



GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER AUTHORITY  
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## **GBRA FLOOD RESPONSE PROGRAM INCLUDES \$400,000 RECON STUDY FUNDED BY CORPS OF ENGINEERS**

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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SEGUIN-October 19, 1999. Since last October's disastrous flooding in the Guadalupe River Basin, the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority has been exploring numerous flood response programs and projects. "We have a pretty long wish list," said GBRA general manager Bill West, "and we're working on it very diligently."

At the GBRA Board of Directors meeting tomorrow in Seguin, West will unveil the most recent addition to GBRA's efforts -- a \$400,000 federally-funded flood reconnaissance study by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers. "We just received confirmation of this project, and are very excited about its potential to identify some flood control options that may reduce the impact of future flood events," West said.

The Corps will administer the reconnaissance study, with local sponsorship provided by GBRA and the San Antonio River Authority (SARA). "Many people don't realize that the San Antonio River flows into the Guadalupe River several miles above where it empties into the bay. The flooding along the San Antonio River seriously impacted areas immediately below San Antonio, as well as portions of Calhoun and Refugio Counties in the lower Guadalupe River Basin. By working together, we hope to find ways to minimize future damage to these areas," said West.

The study will include the 10 counties in GBRA's statutory district, which are Kendall, Comal, Hays, Caldwell, Guadalupe, Gonzales, DeWitt, Victoria, Calhoun and Refugio. Kerr County will also be covered since it is the headwaters of the Guadalupe River. The overall focus will be to develop flood control options for further evaluation and funding.

One option is the construction of off-channel flood control structures, usually small dams, authorized under Public Law 566. The federal government usually pays for the construction, with counties or local sponsors paying to lease land on private property and for dam maintenance.

According to West, Comal County currently has five PL-566 flood control structures built along the Dry Comal and Blieder's Creek. During the October 1998 flood, local officials credited these dams with preventing at least \$5 million in additional property damage. A local committee appointed by Comal County Commissioner's Court has been working for the past year to identify locations for new dams and obtain funding.

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“The Corps recon study would expand this effort to all counties and would also look at the need for levees and construction of flood channels in urban areas,” said West. “The tunnel in San Antonio, which was completed just before last year’s flood, is a good example of how effectively these structures divert water away from populated areas. Without this tunnel, downtown San Antonio would have been flooded.”

The second phase of the recon study will evaluate the options as to their feasibility, including the cost and effectiveness of each project. Funding is usually determined based on the overall benefit of each option. West said costs can range from several million dollars for a PL-566 dam to many millions for levees or urban flood channels.

Also on GBRA’s list of programs is the development of a flood tracking chart that will feature a map of the Guadalupe, Blanco and San Marcos Rivers, locations of USGS flood gauges, graphs showing historic elevations for floods of record and other data. Flood tracking charts are similar to hurricane tracking charts in that they can help the public follow weather events. West said flood tracking information can help basin residents interpret the river stage projections issued by the River Forecast Center of the National Weather Service and determine their location’s probability of flooding based on prior flood levels. The River Forecast Center is also working on its own project to enhance the watershed model for the Guadalupe Basin to improve forecast accuracy.

Another project currently underway is the development of a flood brochure, funded by a \$60,000 grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Judy Gardner, GBRA manager of communications and education, said the brochure is scheduled for completion early in 2000. “It will be a comprehensive reference guide for everyone from private citizens, to elected officials to emergency management coordinators and will be publicized and distributed throughout the basin,” said Gardner.

One of the lessons learned from the October 1998 flood was the importance of having river gauges in the right places. “Much of the flooding experienced by Cuero and areas downriver was the result of runoff from smaller creeks and tributaries that were not gauged,” said West. “We hope to remedy that situation by asking the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to install additional gauges in these critical locations so that emergency officials will have advance notice of how much floodwater is coming their way.”

West explained that the USGS is responsible for installation, maintenance and data collection and interpretation from the river gauges. GBRA and other river authorities help by contracting and paying the annual cost of USGS service to their basin.

Flood warning gauges, along with USGS river gauges, are also valuable tools in the critical first minutes and hours of a flood event. Their ability to warn of rapid rises in elevation enables officials to quickly evacuate these areas. GBRA is completing a project to install additional flood warning gauges along River Road in Comal County that, when activated, will automatically notify local emergency officials and provide an opportunity for early evacuation. West said GBRA is also developing programs for similar gauges with officials in Kerr, Kendall and Hays counties.

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For several years, GBRA has worked closely with homeowners and lake management associations at each of the six hydro lakes located on the Guadalupe River in Guadalupe and Gonzales counties. "Some of these groups would like to develop a system of sirens that would sound if heavy rains are falling below Canyon Reservoir," said West. "Sirens can be a problem because they require a lot of maintenance and frequent testing, and we will be looking at a variety of options with local homeowners to develop some kind of early warning capability."

GBRA also plans to expand its successful Flood Management Workshops. Speakers from federal and state agencies review weather forecast models, flood histories, basic hydrology and disaster planning with emergency management coordinators and local officials in the Guadalupe River Basin. Classes and exams are also given to earn FEMA Flood Plain Administrator credentials. "We will probably incorporate our previous education outreach to realtors as a part of these workshops because they are often the first people new residents meet when moving to river or lake communities," said West. Based on the outstanding participation at last April's flood "Aftermath Conference" held at Southwest Texas State University, West said he expects future GBRA's workshops to be very well attended.

Several other projects will look at the role of federal, state and local agencies in responding to floods and helping to prevent damage. The 1999 Texas Legislature created a "Blue Ribbon Study Committee" to improve coordination and eliminate duplication among agencies that deal with flood victims, including filing claims and obtaining temporary housing. West has been appointed to serve on this committee and is looking forward to making the process "faster and easier for people who are already suffering enough."

FEMA will be conducting a flood plain review study throughout the Guadalupe River Basin to re-evaluate the existing 100 year flood elevations and determine if changes are necessary based on what happened during the October 1998 flood. According to West, the goal is to reduce loss of life and the number of homes and properties damaged by discouraging construction in areas that are known to flood.

"As a river authority, GBRA takes our responsibilities in these areas very seriously," said West. "However, we also have a personal stake in helping to improve flood response because several of our employees lost their homes and many of GBRA's facilities were damaged during this flood. We are approaching almost \$5 million in total damage to GBRA property and will probably end up paying between \$500,000 and \$1 million as our share of repair, with FEMA and NRCS paying the remaining portion. GBRA was a flood victim, too. Because of this, we have a clearer understanding of what our friends and neighbors have suffered and are determined to do whatever we can to improve the situation the next time a flood event occurs."