AGRICULTURE/WILDLIFE/FERAL HOGS
THIRD WORKGROUP MEETING

Thursday, June 5, 2014
5:30 – 7:30 PM

Tony's Barbecue
1102 Miller Street
Anahuac, TX

MEETING SUMMARY

Attendees: Leroy Ezer, Clint Fancher, Guy R. Jackson, Charles Johnson, David Manthei (USDA-NRCS)

Team: Abby Ficklin, Stephanie Glenn (HARC), Brian Koch (TSSWCB), Linda Shead (Shead)

1. Sign-In, Welcome, Agenda Review and Introductions

Linda welcomed everyone, and started self-introductions. She reminded folks of upcoming events: General Meeting on June 17, when the workgroup results will be shared (with dinner by Russell Ezer, sponsored by Samson Energy), and Feral Hog Workshop on June 27 (cost of $10 to cover lunch). Brian noted that Jennifer Peterson had left copies of the fee A&M "Healthy Streams" manuals for beef cattle, horses, and feral hogs. Linda reviewed the agenda, with the meeting purposes being to agree to: (a) land cover in the watershed (with updated information from HARC and stakeholders) and (b) the numbers of specific animal sources of bacteria (from agriculture and feral hogs) in the watershed.

2. Review and Discussion of Watershed Boundary Maps and Land Cover Data

Stephanie presented the map with new boundary and land cover information. The land cover is noted by color in the following categories: grassland/pasture, mixed forest/forested wetland, scrub/shrub, marsh/emergent wetland, and developed. Some areas had been noted by stakeholders as having changed since the data collected for the map, and those were identified by hatch marks. The Team and workgroup attendees agreed that it's not so critical whether a specific tract is grazed one year and with rice another year, since the total number of cows won't change much, but will just be rotated among nearby fields.

3. Presentation of Available Source Data and Discussion of Bacteria Distribution for Each Source

Brian presented the map showing potential cattle distribution across pasture/hay landcover and scrub shrub landcover. The number of cattle is based on beef cattle numbers for the watershed from Texas Ag Statistics. Total cattle number was not used, since that takes into account animal feeding operations or confined animal feed operations (CAFOs). Tyler Fitzgerald and David Manthei had noted that most operations in the watershed are cow-calf operations. The group agreed. There is at least one stocker operation in the watershed, but it would be counted in the beef cattle numbers. The Team also noted understanding that some of the hay/pasture acreage is used just for hay production – not grazing – and that some of the scrub/shrub may be simply fallow.

The discussion next focused on cow density – that is, how many cows per acre, with "cow" for this discussion meaning "animal unit," which, in turn, includes an adult cow and nursing calf. The density was noted as possibly being in a range from as high density as 5 acres per cow on an intensely managed pasture to as low density as 15-20 acres per cow on some native pasture. The Team can run several different scenarios in the model to see best and worst case of potential bacteria levels [on the land] and help identify where applying best management practices would be most effective.

After reviewing the maps and considering what is known about stocking rates in the area, the group concluded that the following would best represent the proportion of different stocking rates across the watershed: 30 acres at 1 ac/AU (animal unit); 3% of the appropriate landcover at 5-6 ac/AU; 30% at 7-8 ac/AU; and <50% at 13-20 ac/AU.

Additional discussion focused on the "snapshot" approach, in that cows on a field in one year might be on a different nearby field another year, but the number of cows wouldn't change much from year to year in a general area. The point will be to identify where in general in the watershed – not by any specific field or tract, but by sub-drainage area – that the best management practices for cows might be most effective, and similarly for goats or horses.

The group then drew some general boundaries on the map, identifying where to apply in the model the specific cow densities of: 1 ac/AU, 7-8 ac/AU, and 12-13ac/AU.

Goats

Stephanie presented the goat map, noting that goats would be applied to the same landcover as cows: grassland/pasture and scrub/shrub. The numbers also come from Texas Ag Statistics, which shows no goats in Chambers County, but some in Liberty County, and the density number is 267 acres per goat. Participants noted that goats may be seen in Chambers County. A suggestion was made that there could be, in aggregate, about 200 total goats for the Chambers County portion of the watershed, with typically less than a dozen goats per household, and they are not for production purposes. These would be widely scattered across the landcover acres in the watershed. Phillip Stewart could be contacted regarding the 12 goats in Texas Ag Statistics for the Liberty County portion of the watershed.

Horses

Stephanie presented the horse map, noting that Texas Ag Statistics were used again for horses, with 262 horses found for the total watershed, which is 125 acres per head of horse, and there are no concentrations of horses. A recommendation could be to apply that number evenly just to the

appropriate land cover (pasture/hay and scrub/shrub), since no one is aware of anyone with 5 or more horses on a congested area. The horses are usually just a few to help run the cow operation.

Deer

For the deer map, Stephanie noted that deer would be found in mixed forest/forested wetland. Deer are not reported to Texas Ag Statistics, but instead determined in resource management units by the TPWD. It's similar to a survey across the state. For this area, it suggests 305 total deer in the watershed, which comes from 5.15 deer per 1,000 acres. These would be applied to the green (forested) area in the watershed.

Feral Hogs

Stephanie reported that the way her team is working up the feral hog numbers is to apply hogs to land within 100 meters of a waterway – in grassland/pasture, forest/forested wetland, and scrub/shrub areas – resulting in squiggly lines across the watershed on the feral hog map. Feral hogs don't fall under TPWD, because they are considered a nuisance species, so they do not do surveys on them. One reference has a high recommendation of 38.9 acres per hog, which would apply to the 100-meter waterway (squiggly) areas. Because of rice in the county, hogs are also seen in flooded rice fields, so that acreage (cultivated crop) will be added to the hog acreage.

There are also hogs everywhere else. The highest reported density is 33 acres per hog, and the Team also has mean and low numbers to work with. The group agreed not to include hogs in developed areas (though they have been known to occur there sometimes – coming out of the marsh). The group also agreed to try a run with the high density of 33 acres per hog, across the watershed.

One of the problems with hogs is that TPWD does not consider them wildlife, but rather nuisance species, so we don't know the population or the kill/trap rate. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension does have an online trapping reporting system that has gone state-wide, but not many people know much about it. The reporting tool can be found here: http://feralhogreports.tamu.edu/

4. Wrap-Up and Next Steps

Brian reminded everyone of the upcoming Feral Hog workshop, which has 5 CEUs, and will be on Friday, June 27th. This workshop is designed to tell what is known about feral hogs and how to manage them. Folks have concluded that the hogs cannot be eradicated, because they are so prolific.

This meeting covered a lot of ground, and received input from everyone, which was the goal. Again, the General Meeting on the 17th will be a compilation of all these workgroup meetings. Brian encouraged everyone to let the Team know if they come up with anything else between now and the General Meeting.

Linda noted that after the next General Meeting, Stephanie's group will run the model to find out where the biggest impacts of bacteria might be. The results of the model will be brought back to the workgroups for feedback. The model results will then be compared with the water quality testing results. The goal is to see where and what management strategies should be implemented for the most improvement in water quality. Another thing that would help would be to have

numbers for hogs killed/trapped, and then compare what is happening to the water quality in that area.

Stephanie noted that we will also need to keep in mind the issue of carcasses and how to keep them out of the bayou, since there are miles of intestines released with bacteria. The hunting and recreation workgroup will talk about this, and see what can be done about getting people to stop dumping in the bayou.

5. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:00 p.m.