

Watershed restoration planning for Laredo and upstream affected stakeholders

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I. Executive summary

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The purpose of the project is to engage diverse affected stakeholders to develop a Watershed Restoration Plan focused on Laredo, Texas and upstream stakeholders along the Rio Grande. Funds will be used to conduct literature reviews, produce geospatial analysis, interview affected stakeholders, and convene stakeholders to discuss and prioritize watershed restoration strategies. The activities performed under this proposal will primarily involve watershed restoration planning (Task B), though critical watershed group development (Task A) activities will take place. The project is a two-year project that will end in June 2022. The watershed project area includes federal facilities such as international bridges.

II. Background data

The San Ambrosia - Santa Isabel watershed is a portion of the Rio Grande Basin in South Texas, stretching from Maverick County (south of Amistad Reservoir) passing through the southwestern edge of Dimmitt County, and to the southern tip of Webb County. The watershed is formed by land in both the U.S. and Mexico. The City of Eagle Pass in Maverick County has a population of nearly 30,000,¹ and its sister-city of Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico has a population of approximately 150,000.² In the southern portion of the watershed, the City of Laredo, Texas has a population of more than 260,000, and its sister-city of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico has a population of nearly 375,000.

The Rio Grande is the only source of drinking water for border cities like these, located along the river. Water rights are known to be over allocated among various users including municipal, irrigation, and manufacturing among others, which has caused the Rio Grande to rank as one of the ten most endangered rivers in the World.³ Water availability is a key concern because of this overallocation and drought. Conflicts over water deliveries between the U.S. and Mexico have made watershed management a challenge.

Water quality is also a major concern for Laredo and other cities that rely on the Rio Grande. Bacteria levels of *E.coli* stemming from millions of gallons of daily raw sewer discharges from Mexican cities have been found to exceed maximum contaminant limits on a regular basis. Meanwhile, persistently low levels of chlorine residuals in tap water led to a recent boil water

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. 2017 estimates.

² INEGI. 2010. <https://www.inegi.org.mx/>

³ Wong, C., Williams, C., Pittock, J., Collier, U., & Schelle, P. (2007). World's top 10 rivers at risk. Gland, Switzerland.

notice in Laredo and remain a concern, as well as disinfection byproducts.⁴ Limited water quality data is available in this portion of the watershed and testing for heavy metals has all but disappeared throughout the Texas portion of the Rio Grande river basin.

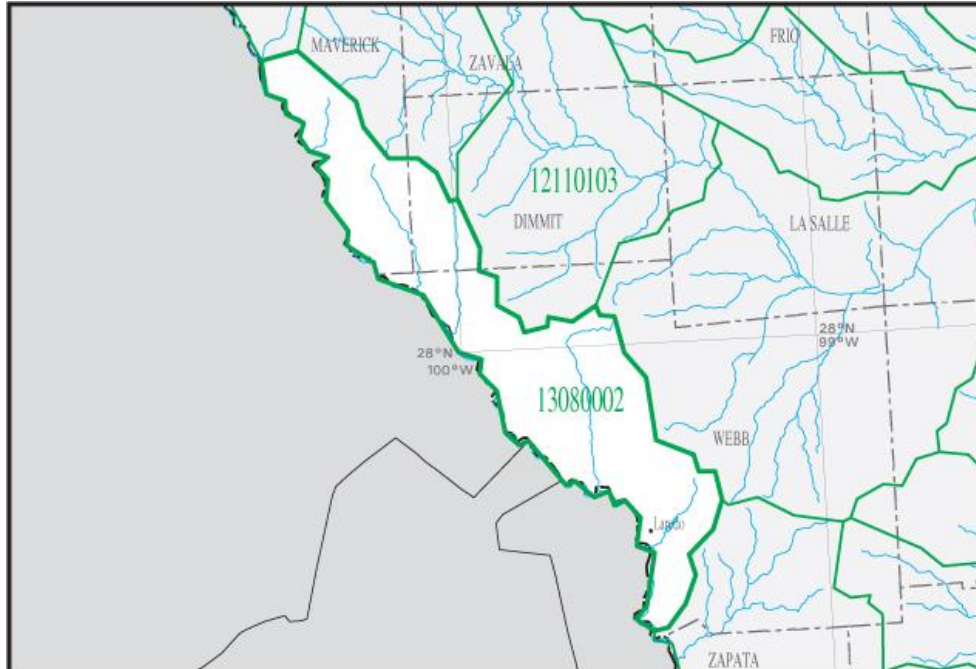
In Webb County, the Rio Grande is home to several endangered and threatened mussel species, mammals and birds. A fast-growing population, rampant development along the river and its creeksheds, poor water quality, invasive species, and toxicity are issues affecting these species.

Federal, state, regional, and international studies and plans have not fully addressed this area of the Rio Grande watershed, and RGISC's anticipation is that engaging the watershed at the 8-digit HUC scale will be the appropriate level at which to achieve results for our region.

III. Project location

The project will take place in the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel watershed (8-digit HUC 13080002), along the Rio Grande - Rio Bravo. The watershed is primarily located in Maverick and Webb Counties, and includes a portion of Dimmit County. Major cities in the watershed include Laredo, Texas, and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico in southern Webb County. In the northern part of the watershed, Eagle Pass, Texas and Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico are affected stakeholders.

Figure 1 Boundaries of the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel Watershed (8-digit HUC 13080002)



⁴ City of Laredo. (2018). 2017 Water Quality Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.cityoflaredo.com/utilities/assets/2017-ccr-report.pdf>

IV. Technical project description and milestones

Applicant Category and Eligibility

RGISC's mission is to preserve and protect the Rio Grande-Rio Bravo, its watershed and environment, through awareness, advocacy, research, education, stewardship and bi-national collaboration for the benefit of present and future generations.

RGISC is a 501c3 non-profit organization eligible for this grant opportunity and has promoted sustainable use of Rio Grande water resources for more than 25 years. As a community-based advocacy organization in Laredo, Texas, RGISC and its members are significantly affected by the quality and quantity of water in the -Rio Grande watershed, as the Rio Grande serves as RGISC's only source of drinking water.

RGISC is seeking funding as a "New Watershed Group," because no such entity exists in Laredo or in the watershed upstream of Laredo.⁵ There is no groundwater management district,⁶ or river authority that pertains to Laredo. RGISC, meanwhile, has completed little or no watershed restoration planning or projects, and requires more substantial support for building its capacity to undertake this type of critical work, and to establish a watershed group and complete outreach to stakeholders.

RGISC was established in 1994 by citizens from Laredo and Nuevo Laredo in response to the deteriorating water quality in the Rio Grande, our only source of drinking water. Since its inception, RGISC has filled an important role as an environmental educator, thought leader, and convening organization in the community, engaging citizens, government entities, and industrial water users to care for the local watershed. Some highlights of RGISC's achievements include the following:

- Coordinates the annual student water testing event called the Rio Research Roundup along the entire 1,885-mile Rio Grande basin for the past 10 years, involving nearly 2,500 students annually from both sides of the river.
- Led the establishment of the river monitoring program for Webb and Zapata counties in the mid-1990s and for the past 25 years has conducted monthly water quality testing through what is now the Texas Clean Rivers Program.
- Prevented aerial spraying of herbicides along the Rio Grande by the U.S. Border Patrol, protecting people, wildlife and ecosystems living along the riverbanks, by mobilizing a community group called Barrio de Colores which ended in a settlement that prohibits the federal government from conducting any aerial spraying along 16.1 Laredo river miles, in perpetuity.
- Successfully mobilized the small historic community of San Ygnacio, Texas to defeat a permit for a "land farm" where oil and gas waste sludge would be disposed in a 100-year floodplain, 1 mile from the community's only water intake pump at the Rio Grande.

⁵ The Rio Grande Regional Water Authority focuses primarily on counties downstream of Laredo and has traditionally excluded the City of Laredo. See rgrwa.org

⁶ Texas Water Development Board. (2019). Groundwater Conservation Districts of Texas. http://www.twdb.texas.gov/mapping/doc/maps/GCDs_8x11.pdf

- Campaigned for and helped craft the City of Laredo's first set of environmental ordinances: hazardous materials, illegal dumping, green spaces preservation, and single-use plastic bag ban.
- Conceptualized and secured \$500,000 in seed money to construct and operate the Lamar Bruni Vergara Environmental Science Center, now managed by Laredo College.
- Earned the Texas Governor's Award for Environmental Excellence in 1995.

Ongoing activities include:

- Monthly testing of Rio Grande water quality.
- Coordination with Mexican agencies in Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas to address the ongoing daily discharge of 6 million gallons of untreated wastewater into the Rio Grande.
- Protecting green spaces and wetland habitats.
- Reducing single-use plastic pollution in the Rio Grande.
- Coordinating the annual Rio Research Roundup.
- Rapid response on issues that involve addressing illegal business practices that create blockages of creeks and tributaries of the Rio Grande in our region.
- Establishing Laredo's first natural landmarks to incentivize ecotourism.
- Coordinating the annual Laredo Birding Festival, in partnership with the Monte Mucho Audubon Society and Laredo Convention & Visitors Bureau.
- Collaborating with the U.S. Geological Survey on a proposal to have real-time river sensors installed in Webb and Zapata counties.
- Organizing regular hikes along the river and nature trails, as well as community paddles along the river that now entail up to 75 people for these paddling events.
- Construction of large-scale Monarch and pollinator gardens at several targeted areas across the City.
- Working with the City of Laredo on a lease to develop and establish interactive educational programs at the upcoming South Laredo (SoLa) Nature & Birding Center.
- Working with the North American Development Bank on a 2020 project to assess and mitigate diesel emissions from some of the 14,000 diesel trucks that cross through Laredo each day.

These past achievements and ongoing activities demonstrate that RGISC is capable of promoting the sustainable use of water resources and meets the eligibility criteria for a New Watershed Group.

Goals

RGISC's goal is to develop a scientifically grounded, data-driven watershed management plan under an adaptive management framework for watershed restoration in the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel Watershed of the Rio Grande. Building on our 25-year history of protecting the Rio Grande watershed, extensive research completed by U.S. and Mexican government agencies, and numerous academic studies, we aim to convene stakeholders and water management entities to identify and prioritize solutions to persistent problems and future challenges, and estimate funding requirements for restoring the watershed.

RGISC's overarching objectives are to implement a multi-year project to understand how to use the Laredo landscape to better handle both flooding and drought, consequently improving water quality, groundwater replenishment, and habitat. Investigation would identify historic Laredo landscape and soils, former arroyos, tributaries, and wetlands, and show how development since 1800 has compromised their effectiveness. The purpose of the New Watershed Group will be to develop relationships between stakeholders, and establish a plan to increase flooding and drought resilience, increase wildlife habitat, establish essential boundaries for land and water development and redevelopment in the watershed that seeks to create more harmony between development and nature, and that can better prepare the region for the impacts of climate change now and in the future.

Approach

RGISC will pursue a three-phase approach for developing a new watershed group and a watershed restoration plan for the Rio Grande-Rio Bravo watershed in Webb County.

- In Phase I, RGISC plans to synthesize information from available research and conduct one-on-one interviews with relevant stakeholders, clearly delineating watershed restoration objectives and needs.
- In Phase II, RGISC will host a series of meetings for stakeholders to collaboratively review the synthesis information and identify and prioritize watershed management projects.
- In Phase III, RGISC will produce a summary report available to project participants and the public detailing key objectives and priority projects for the watershed.

This approach will primarily address Task B - Watershed Restoration Planning described in Section C.3.1. *Eligible Projects*. The following activities under Task B eligible projects will take place:

- Develop a watershed restoration plan
- Conduct mapping and other technical analyses.
- Obtain software technology required to formulate the watershed restoration plan.
- Interview watershed group members and stakeholders to gain an idea of projects that would improve the watershed.
- Work with watershed group members, landowners, Federal agencies, and state or local governments to determine how the watershed can be improved.
- Review watershed-specific best management practices established by Federal, state, and local government agencies.
- Develop general watershed management project concepts or performing an analysis of the watershed to identify and prioritize watershed management projects.

V. Evaluation Criteria

E.1.1. Evaluation Criterion A— Watershed Group Diversity and Geographic Scope

Sub-criterion No. A1. Watershed Group Diversity

Federal

U.S. and Mexican agencies manage water rights and data on water quality across the international boundary including the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) and their Mexican counterpart Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas Entre México y Estados Unidos (CILA).

- Both IBWC and CILA have been invited to participate, plan to engage with this project and have written letters of support for this proposal.

U.S. Geological Survey has worked with RGISC to access relevant data on instream flows and water quality, and develop a project to install real-time river sensors, and will also be invited to participate.

U.S. Congressman Henry Cuellar (TX-28) represents the entire geographic area of the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel watershed in the U.S. and has written a letter of support for this proposal.

Academic

Laredo College is located along the river front and is home to the Lamar Vergara Environmental Science Center.

- RGISC will invite Laredo College to engage, both as a landowner along the river, and from an academic perspective.

Municipal and County

People living in cities along the Rio Grande depend primarily on the Rio Grande for their municipal water supply.

- The City of Laredo water utility must treat water from the Rio Grande to control bacteria levels, which are frequently high due to discharge of raw sewage from sources in Mexico. The City of Laredo Environmental Services Department plans to engage with the project and has written a letter of support for this proposal. RGISC also plans to bring in other relevant departments with whom it has established working partnerships, including Planning, Utilities, Parks, Engineering, Bridge, and Economic Development.
- RGISC also plans to invite Rio Bravo and El Cenizo, small incorporated towns in southern Webb County, which were once *colonias* -impoverished housing developments often lacking basic infrastructure such as roads, potable water, and electricity.⁷

⁷ Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas. (2015). Las Colonias in the 21st Century. Retrieved from: <https://www.dallasfed.org/~media/documents/cd/pubs/lascalonias.pdf>

- RGISC has reached out to the Webb County Drainage District, which has expressed interest in participating in this project.
 - Webb County Judge Tano E. Tijerina has written a letter of support for this proposal and plans to participate in group meetings.
 - Crane Engineering, a stakeholder in the Webb County Drainage District and Texas Society of Professional Engineers (TSPE), has written a letter of support for this proposal and plans to participate in group meetings.
- RGISC will also invite key representatives from Maverick and Dimmit Counties, including the cities of Eagle Pass, Texas and El Indio, Texas.
- To the extent possible, RGISC will reach out to key stakeholders in Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico (sister city to Eagle Pass, Texas), and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico (sister city to Laredo, Texas).

People living along the banks of the Rio Grande in Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas, Mexico have been threatened by the possible aerial spraying of herbicides by the U.S. Border Patrol in an effort to control the invasive Carrizo Cane.

- **U.S. Border Patrol** has made commitments to collaborate with RGISC environmental stakeholders on managing invasive Carrizo Cane along the riverbanks, and RGISC will invite their representatives to participate as a stakeholder.
- **Neighborhood groups or associations** located along the riverbanks will also be invited. RGISC already has relationships with some residents involved with the La Bota Ranch neighborhood association.

Commercial and Industrial

Land developers must comply with the city's Green Spaces Preservation Ordinance, which requires buffers to protect streams, wetlands and floodplains. Laredo Builders Association will be invited to represent this demographic.

Industrial manufacturing facilities are significant water users along the river in Webb and Maverick Counties.⁸

Warehouses and trucking are potential sources of non-point source water pollution. Laredo is the nation's largest port of entry, where nearly 14,000 trucks per day cross the international bridges.⁹ Trade associations representing these industries will be invited to participate.

Oil and gas operators conducting drilling and hydraulic fracturing withdraw from city water. Occasionally, illegal dumping of oil and gas waste in the river and its tributaries has been reported. During the most recent oil and gas boom in 2011, open-top dump trucks hauling sludge down Interstate 35 frequently spilled sludge waste from oil and gas sites at a stop light near the International Bridge, within ¼ mile of the River. Trade associations and local operators will be invited to participate in the project.

⁸ TWDB. (2017). Texas State Water Plan. Retrieved from: <https://2017.texasstatewaterplan.org/county/Webb>

⁹ Mexico News Daily. April 4, 2019. At some crossings, wait times up to 12 hours, 15-kilometer truck lines. Retrieved from: <https://mexiconewsdaily.com/news/wait-times-up-to-12-hours/>

Talen Energy operates a natural gas power plant in Laredo, Texas, which uses surface water for cooling. RGISC will conduct outreach to invite Talen Energy to stakeholder discussions.

Small business

Cattle ranchers & other agricultural businesses are common in Webb, Maverick, and Dimmit Counties.

- RGISC will locate key ranchers and businesses in this sector and invite them to participate.
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and local offices of the State Soil and Water Conservation Districts will be invited to participate.

Public interests

Nature and wildlife enthusiasts use the river for recreation, including kayaking, hiking along nature trails, observing wildlife, practicing plant identification, and more.

- RGISC members attend nature hikes, and kayaking events organized by RGISC.

Hunting and fishing enthusiasts depend on a healthy river to provide habitat, and secure groundwater for providing water for deer.

- RGISC has partnered with Ducks Unlimited in the past, on a Muscovy Duck restoration project, and will invite them to participate.

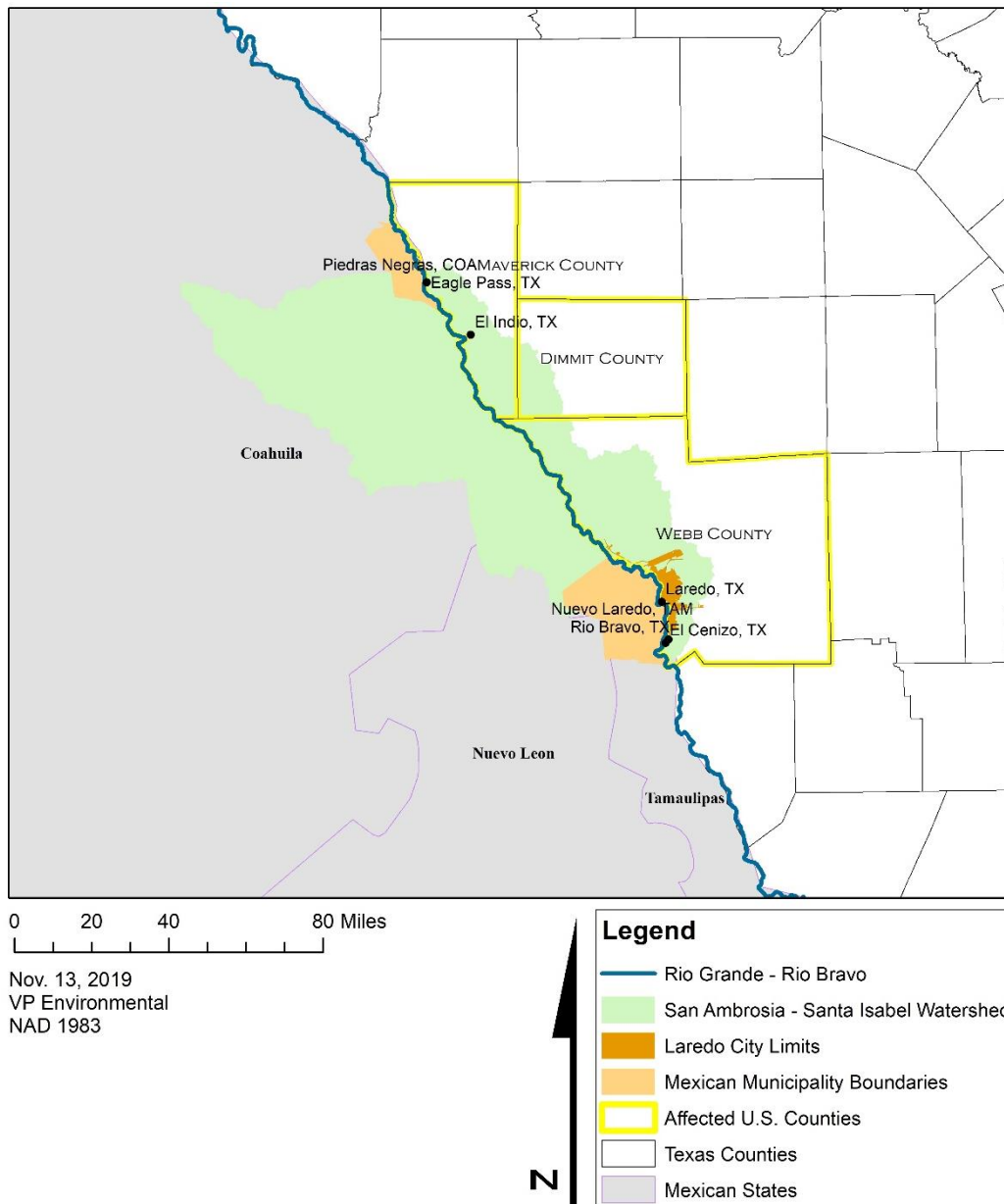
Birders and tourists attend RGISC's annual Laredo Birding Festival during the spring migration, and enjoy bird watching year-round, being geographically located along a major migratory bird corridor, and in the northernmost range of where many Central and South American birds appear in the U.S.

- RGISC already partners with the Monte Mucho Audubon Society and Laredo Convention and Visitors Bureau to coordinate the annual Laredo Birding Festival, which features partnerships with roughly two dozen area ranches. They will be invited to participate.

Sub-criterion No. A2. Geographic Scope

RGISC plans to invite stakeholder groups representing the entire extent of the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel watershed (Fig. 2), as listed above. In order to ensure that stakeholders in the entire extent of the watershed are included, RGISC will reach out to key representatives in Laredo as well as stakeholders both upstream and downstream of Laredo, and inland from the Rio Grande.

Figure 2 Map of the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel watershed



E.1.2. Evaluation Criterion B — Addressing Critical Watershed Needs

Sub-criterion No. B1. Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

In Laredo, the Rio Grande watershed is experiencing several negative impacts that affect water availability, water quality, and wildlife habitats. Water availability stressors include overallocation of water rights and drought exacerbated by climate change. Water quality and wildlife habitat stressors include 6 million gallons of daily raw sewage effluent from Mexico, invasive species such as *Arundo donax* and *Tamarix*, extreme flooding, poor land development practices, herbicide use, illegal dumping, and urban stormwater runoff that includes pollution from oil and gas development and single-use plastics.

Water availability

Rio Grande is our Laredo's only source of drinking water. The Laredo area is an understudied and highly stressed portion of the Rio Grande in a semi-arid region.¹⁰ The river has been ranked as one of the world's most endangered rivers because of insufficient water to meet demand – basin wide, primarily attributed to irrigation withdrawals, dams, invasive species, and drought.¹¹ Laredo is one of the fastest growing cities in Texas and the country,¹² and is expected to grow 80% from 2016 to 2046.¹³

Water rights are known to be overallocated along the Rio Grande, in part because the climate was wetter at the time the rights were initially allocated.¹⁴ Conflicts over water exist among user types and regions, both domestically and internationally. The City of San Antonio, Texas recently purchased water rights from Val Verde County, upstream of Laredo, causing concern over Laredo's water flows.¹⁵ The U.S. and Mexico have had a treaty establishing water allocations and sharing for the Rio Grande since 1944, but in recent years Mexico had not made sufficient water deliveries to the U.S. in a given year,¹⁶ potentially because of drought,¹⁷ causing some U.S. lawmakers to urge federal action to reduce water deliveries to Mexico

¹⁰ Note that the City of Laredo opted out of the 2011 Lower Rio Grande Basin Study by U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and Rio Grande Regional Water Authority.

¹¹ Wong, CM, Williams, CE, Pittock, J, Collier, U and P Schelle. March 2007. World's top 10 rivers at risk. WWF International. Gland, Switzerland. Retrieved from:
<https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2007-01/worldstop10riversatrisk.pdf>

¹² Wallethub, cited in Thorpe, J. Oct. 4, 2018. Report: Laredo among fastest growing cities in the nation. Laredo Morning Times. <https://www.chron.com/local/article/Report-Laredo-among-fastest-growing-cities-in-13281011.php>

¹³ Wallace, J. May 20, 2017. Laredo one of the fastest-growing metro areas in the U.S., according to IHS Markit. Laredo Morning Times. <https://www.lmtonline.com/local/article/Laredo-s-population-expected-to-boom-in-coming-11158247.php#photo-12933463>

¹⁴ Rister, M. E., Sturdivant, A. W., Lacewell, R. D., & Michelsen, A. M. (2011). Challenges and Opportunities for Water of the Rio Grande. *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics*, 43(3), 367-378. <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/S1074070800004363>

¹⁵ Palacios, J. Dec. 4, 2013. San Antonio Water Proposals See Opposition from Laredo. *Fronteras*. Retrieved from: <https://fronterasdesk.org/content/9296/san-antonio-water-proposals-see-opposition-laredo>

¹⁶ Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. 2019. Water Shortage Issue Related to the Mexican Water Deficit. <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/border/water-deficit.html>

¹⁷ Swichtenberg, B. 2003. Border Water Conflict. *Water and Wastes Digest*. <https://www.wwdmag.com/border-water-conflict>

from the U.S.¹⁸ Under the treaty, Mexico is allowed to catch up on water deliveries over a five-year period.¹⁹ Nonetheless, increasing water stress adds to conflict between the two nations.

In addition to overallocation of surface water rights, overdrafts of groundwater may be impacting the Rio Grande, particularly during drought periods.²⁰ This is of particular concern in Webb County, where oil and gas development has been particularly heavy, and water use for hydraulic fracturing can be over 9 million gallons per oil and gas well.²¹

While South Texas is no stranger to droughts, climate change exacerbated heatwaves and temperature extremes brought on by Texas' 2011 historic drought,²² and contributed "to over \$10 billion in direct losses to agriculture alone."²³

Water quality

Bacteria counts in the Laredo sector of the Rio Grande are a consistent problem, and our section of the river is subsequently "Impaired" as a result. The issues primarily stem from untreated sewage discharges from Mexican sources into the Rio Grande. A 2012 Laredo Bacteria Study conducted by the Texas Clean Rivers program, in partnership with our organization, found levels of *E. coli* exceeding U.S. standards by more than 19 times by the time the river reaches downtown Laredo.

Cryptosporidiosis, a parasite, can also be found in high levels as the river continues its southbound trek.²⁴ The contamination has had negative impacts on the smaller incorporated cities of Rio Bravo and El Cenizo, once considered to be colonias, which are located downstream from Laredo and Nuevo Laredo in Webb County. These towns have struggled with poor water quality. Negligent management at their water treatment plant in 2013 led to

¹⁸ Weismann, M.L. 2018. Texas State Representative Asks Administration to Enforce 1944 Treaty by Withholding Deliveries to Mexico. Journal of Water. <https://journalofwater.com/jow/texas-state-representative-asks-administration-to-enforce-1944-treaty-by-withholding-deliveries-to-mexico/>

¹⁹ Texas Department of Agriculture and Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. (2013). Addressing Mexico's Water Deficit to the United States. Retrieved from: <https://www.texasagriculture.gov/Portals/0/forms/COMM/Water%20Debt.pdf>

²⁰ Carter, N., Mulligan, S.P., Seekle, C.R. (2017). U.S.-Mexican Water Sharing: Background and Recent Developments. Congressional Research Service. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43312.pdf>

²¹ Gallegos, T. J., Varela, B. A., Haines, S. S., & Engle, M. A. (2015). Hydraulic fracturing water use variability in the United States and potential environmental implications. *Water Resources Research*, 51(7), 5839–5845. <https://doi.org/10.1002/2015WR017278>

²² Hoerling, M., M. Chen, R. Dole, J. Eischeid, A. Kumar, J. W. Nielsen-Gammon, P. Pegion, J. Perlwitz, X. - W. Quan, and T. Zhang, 2013: Anatomy of an extreme event. *Journal of Climate*, 26, 2811–2832, doi:10.1175/JCLI-D-12-00270.1. cited in U.S. Global Change Research Program (2014).

²³ U.S. Global Change Research Program. (2014). National Climate Assessment - Great Plains. Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <http://nca2014.globalchange.gov/report/regions/great-plains> cited in Henry, T. (2014, May 6). More Drought, Heat and Water Wars: What Climate Change Already Means for Texas. State Impact Texas. Retrieved from <https://stateimpact.npr.org/texas/2014/05/06/more-drought-heat-and-water-wars-what-climate-change-already-means-for-texas/>

²⁴ Webb County. (2015). Drinking Water from the Rio Bravo Water Treatment Plant and possible cryptosporidium. Retrieved from: http://www.webbcountytx.gov/WaterUtilities/Resources/CryptoSupplimentallInformation_July15-English.pdf

water samples testing positive for E. coli, and a no drinking water notice in place for three weeks.²⁵

In September 2019, the City of Laredo issued a Boil Water Notice due to low chlorine residuals in certain areas of South Laredo -an area of the city known for being predominantly low-income.²⁶ In prior years, the City's water utility has exceeded EPA Maximum Contaminant Levels for disinfection byproducts, underscoring the need to address water quality at the source.²⁷ Additionally, Environmental Working Group has reported that City of Laredo drinking water had concentrations of uranium 4.8 times greater than their recommended health guideline, though these concentrations were within the legal limit.²⁸

Habitat

The river serves as a critical wildlife corridor and is home to a wide diversity of plants and vegetation. Texas is second among the U.S. states for number of bird species, being home to nearly 650.²⁹ In South Texas, the Rio Grande serves as the meeting point for the Central and Mississippi flyways, making it one of the most important bird migration routes in North America.³⁰ The San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel Watershed is located in the Central Flyway.

Webb County is also the northernmost range of many neotropical bird species whose range is predominantly located in Central and South America. Laredo's bird appreciation community has recently taken root, with the help of RGISC's annual Laredo Birding Festival, established in 2013 and regular outings hosted by the Monte Mucho Audubon Society. A watershed plan for a healthier river ecosystem could help our County capitalize on these natural resources to develop better ecotourism projects and foster development projects that are more harmoniously aligned with nature.

Federally endangered species in the Rio Grande watershed in Webb County include the Interior Least Tern,³¹ the Texas Hornshell Mussel,³² and the Ocelot.³³ Maverick County is also part of the known range of the Texas Hornshell Mussel and Ocelot.³⁴

²⁵ Satija, N. (2013). U.S. and Mexico Struggle to Clean Up Rio Grande. Texas Tribune. <https://www.texastribune.org/2013/10/23/us-and-mexico-struggle-clean-rio-grande/>

²⁶ City of Laredo. (2019). City of Laredo issues update as boil water notice lifted in north Laredo. Laredo Morning Times. <https://www.lmtonline.com/local/article/City-of-Laredo-issues-update-as-boil-water-notice-14477235.php>

²⁷ City of Laredo. (2018). 2017 Water Quality Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.cityoflaredo.com/utilities/assets/2017-ccr-report.pdf>

²⁸ Environmental Working Group. (2019). EWG's Tap Water Database - 2019 Update. <https://www.ewg.org/tapwater/system.php?pws=TX2400001>

²⁹ Audubon. Birding in Texas. Retrieved from: <https://www.audubon.org/news/birding-texas>

³⁰ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (2018). Urban Bird Treaty. <https://www.fws.gov/birds/grants/urban-bird-treaty/urban-bird-treaty-albuquerque.php>

³¹ Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Interior Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*). Retrieved from: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/species/leasttern/> and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. ECOS. Least tern (*Sterna antillarum*). Retrieved from: <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp0/profile/speciesProfile?spcode=B07N>

³² Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. 07/17/2019. Annotated County Lists of Rare Species - Webb County. Retrieved from: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/gis/rtest/>

³³ Id.

³⁴ Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. 07/17/2019. Annotated County Lists of Rare Species - Maverick County. Retrieved from: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/gis/rtest/>

The Texas Hornshell Mussel is known or believed to occur in only five counties of the U.S, with the largest known population in the world in Laredo at La Bota Ranch.³⁵ Webb County is one of three Texas counties along the Rio Grande where the Inland Least Tern has been observed at the bend of the river, and is known to breed.³⁶ The ocelot is a cat that requires dense brush as habitat, which is being lost to agricultural and urban development.³⁷

Sub-criterion No. B2. Developing Strategies to Address Critical Watershed Needs or Issues

Under Task B - Watershed Restoration Planning, RGISC will pursue a three-phase approach for developing a watershed restoration plan for the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel Watershed.

- In Phase I, RGISC plans to synthesize information from research that has been completed by U.S. and Mexican government agencies at federal, state, and local levels, as well as any relevant academic research. The goal of the synthesis will be to clearly delineate watershed restoration objectives and needs, assemble a list of current watershed restoration projects, and identify gaps. Following this synthesis, RGISC will conduct one-on-one interviews with relevant agency and academic researchers, stakeholders representing major water user groups (e.g. city utility departments, private landowners, manufacturing sector, mining sector, and agriculture sector) and groups that affect the watershed quality (e.g. developers, industrial and manufacturing discharge facilities) to explore progress to date, learn about any planning for future challenges currently taking place, and compile a list of concepts for watershed restoration projects that have not yet been funded. **(6 months)**
- In Phase II, RGISC will host a series of meetings for stakeholders to collaboratively review the synthesis information and the list of concepts compiled from interviews. The goal of the meetings will be to identify and prioritize watershed management projects. Between meetings, RGISC will review new quantitative and qualitative data that comes to light and conduct relevant data and geospatial analysis to inform the process. Throughout this series we will seek to determine potential agencies with jurisdiction over each project concept, areas of overlap with potential for collaboration, an estimate of project costs, and possible funding sources. **(15 months)**
- In Phase III, RGISC will produce a summary report available to project participants and the public detailing key objectives and priority projects for the watershed. **(6 months, with 3 months overlapping Phase II)**

³⁵ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. n.d. Texas Hornshell (*Popenaias popeii*). ECOS. Retrieved from: <https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp0/profile/speciesProfile?spcode=F02M>

³⁶ Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. n.d. Interior Least Tern (*Sterna antillarum athalassos*). Retrieved from: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/species/leasttern/>

³⁷ Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. n.d. Ocelot. Retrieved from: https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_w7000_0013_ocelot.pdf

In an effort to reduce conflicts at the outset of the process, RGISC will ask stakeholders to commit to fully participate in the process as sincere participants seeking out opportunities for collaboration and problem solving. This will not imply that stakeholders must agree with everyone, but that they must strive to find common ground and a resolution to any perceived conflicts that inhibit progress toward the objectives.

E.1.3. Evaluation Criterion C— Implementation and Results

Sub-criterion No. C1—Understanding of and Ability to Meet Program Requirements

Major tasks and milestones are discussed in detail in the technical project description and are not repeated here.

Phase I: Data synthesis and interviews with affected stakeholders

- July 2020 - Dec. 2020 (Cost: \$28,931)

Start and End Dates	Milestones
July 2020 - Sep 2020	Synthesize information from research that has been completed by U.S. and Mexican government agencies at federal, state, and local levels, as well as any relevant academic research.
Sep. 2020 - Nov. 2020	Generate maps of the watershed, using GIS software, that aid in understanding critical issues.
Oct. 2020 - Nov. 2020	One-on-one interviews with relevant agency and academic researchers, stakeholders representing major water user groups.
Nov. 2020 - Dec. 2020	Clearly delineate watershed restoration objectives and needs, assemble a list of current watershed restoration projects, and identify gaps.
Nov. 2020 - Dec. 2020	Compile a list of concepts for watershed restoration projects that have not yet been funded.

Phase II: Collaborative planning meetings with stakeholders

- Jan. 2021 - Mar. 2022 (Cost: \$67,947)

Start and End Dates	Milestones
Jan. 2021 - Feb. 2021	Collaboratively review the synthesis information and the list of concepts compiled from interviews.
Mar. 2021 - Dec. 2021	Identify and prioritize watershed management projects.
Jan. 2022 - Mar. 2022	Identify potential agencies with jurisdiction over each project concept, areas of overlap with potential for collaboration, an estimate of project costs, and possible funding sources.
Jan. 2021 - Mar. 2022	Conduct data and geospatial analysis as needed to inform the process.

Phase III: Producing a summary report for project participants and the public.

- Jan. 2022 - June 2022 (Cost: \$22,932)

Start and End Dates	Milestones
Jan. 2022 - Mar. 2022	Drafting a summary report detailing key objectives and priority projects for the watershed.
Feb 2022 - Apr. 2022	Sharing the draft report with the stakeholder group for feedback.
May 2022 - June 2022	Finalizing the summary report and disseminating to participants, key stakeholders in the region, and the public.

Sub-criterion No. C2—Building on Relevant Federal, State, or Regional Planning Efforts

Federal

There are no EPA Healthy Watershed Projects in Region 6, which covers Texas and other states.³⁸

The Bureau of Reclamation and the Rio Grande Regional Water Authority (RGRWA) published the Lower Rio Grande Basin Study in 2013, focused on planning that would address the 86,438 ac-ft/yr water availability shortfall predicted to be caused by climate change.³⁹ The following constraints were identified in the study for establishing a planning objective:

- Reduce dependency on the Rio Grande
- Preserve existing water rights
- Preserve downstream flows for irrigation/push water and environmental needs
- Contain actions that are within the reasonable control of study sponsors
- Concentrate on Cameron, Willacy, and Hidalgo County needs

Although Laredo is in the heart of the Lower Rio Grande Basin Study geographic area, the City of Laredo opted out of the study,⁴⁰ presumably because the city was concerned that its unique needs would be overlooked due to the study's concentration on Cameron, Willacy, and Hidalgo County needs. As such, establishing a New Watershed Group that focuses on issues in Laredo and the 8-digit HUC watershed will address needs and strategies not already identified by Bureau of Reclamation.

The Army Corps of Engineers has published a Rio Grande Basin Watershed Assessment Review Plan, but substantive documents with details about the assessment were not available to RGISC at the time of this proposal.⁴¹

State

Under the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's (TCEQ) Clean Rivers Program, there is no Total Maximum Daily Load program,⁴² nor is there a Watershed Protection Plan for Nonpoint Source Water Pollution that relates to or intersects the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel Watershed (8-digit HUC 13080002).⁴³

³⁸ U.S. EPA. (2018). Healthy Watersheds Projects in Region 6. Retrieved from: <https://www.epa.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-projects-region-6>

³⁹ Bureau of Reclamation. (2013). Lower Rio Grande Basin Study. Denver, CO. Retrieved from <https://www.usbr.gov/watersmart/bsp/docs/finalreport/LowerRioGrande/LowerRioGrandeBasinStudy.pdf>

⁴⁰ *Id.* at p. 3-3.

⁴¹ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. (2015). Review Plan - Rio Grande Basin Watershed Assessment.

⁴² TCEQ. Segments with Total Maximum Daily Loads. Last modified: 08/28/2019. Retrieved from: tceq.texas.gov/waterquality/tmdl/nav/tmdlsegments

⁴³ TCEQ. Watershed Protection Plans for Nonpoint Source Water Pollution. Last modified: 08/29/2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.tceq.texas.gov/waterquality/nonpoint-source/mgmt-plan/watershed-pp.html>

The International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) is a TCEQ Clean Rivers Program Partner. IBWC engaged in a formal relationship with RGISC in August 2018 to conduct water quality monitoring at key stations in Laredo for the purposes of the Clean Rivers Program.⁴⁴ IBWC noted in its 2019 Rio Grande Basin Program Update that RGISC's volunteers "involvement with the CRP is a great asset to the program." IBWC collaborates with RGISC to promote river cleanups, and the Rio Research Roundup, a basin-wide water quality testing event with students across three U.S. States and five Mexico states.

TCEQ indicates that parameters affecting the river in the project area include bacteria, ammonia, toxicity in water, and antimony in sediment.⁴⁵ None of these parameters are receiving full support.⁴⁶ The state's Watershed Action Plan Strategy Table indicates that the strategy for the Rio Grande Below Amistad Reservoir (the project area) is under "evaluation" for the bacteria parameter, and the status does not indicate that consulting or planning have begun.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, IBWC noted in its May 2019 Rio Grande Basin Program update that it was involved with the "creation of a watershed protection plan in the Rio Grande by the USIBWC, with CRP assistance."

The 2017 State Water Plan, produced by the Texas Water Development Board recommends strategies as well as additional unmet water needs by sector from 2020 to 2070.⁴⁸ The plan has recommended over \$109 million in capital improvement strategies for Webb County, \$7 million for Dimmit County, and \$44 million for Maverick County. A New Watershed Group that focuses on issues in the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel Watershed (8-digit HUC 13080002) will aid in developing strategies to address the unmet needs predicted by TWDB.

Regional

Counties in the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel Watershed (8-digit HUC 13080002) include Maverick, Webb, and Dimmit. Each of these counties have completed projects to establish essential basic water and wastewater infrastructure funded by the Texas Water Development Board's (TWDB) Economically Distressed Areas Program (EDAP).⁴⁹ There are no active or incomplete programs under the EDAP program in these counties.⁵⁰

International

Several institutions at the federal level in the U.S. and Mexico, international bodies, and World Wildlife Fund have participated in a planning initiative funded by the United Nations

⁴⁴ IBWC. (2019). Rio Grande Basin Program Update. Retrieved from:

https://www.ibwc.gov/CRP/documents/2019ProgramUpdate_FINAL.pdf

⁴⁵ TCEQ. 09/27/2019. Draft 2018 Texas Integrated Report - Assessment Results for Basin 23 - Rio Grande River Basin. Retrieved from:

https://www.tceq.texas.gov/assets/public/waterquality/swqm/assess/18txir/2018_Basin23.pdf

⁴⁶ *Id.* see *Level of Support (LOS) column.*

⁴⁷ TCEQ. (2019). WAP Strategy Table, Updated September 2019. Retrieved from:

https://www.tceq.texas.gov/assets/public/waterquality/wap/wap_allbasins.pdf

⁴⁸ TWDB. (2017). Texas State Water Plan. Retrieved from:

<https://2017.texasstatewaterplan.org/county/Webb>

⁴⁹ Texas Water Development Board. (2019). Economically Distressed Areas Program, July 1, 2019 - August 31, 2019. Austin, TX. Retrieved from

http://www.twdb.texas.gov/publications/reports/edap_reports/doc/Status.pdf

⁵⁰ *Id.* at p. 7.

Environment Program (UNEP), which began in 2011.⁵¹ The project objective was “To formulate a comprehensive, binational, ecosystem-based action programme (SAP) based on the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management, for the sustainable use management and use of the Rio Bravo throughout its basin, and to create the necessary enabling social-economic and policy mechanisms for implementing the agreed action programme and engendering the necessary reforms.”⁵² The project was initially expected to be completed in 2014, but was extended through December 2018. Per the FY17 progress report, little was actually accomplished, reportedly due to “Institutional arrangements and changes in Mexico which had prevented its normal execution,” and “concerns from the Mexican government with regards to the implications of the project results on the MX-US 1944 treaty on water allocations.”⁵³

The lack of performance on the UNEP program illustrates the unique challenges associated with international watershed planning, particularly on a larger basin scale. The project RGISC is proposing may have advantages through engaging stakeholders at a more local level.

E.1.4. Evaluation Criterion D— Department of the Interior Priorities (10 points)

This project supports department priority one, “Creating a conservation stewardship legacy second only to Teddy Roosevelt.”

Priority component	How the project supports the priority
Utilize science to identify best practices to manage land and water resources and adapt to changes in the environment;	Will use data, available science and agency studies, and geospatial analysis to key objectives and priority projects for the watershed.
Review DOI water storage, transportation, and distribution systems to identify opportunities to resolve conflicts and expand capacity;	Will incorporate all available information from federal, state, and local agencies as a part of the information gathering and stakeholder involvement processes.
Foster relationships with conservation organizations advocating for balanced stewardship and use of public lands;	Project will be led by a conservation organization advocating for balanced stewardship and use of public lands.

⁵¹ Project partners include United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) ; The Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources of Mexico (SEMARNAT); National Water Commission of Mexico (CONAGUA); Global Environmental Facility (GEF) ; United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) ; World Wildlife Fund (WWF)

⁵² United Nations Environment Program. (2017). UNEP GEF PIR Fiscal Year 17. Retrieved from: <http://open.unep.org/project/GEF-2860>

⁵³ *Id.* at p. 8

VI. Project budget

Budget proposal

Table 1 Total Project Cost

SOURCE	AMOUNT
Costs to be reimbursed with the requested Federal funding	\$100,000
Costs to be paid by the applicant	\$3,939
Value of third-party contributions	\$0
TOTAL PROJECT COST	\$103,939

Table 2 Budget Proposal

BUDGET ITEM DESCRIPTION	COMPUTATION			Total Cost
	\$/unit	Quantity	Quantity Type	
Salaries and Wages				
Tricia Cortez, Executive Director	\$31	898.56	hours	\$28,080
Watershed Science Director	\$31	1926.72	hours	\$60,210
Fringe Benefits				
None				
Travel				
None				
Equipment				
None				
Supplies and materials				
Meeting incidentals (refreshments, paper, pens)	\$75	8	Meetings	\$600
Contractual Construction				
None				
Other				
GIS license	\$500	9.6	40% of 24 months	\$4,800
Meeting venues	\$100	8		\$800
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS				\$94,490
Indirect Costs				
De Minimis	10%	\$94,490		\$9,449
TOTAL INDIRECT COSTS				\$9,449
TOTAL ESTIMATED PROJECT COSTS				\$103,939

Budget narrative

Salaries and wages

- Tricia Cortez, Executive Director (Project Manager)
 - Annual salary: \$65,000
 - Hourly rate: \$31.25
 - Percent of time: 20%
 - Estimated hours: 898.6 (includes 8% to account for payroll tax)
 - Dates of cost incurrence: July 2020 - June 2022
 - How the expenditure benefits the project: Tricia Cortez will oversee all aspects of the project, working with the Watershed Science Director to implement the project, recruit and interview stakeholder members, and host convening meetings. Cortez will review the Phase I synthesis, and summary report in Phase III, as well as all quarterly financial and performance reports.
- Watershed Science Director
 - Annual salary: \$65,000
 - Hourly rate: \$31.25
 - Percent of time: 40%
 - Estimated hours: 1797.1 (includes 8% to account for payroll tax)
 - Dates of cost incurrence: July 2020 - June 2022
 - How the expenditure benefits the project: The Watershed Science Director will perform data analysis, geospatial analysis, and literature reviews to complete all phases of the project. This individual will conduct interviews and write the initial synthesis in Phase I and the summary report in phase II. Additionally, the Watershed Science Director will assemble quarterly financial and performance reports, including the final performance report.

Materials and Supplies

- Amount: \$75/meeting
- Description: general budget to cover the cost of flip charts, markers, pens, notepads, and refreshments such as coffee, sodas, water, pan dulce, or tacos.
- Dates of cost incurrence: Approximately every other month from Jan. 2021 - Mar. 2022
- How the expenditure benefits the project:
 - Writing materials will help the group to record ideas and communicate effectively in a group setting.
 - Refreshments will help the group to stay focused, arrive early, and maintain energy during potentially long meetings.

Other

- GIS License
 - Nonprofit ESRI rate anticipated: \$500/month
 - Project percentage and amount: 40% = \$200/month
 - Date of cost incurrence: July 2020 to June 2022

- How the expenditure benefits the project: An ESRI ArcGIS license will allow the Watershed Science Director to complete geospatial analysis needed for the project, highlighting observations and potential planning strategies in the watershed and communicating these results to the group.
- Meeting venues
 - Amount: \$100 per meeting
 - Date of cost incurrence: Approximately every other month from Jan. 2021 - Mar. 2022
 - How the expenditure benefits the project: Meeting venues will be an essential component of the project for convening stakeholders. A local coworking space offers memberships that include conference room access at a cost of \$50 per month.

Indirect Costs

- De Minimis: RGISC has never received a Federal negotiated indirect cost rate, and the budget include a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs.

Funding plan and letter of commitment

RGISC will cover the amounts greater than \$100,000 using the organization's operating funds, for a total contribution of \$3,939 toward the de minimis indirect costs of the project. RGISC's letter of commitment to contribute funds in excess of \$100,000 is included in the appendix. Additionally, the official resolution signed by RGISC's board will include RGISC's contribution.

VII. Environmental and cultural resources compliance

The project does not involve measurement, monitoring, or field work therefore, this section is not applicable.

VIII. Required permits or approvals

No permits or approvals are required for this project.

IX. Official resolution

RGISC will submit an official resolution after the November 25, 2019 board meeting and prior to the deadline of December 13, 2019.

Appendix: Letters of commitment and support

- Cost-share letter of commitment from RGISC
- Letters of support
 - U.S. Congressman Henry Cuellar (TX-28)
 - International Boundary and Water Commission
 - Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas Entre México y Estados Unidos
 - City of Laredo Environmental Services Department
 - Webb County Judge, Tano Tijerina
 - Crane Engineering



Rio Grande International Study Center
West End Washington St. Bldg. P-11
Laredo, Texas 78040
(956) 718-1063
www.rgisc.org

November 12, 2019

Ms. Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Mail Code: 84-51000
P.O. Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Ms. Morgan:

The Rio Grande International Study Center (RGISC) is thankful for the opportunity to submit a proposal under the WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase I Grants. RGISC is committing to contribute up to \$3,939 for any costs of the project greater than \$100,000. These funds will be available to the applicant at the time the project commences in July 2020, and there are no time constraints on the availability of funds. Per the project budget provided in the grant application, RGISC will cover the following costs:

- Indirect costs at the De Minimis rate, up to \$3,939

Sincerely,

Tricia Cortez
Executive Director



COMMITTEE ON
APPROPRIATIONS

SUBCOMMITTEES:

DEFENSE

HOMELAND SECURITY, VICE CHAIR

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT,
FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION,
AND RELATED AGENCIES

WASHINGTON OFFICE
2372 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
PHONE: (202) 225-1640
FAX: (202) 225-1641

cuellar.house.gov
TOLL FREE: 1-877-780-0028

DEMOCRATIC STEERING AND
POLICY COMMITTEE

CHIEF DEPUTY WHIP

U.S.-MEXICO INTERPARLIAMENTARY
GROUP CHAIRMAN

HENRY CUELLAR, PH.D.
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

November 13, 2019

Ms. Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Mail Code: 84-51000
P.O. Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Ms. Morgan:

I write in support of the Rio Grande International Study Center's (RGISC) application for funding through the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase 1 grant. Allocating federal funding to RGISC will support their mission to preserving and protecting the Rio Grande-Rio Bravo.

With this funding, RGISC will assemble a new watershed group with appropriate stakeholders for an area that currently does not have one. Establishing this group will provide a foundation for further work, including watershed restoration planning and watershed management project designs. Supporting RGISC with federal funds addresses water quality and availability for both people and the farmers in the area. Establishing this watershed group will define critical watershed needs and prioritize strategies to ensure a clean and adequate water supply for the region.

I emphasize my support of Rio Grande International Study Center's (RGISC) application for funding through the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSMART Cooperative Watershed Management Program Phase 1 grant. Providing funding for RGISC's watershed project will support their mission of protecting green spaces in the Rio Grande Valley.

Thank you for your continued support and please do not hesitate to contact my Grants Coordinator, Alexis Garcia, at alexis.garcia@mail.house.gov.

Sincerely,



Henry Cuellar, Ph.D.
U.S. Congressman
28th District of Texas

LAREDO
602 EAST CALTON ROAD
SUITE 2
LAREDO, TX 78041
PHONE: (956) 725-0639
FAX: (956) 725-2647

SAN ANTONIO
615 EAST HOUSTON STREET
SUITE 563
SAN ANTONIO, TX 78205
PHONE: (210) 271-2851
FAX: (210) 277-6671

MISSION
117 EAST TOM LANDRY STREET
MISSION, TX 78572
PHONE: (956) 424-3942
FAX: (956) 424-3936

RIO GRANDE CITY
100 NORTH F.M. 3167
SUITE 208
RIO GRANDE CITY, TX 78582
PHONE: (956) 487-5603
FAX: (956) 488-0952



COMISION INTERNACIONAL DE LIMITES Y AGUAS
ENTRE MÉXICO Y LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS

REPRESENTACIÓN EN NUEVO LAREDO, TAMAULIPAS

NUM: CILA/NL/0221/19

EXP: CILA/0265

ASUNTO: 8.E. Asuntos Ambientales-Proyectos.
Nuevo Laredo, Tam., a 08 de noviembre de 2019

AVRA MORGAN
COOPERATIVE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT
PROGRAM COORDINATOR
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
WATER RESOURCES AND PLANNING DIVISION
Mail Code: 84-51000, P.O. Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

La Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas entre México y los Estados Unidos (CILA) es un organismo internacional que tiene como misión vigilar el cumplimiento de los Tratados Internacionales entre México y Estados Unidos de América, en materia de límites y aguas, negociar y formalizar acuerdos generados en el marco de sus atribuciones, asistir a ambos gobiernos en los asuntos que le sean encomendados, así como operar y mantener la infraestructura construida bajo dichos acuerdos, asegurando la integridad territorial y promoviendo el manejo de las cuencas transfronterizas en un marco de cooperación y transparencia.

La Sección mexicana de la CILA, desde hace 25 años, ha participado constantemente con el Rio Grande International Study Center (RGISC), en actividades en beneficio del medio ambiente en las cuales se destacan la conmemoración del Día del Río, participación en la solución a las problemáticas del recurso agua, proyectos del cuidado del medio ambiente, monitoreo de la calidad del agua del río Bravo, proyectos de concientización con alumnos de las entidades educativas de la región, entre otros.

Hacemos hincapié en la importancia que representa para este Organismo Internacional la inclusión de proyectos que puedan mejorar el cuidado, el uso, la preservación y la calidad del agua del río Bravo, por lo que nos encontramos en la mejor disponibilidad de continuar colaborando con dicho Centro buscando siempre el beneficio de los habitantes de esta región Fronteriza entre México y los Estados Unidos.

Hago propia la ocasión para reiterarle las seguridades de mi consideración atenta y distinguida.

ATENTAMENTE

AGUSTÍN BOONE GONZÁLEZ
REPRESENTANTE EN NUEVO LAREDO, TAM.





INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION
UNITED STATES AND MEXICO

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER
UNITED STATES SECTION

November 13, 2019

Ms. Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Mail Code: 84-51000
P.O. Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Subject: Collaboration with RGISC to assemble a watershed group composed of affected stakeholders in the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel 8-digit HUC Watershed in the Rio Grande

The United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) welcomes the opportunity for collaboration with the Rio Grande International Study Center in their efforts to assemble a watershed group for affected stakeholders in the San Ambrosia-Santa Isabel 8-digit HUC Watershed along the Rio Grande.

The purpose of establishing this watershed group will be to define critical watershed needs and prioritize strategies to ensure a clean and adequate water supply for the region. The grant is a two-year grant, and will allow RGISC to complete a literature review, interview stakeholders, recruit more stakeholders to be a part of the group, and host a series of collaborative meetings with the group participants to define and prioritize strategies for the watershed.

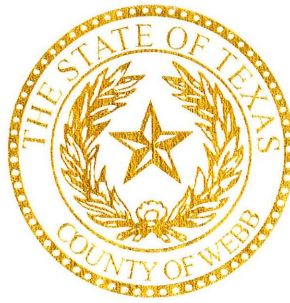
As a collaborating agency along with our Texas Clean Rivers Program for the Rio Grande Basin, we commit to providing the following resources and services toward the project grant from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation:

- Participate in at least three of the collaborative meetings with stakeholders
- Participate in a stakeholder interview about watershed needs and priorities, if requested
- Assist RGISC staff in accessing public data, if requested, for the purposes of identifying watershed needs and priorities

This collaboration will result in the collection of valuable information from a diverse group of local stakeholders regarding water quality and use, while also providing the opportunity to discuss and prioritize strategies that would be invaluable to the border region in protecting the environment and human health. We look forward to continued coordination with the Rio Grande International Study Center and will assist them as appropriate during the project planning and implementation process for the grant. If you have any questions, please contact me at 915-832-4702 or Leslie Grijalva at 915-832-4770.

Sincerely,

Gilbert Anaya
Division Chief
Environmental Management Division



Tano E. Tijerina
Webb County Judge

November 12, 2019

Ms. Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Mail Code: 84-51000
P.O. Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Ms. Morgan:

Webb County is an affected stakeholder in the Rio Grande watershed in Webb County, Texas. Critical issues of concern for Webb County include water availability for potable and agricultural purposes. As County Judge of Webb County I am in support of RGISC's proposal to establish a new watershed group composed of diverse affected stakeholders.

When the program commences, I plan to participate in the watershed group meetings as an affected stakeholder.

Thank you,

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tano E. Tijerina", is written over a faint, larger version of the signature.

Tano E. Tijerina
Webb County Judge
1000 Houston St. Third Floor
Laredo, Texas 78040



City of Laredo Environmental Services Department



John Porter
Director

City of Laredo Environmental Services Department
619 Reynolds Street
Laredo, TX 78040
Office: 956-794-1650
Email: jporter@ci.laredo.tx.us

November 11, 2019

Ms. Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Mail Code: 84-51000
P.O. Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Ms. Morgan,

The City of Laredo Environmental Services Department is most certainly a stakeholder in any potential watershed association, and in this case, a principle as the holder of the TCEQ issued Texas Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit, and as the department namely in charge of its administration. All that we do is to prevent pollutants, and to maintain a clean viable storm sewer system that empties into a number of creeks and tributaries in the area. We are in support of the creation of a new watershed organization and interest group and are committed to staying a close partner to the Rio Grande International Study Center.

Areas of concern remain for us and are constant in that we do our best to minimize the impact this community of over a quarter million has on the watershed it is bountifully blessed with, and of course ensuring the preservation of the Rio Grande for years to come as a drinking source and for agricultural use. We have as much a concern for this population as we do for our neighbors down river. The Laredo Environmental Services Department is writing in support of RGISC's proposal to establish a new watershed group composed of diverse affected stakeholders.

When the program commences, we plan to participate in the watershed group meetings as an affected stakeholder. Additionally, we plan to partner with RGISC on a number of needs, and assess how best we may support them as the project takes shape and the group is formed.

Thank you for your consideration

Sincerely,

November 12, 2019

Ms. Avra Morgan
Cooperative Watershed Management Program Coordinator
Bureau of Reclamation
Water Resources and Planning Division
Mail Code: 84-51000
P.O. Box 25007
Denver, CO 80225

Dear Ms. Morgan,

As a Professional Engineer in Texas, I live and work by a code to protect the safety, health, and welfare of the public. Engineers are tasked with safeguarding the earth and our community shares the Rio Grande with other Texas communities and Mexico to ensure access to potable quality water for our citizens.

The Webb County Drainage District (WCDD) and City of Laredo work together to manage and maintain watersheds within our community to improve water quality. Additionally, the membership of our local chapter of the Texas Society of Professional Engineers (TSPE) collaborates to provide updates to ordinances that affect our watersheds to improve sustainability.

As a stakeholder in these organizations and a Board Member of RGISC, I plan to participate in the watershed group meetings and promote the participation from TSPE, WCDD, and the City to ensure their engagement in the critical issues that affect water availability and potable water for our region. I appreciate your consideration and support for the USBR grant application for Webb County watershed management.

Sincerely,

CRANE ENGINEERING CORP.
Firm # F-3353


Edward D. Garza, P.E., CFM
Principal Engineer

Cc: Ms. Tricia Cortez
Executive Director
Rio Grande International Study Center (RGISC)