



# TEXAS STATE SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION BOARD

*Protecting and Enhancing Natural Resources for Tomorrow*

PO Box 658 • Temple, TX 76503 • (254) 773-2250 • <http://www.tsswcb.texas.gov/>

## RIO GRANDE CARRIZO CANE ERADICATION PROGRAM

### *Improving Border Security and Restoring Ecosystem Function of the Rio Grande Through Invasive Species Control*

Large dense stands of non-native carrizo cane (*Arundo donax*) occupy the banks and floodplains of the Rio Grande, thwarting law enforcement efforts along the international border, impeding and concealing the detection of criminal activity, restricting law enforcement officers' access to riverbanks, and impairing the ecological function and biodiversity of the Rio Grande.

Carrizo cane is an exceptionally fast growing plant, able to grow about 4 inches per day and reach a mature height of over 25 feet in about 12 months. There is an estimated 30 to 60 thousand acres of cane along the Rio Grande. These stands of invasive riparian weeds present considerable obstacles for the protection of the international border by law enforcement and agricultural inspectors, by both significantly reducing visibility within enforcement areas, and providing favorable habitat for agriculturally-damaging cattle ticks.

Carrizo cane is considered one of the greatest threats to the health of riparian ecosystems in the southwestern United States. Carrizo



cane does not provide any food sources or nesting habitats for native wildlife. Carrizo cane is linked to sediment accumulation, channel constriction, and increased flooding frequency threatening the riparian ecosystem of the Rio Grande.

Carrizo cane consumes water resources to a degree that is detrimental to water conservation. As a result of this weed's high evapotranspiration capacity, infestations threaten water supplies for agricultural and municipal drinking water uses in South Texas.

### **RIO GRANDE CARRIZO CANE ERADICATION PROGRAM**

In order to help meet the Governor's border security priorities, the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature, in 2015, directed the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB), through S.B. 1734, to develop and implement a program to eradicate carrizo cane along the Rio Grande.

The Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program (RGCCPEP) establishes long-term management of invasive carrizo cane at a landscape scale along the entire Rio Grande, an international border with great ecological and cultural significance. Comprehensively addressing the impacts of carrizo cane on border security is paramount to the program, while also accruing benefits to the ecosystem health of the Rio Grande and water user groups in South Texas.

The process to develop a program will involve affected landowners, municipalities, other state and federal governmental entities, and concerned citizens. The TSSWCB is in the "public scoping" stage of soliciting input from the public and affected stakeholders on how this program should be implemented.

The Rio Grande Carrizo Cane Eradication Program will:

- Reduce carrizo cane canopy, density, and biomass
- Improve border access for law enforcement officers
- Improve visibility to allow better detection of illegal activities
- Restore ecological function, degraded riparian habitats, and biodiversity of the Rio Grande
- Enhance water savings by conserving water lost to evapotranspiration by carrizo cane

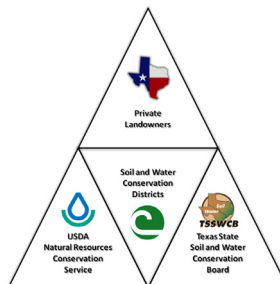
Due to the diversity of biological, legal, and cultural issues associated with control of carrizo cane along the 1,255-mile Rio Grande international border, the RGCCPEP takes an ecosystem-based approach that integrates the use of biological, chemical, and mechanical controls to manage carrizo cane along the Rio Grande. This approach will promote restoration of treated areas with beneficial native plants, and necessitate a long-term maintenance and monitoring program to ensure control is successful. Close coordination is necessary with many local, state, and federal governmental agencies. Participation in the program by landowners is voluntary.



### **CONSERVATION DELIVERY SYSTEM**

The TSSWCB delivers coordinated natural resource conservation programs to agricultural producers through the State's 216 soil and water conservation districts (SWCDs). SWCDs serve as the State's primary conservation delivery system through which technical

assistance and financial incentives for natural resource conservation programs are channeled to agricultural producers and rural landowners. SWCDs give farmers and ranchers the opportunity to solve conservation challenges locally, instilling in landowners a stewardship ethic and individual responsibility for soil and water conservation.



Many of the TSSWCB's programs, including the RGCCEP, are coordinated through the conservation delivery system of the 216 local SWCDs. This Conservation Partnership is one of the most efficient and effective mechanisms for conducting natural resource conservation programs.

TSSWCB is well-experienced in managing programs and projects to control invasive riparian vegetation.

### **CARRIZO CANE CONTROL DEMONSTRATION PROJECT IN WEBB COUNTY ON THE RIO GRANDE**



In 2007, the TSSWCB worked with conservation partners to demonstrate the effectiveness of aerial herbicide application to control carrizo cane for border security purposes. Conducted just outside of Laredo, approximately 120 acres of

cane was sprayed on private land along the Rio Grande. The Webb SWCD #337 was critical to the success of this demonstration project.

### **SALT CEDAR CONTROL ON THE COLORADO RIVER, E.V. SPENCE RESERVOIR, AND THE PECOS RIVER**

From 2005 to 2007 and in 2011, the TSSWCB worked with conservation partners to treat 11,391 acres of saltcedar (*Tamarix* spp.) through aerial herbicide application along the Colorado River and its tributaries between Lake J.B. Thomas and E.V. Spence Reservoir and 2,672 acres of saltcedar along the Pecos River and its tributaries. These efforts were in support of implementing the *Total Maximum Daily Loads for Total Dissolved Solids and Sulfate* in E.V. Spence Reservoir, and the *Pecos River Watershed Protection Plan* to improve water quality related to excessive salinity.



### **WATER SUPPLY ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM**

In order to help meet the State's critical water conservation needs and ensure availability of public water supplies, the TSSWCB administers the Water Supply Enhancement Program (and its predecessor, the Brush Control Program) to increase available

surface and ground water supplies through the targeted control of brush species that are detrimental to water conservation. TSSWCB works through SWCDs to deliver technical assistance and financial incentives to landowners in order to implement brush control. From 1999 to 2015, landowners treated over 852,068 acres of brush in priority watersheds across the state.



### **FUNDING NEEDS FOR RIO GRANDE CARRIZO CANE CONTROL**

In order for the TSSWCB to successfully implement the RGCCEP, the Texas Legislature indicated a need of \$4.9 million per year. Funds are needed for:

- local SWCDs to provide on-the-ground technical assistance and conservation planning for landowners
- direct control and treatment of carrizo cane, conducted primarily by contracted private service providers, potentially including:
  - mechanical topping to allow for immediate visibility
  - aerial and ground application of chemical herbicides
  - propagation and distribution of biological control agents
  - revegetation of native plants in highly disturbed areas
- conducting scientific investigations to ensure the program is successful, including:
  - aerial and remote sensing for detailed mapping of the spatial extent of the cane infestation
  - documenting the water conserved from managing cane
  - evaluating treatment impacts on river hydrology, sediment dynamics, water quality, and aquatic health.

While the 84<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature established the program, no appropriation of funds was made for the 2016-2017 biennium. The TSSWCB has included an Exceptional Item for the RGCCEP in the agency's Legislative Appropriations Request for the 2018-2019 biennium. The agency has requested \$3 million across the biennium (\$1.5 million per fiscal year) to implement the program.

### **FOR MORE INFORMATION**

Contact the Water Supply Enhancement Program Office at (325) 481-0335.

The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board, established in 1939, administers Texas' soil and water conservation law and delivers coordinated natural resource conservation programs to agricultural producers throughout the state. The agency is responsible for planning, implementing, and managing programs for preventing and abating agricultural and silvicultural nonpoint sources of water pollution; administers a water supply enhancement program to increase available surface and ground water supplies through the targeted control of water-depleting brush in areas in need of water conservation; works to ensure the State's network of 2,000 flood control dams is protecting lives, private property, and public infrastructure from flood damage; works to improve border security along the Rio Grande through control of invasive carrizo cane; and facilitates the Texas Invasive Species Coordinating Committee.



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