


Youth Water Camp



A plant chemist directs Water Camp youth in basic water analysis at a local power plant during a tour.

Ward County 4-H program educates students about water conservation, quality

In January 1991, a committee of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service (now Texas AgriLife Extension Service) and Upper Pecos Soil and Water Conservation District personnel met on the development of a 4-H water camp educating youth on water issues to be held at the George and Opal Bentley 4-H Center in Ward County.

The center in Monahans, Texas, was deeded to Ward County in 1989 by the Bentleys with the stipulation that the facility be used for 4-H projects and activities. Ward County had the facility, transportation, and paperwork; the committee needed to find the technical information and suggestions for projects. Thus, planning for the first State Youth Water Camp began.

“Those of us in Ward County were excited that we had Extension specialists and folks

from other agencies who thought this was a worthy project that we could bring to fruition,” said Abigail Pritchard, Ward County Extension agent—family & consumer sciences.

During the ensuing discussions, several suggestions were made concerning what might be done at that year’s camp and what subject areas should be included.

“The number of ideas listed was astounding,” Pritchard said. Topics ranged from water laws, water supply, and water use for irrigation to effluent water, drinking water quality, and more.

“Many of the suggestions from that original meeting are part of the camp today,” she said.

When the committee had lined out the basic agenda and several activities to include during the week-long camp, a task force committee was appointed to work out the myriad of details still left. Weldon Floyd and Nancy Rhodes, then Ward County Extension agents, were co-chairs. Committee members were Joe Henggeler, Extension engineer-irrigation; Marsha Stabel, 4-H and youth development specialist; and Abigail Pritchard, Upper Pecos Soil and Water Conservation District technician at that time. Dr. John Sweeten, then an Extension program leader for agricultural engineering, also assisted with the curriculum.

“That first committee group really saw what water camp could be even in Far West Texas,” Pritchard said.

This committee turned the State Youth Water Camp into the program it is today—a



Members of the Rangeland Watershed Management project group simulate the splash effect of rainfall on partial vegetation as part of their project work.

five-day educational camp featuring hands-on experiences, guest speakers, and field trips. It teaches high school youth the importance of water stewardship and trains youth in water conservation and preservation. The camp also illustrates how water resources are being used by industry, agriculture, and municipalities.

The first State Youth Water Camp was held July 21-26, 1991 at the center. Twenty-five high school 4-H members and 27 adult leaders from across Texas participated.

“We knew as soon as the first camp was over we wanted to do another one and immediately began preparations,” Pritchard said.

Since 1991, the camp has been held annually the last week in July. The camp is limited to 15 boys and 15 girls from across the state who are high-school age, have an interest in water quality and conservation, and are willing to participate as a team member.

Information about the camp can be found through the Ward County Web site at <http://ward-co.tamu.edu/>.

The camp is staffed by professionals from several state, federal and private agencies under the leadership of AgriLife Extension and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service. Other partners include the Pecos Valley Resource Conservation & Development Area, Texas Water Resources Institute, Texas Water Development Board, Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission, state soil and

water conservation districts, underground water conservation districts, the City of Odessa, and Coyanosa Field Crops Committee.

In addition, the Rio Grande Basin Initiative (RGBI) funds materials and project work. Pritchard said this enables the cost for the camper to be kept relatively low at \$150 while still providing a quality experience. The projects and work of RGBI participants are also referenced because that effort often ties to other topics being discussed with the campers, she said.

“Most of our partners have been with the camp since its inception,” Pritchard said. “They continue to provide quality tours and speakers for youth to learn about water use and conservation as well as today’s water issues.”

State Youth Water Camp objectives

Youth will learn:

- Needs and opportunities for water conservation, economic benefits of reduced water use, technologies for improving efficiencies, proper irrigation management, and improved use of precipitation on crops and forages.
- Individual conservation practices and methods for efficient use in the home and in landscapes.
- Methods of reducing nonpoint source pollution (in support of the USDA Water Quality Initiatives).
- Methods of water management and possible alternate water supplies.
- Skills in evaluating water quality/conservation problems and the ability to develop solutions to problems.
- Career opportunities in water quality and conservation.
- Leadership skills which enable them to be leaders seeking solutions to local, state, and national water concerns. 💧