NEWS

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Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority, U.S. Corps of Engineers tour Salt Water Barrier, Guadalupe River Delta

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SEGUIN-The Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA) hosted the U.S. Corps of Engineers (the Corps) for a tour of the Salt Water Barrier and the Guadalupe River Delta on March 18th in an effort to better understand the elements affecting flood conditions in the lower basin.

“We are all concerned about the flooding and want to understand whether or not the causes are natural and what would help either prevent or alleviate it as quickly as possible when it does occur,” said Bill West, general manager for GBRA. “We invited the Galveston District Colonel Steven Haustein and the Fort Worth District Colonel John R. Minahan to come take a look at the Salt Water Barrier, our efforts to clear log jams, and see what’s happening on the Guadalupe River Delta.”

Victoria County Judge Donald R. Pozzi and Calhoun County Judge Michael J. Pfeifer also participated in the tour which started at the Salt Water Barrier.

“The Salt Water Barrier is an inflatable dam used only during low water conditions to prevent brackish water from moving up the Guadalupe River where it can enter the Calhoun County Canal System which provides water for irrigation and municipal use,” said West. “The design of the salt water barrier actually prevents it from inflating during high water conditions. This is something a lot of people don’t understand.”

Following the presentation at the Salt Water Barrier, the group observed the Miss Guadalupe I and II workboats and the log disposal site, where a large stack of logs and river debris was being burned.

“With the addition of Miss Guadalupe II, a new workboat designed by GBRA employees, which can carry a back hoe to attack the logjam, it now takes a day, instead of weeks to break up some logjams,” said West. “Keeping the Guadalupe free of jams, especially with the number of high water events we’ve had recently, is very difficult, but having two boats and equipment designed to handle the work has made a big difference.”

The group then took an airboat tour of the Guadalupe River Delta and Traylor’s Cut.

“Traylor’s Cut is a man-made water conduit connecting the Guadalupe River to the bay that was originally built back in the 1930s by local interests to drain portions of the delta for farmland,” said Todd Votteler, director of natural resources for GBRA. “At the Traylor’s Cut intersection with the Guadalupe River the depth of the river is about 20 feet. But if you follow the old channel of the Guadalupe from that point on it becomes shallow, eventually becoming only about two feet deep.

Seventy to 90 percent of the river flow discharges from Traylor's Cut into Mission Bay, thus avoiding the delta — so a large amount of the sediment and fresh water doesn't reach the delta anymore."

According to Votteler, prior to the Traylor's Cut alteration, the fresh water of the Guadalupe River ran through the old river channel to the bay and provided enough sediment for a beach and even cypress trees in the delta.

"Today a lot of that fresh water follows the Victoria Barge Canal because Traylor's Cut altered the distribution of fresh water into the bay," said Votteler. "It may be what caused the erosion of the beach and contributed to the brackish water in the delta. We need to understand what all the contributing factors may be in order to determine what action needs to taken."

Aerial photos and satellite pictures from the 1930s to the present, showing changes in the environment, were also reviewed by the group.

"We hear a lot about how there's more flooding or that the flooding is the result of the releases from Canyon Reservoir or the management of the Salt Water Barrier and log jams, but we need to consider what other factors may be contributing to changes in the lower basin," said West. "In fact, the environment may be changing naturally, or it may not be changing as dramatically as we think. The only way to have a better understanding of what's really happening is to educate ourselves and others by sharing information that might have an effect on this situation. We hope this opportunity to see what's happening in the lower basin will help us work together to find some solutions."

According to West, the next step is to obtain federal funding for a hydrologic model of the lower Guadalupe River and Delta.

"The GBRA has put up matching funds for the model which could be created at the Corps' Engineer Research and Development Center in Vicksburg, Mississippi," said West. "The Center has the unique capability to develop such a complex model. We've also requested support for the Corps portion of the funding from the appropriate Congressional delegation. We hope the federal portion of the funding can be secured so the modeling effort can go forward, we can all have a better understanding of the flooding issue, and possible solutions can be explored."

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