



San Jacinto River Authority  
Lake Conroe Division  
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Attendees of Lake Conroe Advisory Meeting on December 12, 2011:

Blake Kellum – SJRA Lake Conroe Division Manager  
Bret Raley – SJRA Lake Conroe Division Operations Manager  
Ronda Trow – SJRA Public Relations Manager  
Diana Sanchez – SJRA Lake Conroe Division Customer Service Rep  
Dr. Mark Webb – TPWD Inland Fisheries Region 3E District Supervisor  
Dr. Richard Ott - TPWD Inland Fisheries Region 3C District Supervisor  
Craig Bonds – TPWD Inland Fisheries Region 3 - Regional Director  
Dr. Earl Chilton – TPWD Director of Aquatic Habitat Enhancement Program  
Warren Oja – U. S. Forest Service – Sam Houston  
Matthew Wiese – MCCO Pct 1  
Gary Lewis – Tow Boat U. S.  
Mike Bleier – LCA President  
Sue Wheatley – LCA  
Tom Butz – LCA  
Ben P. Richardson – LCA  
Bart Richardson – EZ Boat Storage  
Ed Parten – T.B.B.U. President  
Aubrey Lewis – T.B.B.U.  
Paul Maire – T.B.B.U.  
Bob Singletary – T.B.B.U.  
Ron Gunter – SCBC / Texas B.A.S.S. Federation Assistant State Conservation Director  
Tim Cook - Texas B.A.S.S. Federation State Conservation Director

Blake Kellum started meeting at 5:45pm.

Blake discussed removing twenty-two Hedgehogs located by Gary Lewis in the Sandy Creek area of Lake Conroe. The Hedgehogs are approx. 36” in diameter, 2-4’ long, ¼” thick and weigh 80 pounds. Blake had a picture of Lake Conroe with the Hedgehog locations mapped. These present hazards for vessels and recreational usage of the Lake. Blake asked that the angling community share that this type of structure is not navigationally safe to use for fish habitat.

Mark Webb with TPWD presented information on Lake Conroe projects being discussed:

1. Stump Cutting: The drought situation has brought new circumstances to the Lake. We are experiencing hazards that never have been a problem in the past. Weather reports support that in 2012 the drought conditions will continue and it is not unreasonable to state that the Lake could be as low as 12’ next year. Areas that are usually considered safe are now navigational hazards due to low water levels.
2. Renovation of F.M. 830 Ramp: There are some private property access issues with this project. Funding would need to be shared by TPWD, SJRA, Montgomery County and TXDOT. Considering renovations to allow for 15’ below normal pool access.
3. Extend/Dredge Forest Service Ramps: Funding for this project must be met by matching with non-federal funds.

4. Exposed Tree Top Areas: Ben Richardson, with LCA, is acknowledged as the leader of getting this project going. Tree Tops causing navigational hazards need to be removed. Sometimes, multiple branches of one tree are being seen above water level. Mark Webb presented a picture titled See Ben's Track with actual pictures provided by Ben Richardson.
5. Lewis Creek Concerns: Fallen trees are causing stick ups to now show in open water. Six of these are detrimental to F.M. 830 ramp.
6. Above 1097 West Bridge: Boat passageways and crossovers need attention. Paths need to be marked and minimal cutting may be needed. See the hand out provided titled TPWD Compilation for locations of concern.
7. Funding of project: LCA - \$30,000; The Richardson Family - \$10,000; TPWD will work to match 3:1.
8. Vegetation Habitat Program: There is very little native vegetation & Hydrilla currently on Lake due grass carp. Mark explained that the native vegetation will outgrow the grass carp and the Hydrilla should remain just in check. Currently Hydrilla is only growing in water too shallow for grass carp to reach. Hydrilla will be something to deal with once it is in 2' deep water.
9. TPWD Goal: Cutting tree tops and stumps that will minimally affect fish habitat and maximize boat access for all Lake users.

Ed Parten asked four questions of Mark Webb with regards to the safety concerns for anglers and boat lanes.

1. **How will dredging affect the eco-system of the Lake?**  
There will be minimal impact because just removing siltation of ramps.
2. **What is the width required to provide safety for boat lanes?**  
Minimum of 100' width is needed with little or no cutting necessary. The majority of these will be marked rather than cut with possibly minimal trimming at edges.
3. **Who is responsible for the Liability of the boat lane marking project?**  
We may need a partner to take out an insurance policy similar to what the T.B.B.U. did on Lake Livingston. These details have not been worked out yet.
4. **We would like to properly weight anything that floats.**  
Ben Richardson mentioned that the binding usually breaks after one year. Ed Parten stated that they use nylon straps which last 10-15 years under water. By the time the binding breaks, the floaters are water logged and stay under. This would help the fish habitat. Mark Webb mentioned that Blake Kellum suggested letting the tree top fall down by the tree thus creating a more complex habitat.

After receiving the answers to his questions, Ed Parten stated that he had not heard anything that T.B.B.U. could not support. His attending members agreed with his statement that T.B.B.U. could support this project.

Ron Gunter had the following questions for Mark Webb:

**1. Once the water returns, how long before the vegetation dies and affects the eco-system of the Lake?**

Positives of this process:

1. Provides stable environment to help make nutrients available for aquatic plants and insects.
2. Provides protection from wind, grass carp and turtles.
3. Provide spawning and nursing habitat for juvenile fish.
4. Plants will last approx. 12 months at most or one season. When plants decay, other plants or things will eat it. The decay would be like compost and the nutrients taken by other organisms.

**2. What is the potential for Hydrilla growth?**

Decomposition should not significantly add nutrients for Hydrilla to grow. The Lake is nutrient rich now anyway. Hydrilla loves stable water levels so the drought conditions could be potentially helpful. Ed Parten mentioned that fluctuating water levels areas are also helpful for vegetation and fish.

Blake Kellum directed discussion towards gaining closure on the Stump Cutting issue:

1. Richard Ott asked if boat lanes below Forest Service Area are in areas that were intended to be cleared but never were. Answer: Yes.
2. Mike Bleier announced that Ben Richardson has done the work on behalf of LCA. LCA Members that raised funds for Hydrilla are high end properties and if they want 1 or 2 stumps removed they will want assurance from angler community that this will be acceptable. He also asked if residents north of Scott's Ridge should be referred to SJRA or the Forest Service. They are to be referred to Blake Kellum who will be working with to Warren Oja with the U.S.D.A. Forest Service.
3. Bret Raley reported that SJRA has received about one dozen stump inquiries from homeowners. Blake Kellum has advised that homeowner calls will be handled on case by case basis. Stumps behind homeowner docks will be addressed individually and trusted to follow guidelines provided. If POA or HOA calls with 20+ stumps, then SJRA will investigate and collaborate with Mark Webb at TPWD. More homeowners may be calling once this project begins. There has not been a determination of a line that separates the Forest Service land from the SJRA land per Blake Kellum and Warren Oja.
4. Tom Butz asked if the number of stumps to be cut had been determined. Mark Webb responded that it is not 250 and not 500 either. Something to also consider when deciding on the number of cuts is that the machine used for cutting can potentially grab multiple branches in one cut. His best estimate is that the lower areas around F.M. 1097 will be well under 250 cuts including those needing trimming. Tom Butz also asked if someone needed to go on the Lake with the cutter. Ben Richardson volunteered to go out for one day with them.
5. Charles Von Schmidt suggested using fluorescent orange paint to mark the stumps that are to be cut. Under water stumps could be marked with PVC pipe that could be recovered and recycled for the project.
6. The question was asked - who will pre-mark the stumps? Mark Webb's team from TPWD will go out with GPS and side scan sonar to mark the stumps. Bret Raley has offered the help of

SJRA as well as Ed Parten and Aubrey Lewis have offered assistance from T.B.B.U. members and Tim Cook from members of Texas Black Bass Federation.

7. Gary Lewis provided information about bringing hardwoods and sinking them for pre-spawn/post spawn habitat for the past four winter seasons. They typically take out one load per week from January 1<sup>st</sup> through March. His point made was that the amount of anticipated cuts would not be more than the hardwoods that have been brought in over the last four years. Gary will offer support for the cutting operation.
8. It was decided that all were in agreement that more cutting on the boat roads may be necessary and all approved of such because it is a one-time cutting event. Blake Kellum explained that the boat lanes may require to be re-cut at some point in the future if future water levels continue to recede.
9. Charles Von Schmidt advised that 12' can be cut off in most cases, but for very old trees that are large, the cut may not be able to go down 12'. When asked about the length of time to complete the project, he provided that wind has a definite effect on how fast they can work. On a day with perfect weather conditions, 30-40 stumps can be cut. Ben Richardson offered the use of EZ Boat Storage as a place to stockpile any cuts that do not sink. Blake Kellum advised this would potentially create a 20' depth clearance at normal pool level.
10. Ron Gunter asked about the protocol for addressing the random stumps called "widow makers" on the Lake. These stumps will be dealt with to promote safety on the water.
11. Bret Raley introduced Ronda Trow, SJRA Public Relations Manager, and Diana Sanchez, SJRA Lake Conroe Division CSR handling commercial accounts.
12. Tim Cook thanked Blake Kellum for the meeting. He expressed that after working on the vegetation program of Lake Conroe for past 3-4 years, he feels like we are "stewards" of the Lake. He is excited over the partnerships being developed with the anglers, LCA, TPWD and SJRA. He said that utilizing *boater access funds* could turn this project into something better than anyone originally planned and safer for all boaters on the Lake. He has offered assistance from his organization of approx. 20-30 boats with side sonars to help with marking stumps. He mentioned that they probably could raise some funds to help with the effort.
13. Warren Oja discussed the potential floating trees in the north end of the Lake. Approx. 600 acres of dead trees found because trees did not have a deep enough root system prior to the drought conditions. Trees are not usually cut in the riparian zone. They would fall on the lake bed without water so they would never become water logged. This would mean that they will float when water returns. He mentioned that trees could be hinged cut to keep stationary leaving them attached to the stump. This would improve fish habitat. Blake Kellum offered the help of SJRA for this project.
14. Ed Parten offered his apologies because he said that their viewpoint had been that the stump cutting project was about the aesthetics of the Lake only for homeowners. He again reinforced that he was in support of the project as discussed. Mike Bleier offered that no apologies were needed that this project is simply about safety for all boaters, recreational users and anglers alike.

15. Blake Kellum also advised that this has been a learning experience for SJRA. He stated that a meeting should have been called right from the beginning. From this point forward, SJRA ensures that protocol will be followed.
  
16. Earl Chilton spoke on behalf of TPWD and the possibility of available funding. He agrees that the stump cutting project is a valid project that can possibly be added into the project with Fish and Wildlife Service. The paperwork has to go through the Albuquerque office. He will try to use funds retroactively. He is concerned about the amount of days it will take to work out the details in order to guarantee the funds are secured due to the holiday time of year. He advised that the best use of all funds available be considered. He will work to secure the guarantee for a 3:1 matching of funds since they qualify the non-federal money requirement.
  
17. Sue Wheatley advised that LCA Board has not approved the usage of funds for this project. The first vote ended with a majority against the project due to the controversy surrounding the project with other organizations but this meeting has helped relieve those concerns. Their Board will vote again and Mike Bleier is confident the project will receive the necessary approval with the second vote.
  
18. The LCA and Richardson Family have a combined total of \$40,000 for the project. The LCA has \$30,000 and the Richardson Family has \$10,000. Mike Bleier wants the LCA to have as little liability as possible. Initially the project was scheduled to end once the combined total of \$40,000 was spent.
  
19. Discussion took place regarding who will initiate the contract with Stump Busters to begin the project. The Richardson Family is considering initiated a contract for \$10,000 so the project can begin before the holidays. Earl Chilton reminded all that it is a possibility funds used prior to his securing a financial match guarantee may not be matched retroactively. Blake Kellum to work on securing an amendment to the SJRA's existing Aquatic Vegetation Management contract with TPWD and should know something after the holidays as well.
  
20. The proposed completion date of cutting renegade stumps and boat lanes is approx. 3 months. Once completed, any stumps that are identified as concern will be evaluated.

Meeting finished at 7:15pm.