



NEWS

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GBRA, SARA Evaluate Continuation of Bay and Estuary Environmental Studies

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SAN ANTONIO AND SEGUIN.....Continuation of two of the environmental studies initially commissioned as part of the Lower Guadalupe Water Supply Project (LGWSP) is being explored by the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA) and the San Antonio River Authority (SARA)

"The Whooping Crane Study and the San Antonio Bay Beneficial Inflow Study will each generate important scientific and environmental data and information, with current validity, and will be invaluable to federal, state and local agencies," said GBRA general manager Bill West, Jr. "This information will not only supplement older studies and data, but will create a more comprehensive source of scientific information on this dynamic ecosystem."

Directors of both GBRA and SARA have instructed their respective staffs to provide them with more information on the overall benefit of the studies, and specific uses and applications for current and future water management and planning efforts.

"Our board recognizes the importance of these studies and the fact that they represent a significant investment toward increasing the scientific data available, as well as expanding our collective knowledge of factors influencing the environmental health of the San Antonio and Guadalupe Rivers and the related bay systems," said SARA general manager Greg Rothe. "We will be bringing a recommendation to our board in August that addresses the benefit of continuing the studies, potential modifications to study scopes and timelines, and possible sources of funding.

The Whooping Crane Study, under the direction of Dr. Douglas Slack of Texas A&M University, "is the most comprehensive study ever conducted on this endangered species," said West. The study, which just completed its second full year, will provide a significant amount of information about the role of freshwater inflows in maintaining critical elements of the habitat and food sources for the Whooping Crane, which winters at and near the Aransas Natural Wildlife Refuge adjacent to the San Antonio Bay system. The study process includes input from experts from nationally-recognized educational institutions and government agencies. The current study scope was proposed to be completed over a 6-year period, at a total cost of approximately \$2 million.

The San Antonio Bay Beneficial Inflow Study being conducted by Dr. George Ward from the University of Texas-Austin, is examining the beneficial freshwater inflows and other factors needed to maintain the overall health of San Antonio Bay. Dr. Ward's work will expand upon the "state methodology" concept originally developed by the Texas Water Development Board (TPWD) and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

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(TPWD), with specific application to the freshwater inflow needs of the San Antonio Bay ecosystem. Phase I of the study, which included a preliminary inventory of the existing information and data, has been finished. The estimated cost for the total study, to be completed around 2008, is approximately \$2 million. . The study teams directed by Drs. Slack and Ward are working conjunctively so that there is integration of the two efforts. Data and information are regularly shared by the two research groups, so that the two studies complement each other.

Two additional estuary studies are also being conducted by Texas A&M University. The effect of freshwater pulses in the Guadalupe Estuary, funded by a grant from the U. S. Geological Survey (USGS) will help researchers understand variability in rainfall, drought and flow conditions in the Guadalupe Estuary and how they affect food source productivity. The second study, funded by the Sea Grant Program of Texas A&M University, will study the amounts and timing of freshwater inflow and how they affect loading of nutrients and sediment.