



Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority  
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## Teamwork Enhances Wetlands for Waterfowl and Shorebirds

### New Water Supply Canal Dedication Ceremony Held

#### For More Information

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The Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (Trust), the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA), and the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) will dedicate a new water supply canal during a ceremony today, Oct. 16 at 10 am at the Bauer Community Center in Port Lavaca. Following the ceremony officials will lead a tour of the new canal and the Whitmire Unit.

#### HISTORY:

Indianola, once an important point of entry for European travelers in the 19th century, it was destroyed by devastating hurricanes in 1875 and 1876. Today, the nearby Myrtle Foester Whitmire Unit (Whitmire Unit) serves as an important port for feathered travelers, in some years providing food, water, and shelter for up to 18 percent of the Central Flyway waterfowl that annually migrate to the Texas Gulf Coast. However, the wetlands habitat of the Whitmire Unit has waxed and waned from year to year with hit or miss rainfall.

The 3,440-acre Whitmire Unit, a satellite component of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge and is located at the end of the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority's Calhoun Canal System in Calhoun County. In 2004, the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust, GBRA, and the Refuge began an effort to make the Whitmire Unit an unmatched habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds year in and year out. The partnership is accomplishing its goal by establishing a more reliable water supply for the Whitmire Unit through a new water supply canal that is 2.65 miles long, and cost \$600,000 to construct. Construction of a canal to provide a reliable source of freshwater to the Myrtle Foester-Whitmire Unit of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge was completed in Summer of 2008. Construction of the canal overcame a number of obstacles such as 20 inches of rain at the Whitmire Unit in July 2007. The partnership is also improving the efficiency of water delivery within the Whitmire Unit, and controlling invasive aquatic plants such as water hyacinth that have clogged the canals. The project is benefiting 750 acres of impoundments, and additional impoundments are now being added in a second phase of the project to benefit hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, wading and shorebirds.

The Whitmire Unit is a major wintering area for Northern Pintails and a significant breeding area for Mottled Ducks, both species have declined significantly in recent years. The property has been identified in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan as one of the most important wetland habitats on the Texas Gulf Coast. Nearly every waterfowl species using the Central Flyway benefits from this high value wintering habitat at the Whitmire Unit, as do threatened and endangered species that occur on the Whitmire Unit such as whooping crane, peregrine falcon, aplomado falcon, wood stork, and the brown pelican.

The old water supply canal, built in the early 1950s, provides water to the Whitmire Unit and stretches over 18,000 feet on flat pastureland. Maintenance and repair of the levees is difficult and expensive due to extensive levee damage from livestock and limited access to the canal. To further complicate matters, rice farming has declined significantly in this area, resulting in reduced water usage within the canal system. The reduced water flow increases silting in the canal and allows invasive aquatic plants to proliferate. The inefficient delivery of water through the old canal was often unable to flood these impoundments in a timely manner thus reducing the quantity and quality of migratory bird habitat. The Whitmire Unit also has an additional 100+ acres of impoundments that will now be available to feathered travelers. The availability of winter wetland habitat, vital for at least 300 species of birds and wetlands on the Texas Coast, is declining at an alarming rate. Because coastal marsh habitat often becomes too deep for optimal dabbling duck forage, this habitat is not always available during critical times.

A number of entities provided financial and in-kind support for the project. These include: the North American Wetlands

Conservation Council; the Formosa Plastics Environmental Endowment Fund ; Alcoa; TetraTech Corporation; and Friends of Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The majority of funding was provided through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and ConocoPhillips and the Coastal Management Program managed by the Coastal Coordination Council who awarded the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (Trust) grants totaling over \$400,000 in support of the project.

The Trust and its lead partners, the USFWS and the GBRA, are expanding their current cooperation in a future project that would install water control structures at strategic locations in the Whitmire Unit to provide optimal water distribution within the impoundments within the Unit.

The Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust works with landowners, primarily within the Guadalupe River Basin, to help them preserve their property and leave a legacy for future generations to enjoy. Conservation easements are used by landowners who want to ensure that future owners continue to respect and conserve the values they have for the land. Conservation easements can also provide tax savings for the landowners who donate them. To learn more about the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust please visit the website at [www.gbrtrust.org](http://www.gbrtrust.org).

#### A NEW CANAL FOR THE WHITMIRE UNIT

Construction of a canal to provide a reliable source of freshwater to the Myrtle Foester-Whitmire Unit of the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge was completed in Summer of 2008. The project is a joint effort between the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (Trust), the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The Myrtle Foester-Whitmire Unit, known as the Whitmire Unit, is located in Calhoun County near the end of the GBRA's canal system near the historic site of the port of Indianola, which was destroyed by hurricanes in 1875 and 1886. The new canal replaces an aging canal built in the early 1950s, as the source of water for the Whitmire Unit, which includes 750 acres of impoundments that require flooding at critical times for wintering and breeding waterfowl dependent on this wetland habitat. The project will provide an efficient and reliable delivery system of water necessary for high quality habitat to help sustain wintering waterfowl populations.

The Whitmire Unit has been identified as one of the most important wetland habitats on the Texas Coast. Nearly every waterfowl species using the Central Flyway benefits from this high value wintering habitat. Threatened and endangered species found on the Whitmire Unit include, whooping crane, peregrine falcon, piping plover, wood stork, and the brown pelican. Other birds of management concern that use the Whitmire Unit include the reddish egret, roseate spoonbill, and osprey. Important marsh and water bird species also found there are herons, egrets, sandhill cranes, curlews, shorebirds, terns, rails and gallinules.

One of the most important waterfowl areas in North America, the Whitmire Unit is important because the Gulf Coast is the terminus of the Central Flyway and Mississippi Flyways, and therefore provides both wintering and migration habitat for significant numbers of the continental duck and goose populations. The project increases the value of the Whitmire Unit during droughts, such as the one currently occurring in the region, by providing a supplemental source of water when other natural wetlands are affected by reduced rainfall.

With completion of the new canal system, the Whitmire Unit will be able to deliver water in an efficient, cost effective and reliable manner. This will allow the Refuge to enhance and restore existing wetlands, as well as the creation of new ones. Having the ability to provide freshwater to selected impoundments at critical times will increase feeding, nesting, resting and breeding sites for federally listed species along with other species of management concern and common waterfowl species.

The majority of funding for the project was provided through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and ConocoPhillips and the Coastal Management Program managed by the Coastal Coordination Council who awarded the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (Trust) grants totaling over \$400,000 in support of the project.

Matching funds, in-kind services, and other support has been provided by Alcoa, TetraTech, Friends of Aransas and Matagorda Island National Wildlife Refuges, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Formosa, USFWS, the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority and the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust.

The Trust and its lead partners, the USFWS and the GBRA, are expanding their current cooperation in a future project that would install water control structures at strategic locations in the Whitmire Unit to provide optimal water distribution within the impoundments within the Unit.

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