



NEWS

GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER AUTHORITY
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GBRA adopts Aquatic Vegetation Management Policy

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SEGUIN - Policy guidelines governing the treatment of nuisance aquatic vegetation in lakes and reservoirs operated by the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority were adopted by GBRA's Board of Directors at their regular monthly meeting in Seguin on Wednesday, March 17.

According to GBRA general manager Bill West, the Policy applies to all "watercourses, delivery systems and impoundments managed by GBRA in its ten-county statutory district. It creates the general framework necessary for GBRA to manage nuisance aquatic vegetation to protect water access, quality and public health and safety while balancing the needs of a healthy aquatic ecosystem."

The overall program approved by board members included a Board Policy, a staff Management Directive and a 1999 vegetation management plan for GBRA's Coletto Creek Reservoir.

Debbie Magin, GBRA director of water quality services, discussed specific details of the Policy and Management Directive. She explained that all future treatment of aquatic vegetation will involve a comprehensive site analysis, including water activities, surface water intakes, contact recreation and fisheries management. GBRA will also involve state agencies, major water users, recreationists, fishing clubs and homeowner organizations in the process.

"All potential applications will follow the general practices of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) which involves the coordinated use of pest and environmental information to result in the least hazard to people, property and the environment," said Magin. "If chemical application is used, it will be done by licensed applicators, after extensive public notification, and will include water quality testing before, during and after the application."

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In explaining the need for aquatic plant management, West said GBRA's overall responsibility to manage its facilities makes vegetation control an important component of the maintenance of its dams, hydroelectric plants and other operations. "We realize aquatic vegetation management is often a controversial issue," said West. "However, we also know that Mother Nature has a tendency to reclaim water bodies that are not cared for properly."

As population growth creates new residential developments and recreational facilities around water bodies, the additional nutrients from fertilizers, septic tanks and other runoff sources helps encourage plant overgrowth. West said these were not significant problems in the 1930's and 1940s when the basin was sparsely populated but "GBRA has learned over the last few years that a formal process is needed to direct our aquatic management efforts."

The Management Directive specifies how GBRA staff will carry out the Policy if aquatic herbicides are selected as a control measure. West explained that GBRA has actually followed most of the guidelines in previous applications but the Directive "pulls each element together into a comprehensive document that formalizes the process."

Bills were introduced to address the management of aquatic vegetation during the 1997 legislative session, but none were passed. This year, State Representative Edmund Kuempel has introduced legislation to amend the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code and require the agency, in cooperation with local authorities, to develop an aquatic vegetation management plan for each water body.

Representative Glen Maxey has introduced another bill to amend the water code and require the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) to issue permits for each lake on a case-by-case basis. West said the average timetable to pass legislation is three legislative sessions but is hopeful some action may take place during the current session.