



TEXAS STATE SOIL & WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

QUARTERLY REPORT - SUMMER 2023



TSSWCB ANNOUNCES 2023 CONSERVATION AWARD WINNERS

Each year the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) and the Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts (ATSWCD) recognize and honor individuals who dedicate themselves to the conservation and management of renewable natural resources. These outstanding conservationists will be recognized during an awards luncheon on Tuesday, October 31, 2023 at the Omni Hotel in Fort Worth.

The Texas Conservation Awards Program began in the late 1970's to recognize conservationists and the vital role they play in managing Texas' natural resources. The purpose of the program is to acknowledge, recognize, and honor individuals that dedicate their time and efforts to the conservation of natural resources.

The program provides an opportunity for competition and incentives to expand and improve con-servation efforts as well as the wise utilization of renewable natural resources. Categories recognized through the Texas Conservation Awards Program are: Poster Contest and Junior and Senior Essay Contests, Conservation Farmer, Outstanding Soil and Water Conservation District, Conservation Rancher, Friend of Conservation, Conservation Teacher and Wildlife Conservationist.

The subject for the 2023 Poster Contest was "One Water." Isabella Cervantez representing the West Nueces-Las Moras Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) #236, was chosen as this year's winner of the Kindergarten through 2nd Grade Division. The winner of the 3rd through 6th Grade Division as Emme Davila representing the Jackson SWCD #336. The posters will advance to the National Association of Conservation Districts Poster Contest in December 2023.

"One Water" was also the topic for the 2023 Essay Contest. Blaine Dahl, from the Hartley SWCD #152, took first place in the Junior Division of the essay contest. Tabor Christanelli, of the Lower Pease SWCD #162, took first place in the Senior Division of the essay contest.

Below is a list of the 2023 Conservation Award Winners:

- Conservation Farmer: Aaron Reeves, Collin County #535
- Conservation Rancher: Yellowhouse Ranch, Lamb County #130
- Outstanding SWCD: Gillespie County SWCD #220
- Conservation Teacher: Lynita Foster, Bedias Creek SWCD #428
- Wildlife Conservationist: Gary Gardner, Upper Llanos SWCD #225
- Friend of Conservation: Keep Big Spring Beautiful, Howard SWCD #243

PROGRAM UPDATES

BUDGET & ACCOUNTING

- The deadline for reporting completion of a DIR-approved cybersecurity training program is August 31st.
- The deadline for submitting Fiscal Year 2023 claims for the Conservation Activity Program (CAP) is September 1st.
- Financial Statement/Audit Notifications forms for Fiscal Year 2023 are due by September 1st.
- The deadline for submitting the Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Plan of Work is September 1st.

CARRIZO CANE ERADICATION PROGRAM

The TSSWCB submitted a request to the Office of the Governor for an advance of \$718,766 for the mitigation of Carrizo cane in an area deemed high priority by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) to ensure border security along the Rio Grande River. This advance was approved by the OOG and will provide the immediate reimbursement to contractors for work performed along a 1.5-mile section of the Rio Grande in Maverick County. Carrizo cane mitigation began on 11/7/2022, and \$667,104.65 in disaster funds from this advance have been requested and paid for work performed through 6/8/2023. The mitigation of Carrizo cane in this project is ongoing. Staff attended the Senate Finance Hearing, House Ag and Livestock Committee Hearing, House Appropriations Committee Hearing, and Senate Border Security Hearing. Staff provided information on the CCEP to Representative Hayes' office and to Representative Morales' office. Staff continues working with DPS, Border Patrol, SWCDs, Irrigation Districts, and landowner groups to determine potential areas for future treatment of Carrizo cane.

FLOOD CONTROL PROGRAM

The State Board approved \$2,000,000 for dam operation and maintenance (O&M) grants for fiscal year 2023. All of this funding has been obligated. Work on funded proposals must be completed within 90 days of Purchase Order date. For FY 2023, \$6,000,000 is available for structural repair. It is anticipated that all of these funds will be used to cover high bids on previously funded projects and provide matching funds for federal rehabilitation projects. TSSWCB is now able to transfer ESF funds from one ESF obligated project to another ESF obligated project when needed to accommodate cost increases. Since 2019 construction has been completed on 50 dam repairs, upgrades, and rehabilitations. Sixteen repair, upgrade, and rehab projects are in construction. Sponsors are preparing to get bids on 10 additional funded projects. Federal rehabilitation planning continues on 14 high hazard dams. Currently, \$110 million is needed to repair about 164 flood control program dams in Texas, and \$2.0 Billion is needed to upgrade and rehabilitate about 500 high hazard dams where downstream urban development has resulted in public safety issues.

WATER QUALITY MANAGEMENT PLAN PROGRAM

With the enactment of Senate Bill 503 (73rd Regular Session - Sims/Counts) in 1993, the Texas Legislature designated the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) the lead agency in the state for the abatement, management, and prevention of nonpoint source pollution from agricultural or silvicultural sources. Additionally, the Legislature authorized the agency to administer a certified water quality management plan (WQMP) program, complete with a cost-share program to incentivize participation and offset the cost of implementing soil and water land improvement measures, for lands within the state. For FY2023 as of June 28, 140 WQMPs have been certified on 63,644 total acres.

PROGRAM UPDATES

HUMAN RESOURCES

TSSWCB currently has 2 positions open: Natural Resources Specialist III in the Dublin Regional Office as well as a Program Specialist IV (Field Representative for Area 5. For more information visit: <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/contact-us/employment>

FERAL SWINE CONTROL PILOT PROGRAM

Staff has been working with project partners to implement the Feral Swine Control Pilot Program in 15 counties. As of April 1, 2023, fifteen local SWCDs in the pilot project areas have purchased over 100 smart traps that have been utilized on over 573,000 acres by over 215 landowners. Landowners have trapped over 6,000 feral hogs through the trap loan efforts.

COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

- **2023 Annual Meeting of Texas SWCD Directors:** We hope you make plans to join us October 30-November 1, 2023 at the Omni Hotel in Fort Worth! The hotel room block and pre-registration will open on August 1st. The tentative schedule and more information can be found here: <https://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/annual-meeting-swcd-directors>
- **2023 SWCD Director & Employee Workshop:** Save the date for the 2024 SWCD Director & Employee Workshop! The workshop will be held April 9-10, 2024 at the Mayborn Convention Center in Temple.

IMPORTANT DATES & DEADLINES

Important Dates and Deadlines for Calendar Year 2023 is now available at the SWCD resources section on the TSSWCB Website. Please note the SWCDs resource section on the TSSWCB website contains documents, forms and important updates to SWCDs in conducting their daily business operations.

LEADERSHIP ELECTED TO THE TEXAS STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) held a board meeting on Thursday, May 18, 2023. During the meeting, action was taken to elect a Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the board. David Basinger of Deport was elected as Chairman of the TSSWCB. He previously served as Vice-Chairman of the board for the past two years. Basinger, who has been a member of the TSSWCB since 2018, runs 3,200 acres in the Sulphur River Bottom where he farms corn, soybeans, and hay. Basinger also currently serves as Chairman of the Lamar Soil and Water Conservation, which he has been a member of for 21 years. He has previously served as President of the Association of Texas Soil and Water Conservation Districts and a former President of the Northeast Texas Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts. David and his wife Connie have two sons and three granddaughters.

“It is a great honor to serve this agency and uphold its mission to promote and protect natural resources. I have the pleasure of working alongside a tremendous group of board members and staff. We will work hard to provide our local districts and landowners across Texas with the tools they need successfully conserve the natural resources of this great state for generations to come,” said Basinger.

Scott Buckles of Stratford was elected as Vice-Chairman of the TSSWCB. He was elected to the board representing Area I in 2011. In addition to his work on the board, he is Chairman of the Sherman County Soil and Water Conservation District and has been a member since 1992. As managing partner of Buckles Farms, Scott works alongside his family to produce corn, grain, sorghum, wheat, and stocker cattle. The family farm has been in operation since 1917. Scott is also co-owner and operator of a crop and aerial spraying service. When Scott has spare time, he builds and operates a 1/8th scale railroad and enjoys spending time in Red River, New Mexico. Scott and his wife Dana have 3 children, Carson, Haley, and Hunter.

Joining Buckles and Basinger on the TSSWCB are José Dodier Jr. of Zapata, Tina Y. Buford of Harlingen, Marty H. Graham of Rocksprings, and Barry Mahler of Iowa Park.