Course helps professionals develop watershed protection plans
Water resources professionals wanting training on watershed protection plan development are benefiting from a course organized by the Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) and collaborators.

TWRI is working with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB), the Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Texas AgriLife Research, the River Systems Institute at Texas State University, Texas Institute for Applied Environmental Research at Tarleton State University, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to create the Texas Watershed Planning Short Course.

The first of three currently scheduled week-long courses was June 2-6, 2008, at the Mayan Dude Ranch near Bandera. Forty-three people attended.

Holistic watershed protection plans that actively involve stakeholders to preserve and restore watersheds are the accepted approach to managing Texas surface waters, said Kevin Wagner, TWRI project manager and leader for the short course.

“Proper training is needed to ensure that watershed protection efforts are adequately planned, coordinated, and implemented, and results from the efforts properly assessed and reported,” he said.

“This course is important,” Wagner said, “because it is one of only a few courses that builds upon the nine essential elements for watershed planning identified by EPA. As a result, people who have gone through this training program will be well prepared to develop plans according to EPA guidelines.”

Wagner said the course provides people with a thorough background into issues related to watershed protection planning, including how to deal with stakeholders and how to collect and analyze watershed data to determine loadings and identify pollutant...
Watershed protection plans

sources. The course also teaches participants how to develop education and outreach efforts that will promote the use of sustainable best management practices to protect water quality. Participants are given an overview of EPA web-based tools, including the EPA Watershed Plan Builder.

National water resources experts—including Charlie MacPherson with Tetra Tech, Stuart Lehman with EPA headquarters, Bill Jarocki with the Northwestern Environmental Finance Center, Tom Davenport with EPA Region 5, and Jeff Thornton with the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission—were instructors at the June course. They provided a broad perspective on watershed-based planning. Instructors also included staff from EPA, TSSWCB, TCEQ, and faculty and staff from Texas A&M, Tarleton State, and Texas State universities.

Wagner said the Plum Creek Watershed Protection Plan, recently published as a draft, is used as a case study. “A case study allows course participants to see how others are developing their plans,” he said.

“This program brings watershed coordinators from across the state together in a setting where we can hear from experts, get to know each other, and discuss the common challenges we all face,” said Nikki Dictson. She is an Extension program specialist in water quality who works on the Plum Creek Watershed Protection Plan and is one of the instructors.

“As we bring watershed coordinators together at the training, it provides a forum to look at success stories that can be applied to develop and implement successful plans at the local level,” Dictson said. “As a result, we will help watershed coordinators develop watershed plans that have a better chance of being successfully implemented.”

Throughout Texas, TSSWCB and TCEQ are financing the development of over a dozen watershed protection plans.

“Up to now, the watershed coordinators we’ve sponsored have only had limited training opportunities,” said Aaron Wendt, TSSWCB’s state watershed coordinator. “Over the past couple of years, there have been several national courses, but we do things a little differently here in Texas.

“This course will help watershed coordinators build sustainable partnerships committed to implementing well-crafted watershed protection plans and will help TSSWCB and TCEQ direct limited grant funds to watershed restoration and protection projects that improve the water quality of rivers, streams, and estuaries in the state,” Wendt said.

Other courses are scheduled for Jan. 12-16, 2009 and August 2009. TCEQ and EPA provided funding for the courses through a Clean Water Act Nonpoint Source Grant. For more information, visit the project’s Web site at http://watershedplanning.tamu.edu/.

National expert in river restoration teaches course

Forty-four Texas water resources professionals met at the Mayan Dude Ranch outside of Bandera, Texas, on Jan. 28-Feb. 1 to learn about river restoration from a nationally recognized expert.

Dr. Dave Rosgen, a registered professional hydrologist with more than 40 years of experience, taught the weeklong Applied Fluvial Geomorphology Course. The course was coordinated by the Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) and was part of the Texas Watershed Planning Short Course project, funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).
Rosgen, the principal hydrologist of Wildland Hydrology Consultants, gave the participants in-depth knowledge of natural processes in river basins, including fluvial geomorphology, sedimentation, hydraulics, and streambank erosion. He also taught participants about best management practices to restore impaired stream segments and improve fish habitat. Rosgen conducted field exercises with the group in West Verde Creek, located in the Hill Country State Natural Area.

Participants were from TCEQ, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Forest Service, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, and TWRI.

Kevin Wagner, TWRI project manager, said the course was very successful. “Based on our evaluations, participants’ overall satisfaction with the course was excellent,” Wagner said. “Much time and effort went into coordinating this, but it was well worth it.”

Wagner said he is keeping a waiting list for possible future offerings of the course. “With additional funding, we may offer the same course again or Dr. Rosgen’s second course, River Morphology and Applications Short Course,” he said.