



PRESS RELEASE

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Bird Exclusion Netting to be Installed on SH 16 Bridge

Approximately 270 feet of the underside of the state Highway 16 Bridge will soon be covered with bird exclusion netting to prevent swallows from nesting directly over the water and dropping bird waste into the Guadalupe River which can degrade water quality. “We are excited to get this portion of the project underway. The Guadalupe River is the Crown Jewel of Kerr County and in addition to providing water supply and enhancing our quality of life, it is a tremendous economic engine for Kerr County,” said Ray Buck, UGRA General Manager.

The Upper Guadalupe River Authority (UGRA) publically bid the project and SCR Construction Co., Inc. out of Richmond, Texas, was recently selected as the contractor. The time required to install the exclusion netting is expected to be about one month. Construction is set to begin on December 17th and Kerrville motorists can anticipate lane closures on the SH 16 Bridge as well as restricted access to the portion of Louise Hays Park directly under the bridge. The Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) has partnered with UGRA throughout the development of this project and has put together a traffic control plan to accommodate the construction schedule. “We are doing our best to provide for the safety of the contractor and motorists. We will not close any lanes until after morning rush hour and will ensure the lanes are reopened for the evening rush hour. We tentatively expect one lane in each direction of the SH 16 Bridge to be closed from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm during construction,” said Mike Coward, TXDOT area engineer.

Motorists should expect the first set of lane closures on Tuesday, December 18 – Friday, December 21. After that time, additional lane closures will occur according to the following tentative schedule. Dates will be confirmed and provided to local media on a weekly basis: Wednesday, January 2 – Friday, January 4; Monday, January 7 – Friday, January 11; Monday, January 14 – Wednesday, January 16.

It is important that installation of the exclusion netting occurs at this time. “Cliff swallows are a federally protected migratory bird and modifications can not be made to their habitat during the nesting season. The swallows are currently overwintering in South America and typically return to our area starting in mid-February, so we planned this project to be completed by that time,” said Tara Bushnoe, UGRA Natural Resources Coordinator.



Bracketed area indicates bridge sections where bird exclusion netting will be installed.

The installation of the exclusion netting is the result of a process initiated in 2002 when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) included a portion of the Guadalupe River in the EPA's 303(d) list of impaired water bodies. During the summer months, *E. coli* bacteria levels in the Guadalupe River in Kerrville sometimes exceed the state's water quality standards for contact recreation. The section of the Guadalupe River determined to be impaired is from the confluence of Town Creek downstream to Flat Rock Lake.

Once the water body is declared impaired, a number of other processes are initiated. First, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) is required to develop a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) study which determines the quantity of pollution in the water, possible sources of the pollution and how much pollution needs to be removed to make the water safe for swimming. Once the TMDL study is complete, the TCEQ is obligated to develop a strategy to reduce the pollution to acceptable levels.

“When I assumed management of UGRA in 2005, a legitimate concern was that the EPA would force the state to develop a plan and make local entities pay for implementing the plan. UGRA shared this concern so we set out to address the problem with the help of a 15 member stakeholder group comprised of local individuals and entities. Aided by a grant from TCEQ we hired an environmental engineer and developed a local bacteria reduction plan and submitted it to the TCEQ for approval. We were elated when our plan, developed by consensus at the local level was subsequently approved by TCEQ and the EPA. We are especially proud of the fact that the required match component of the grant is made up entirely of in-kind services performed by local entities, while the funding from TCEQ pays for the actual expenses like construction,” said Buck.

Already in the second year of a grant award made by TCEQ, the groundwork has been laid for implementing numerous bacteria reduction strategies and UGRA is coordinating with the City of Kerrville, TXDOT, and Kerr County to put those strategies in place. The strategies will address the primary sources of bacteria pollution that have been identified in our section of the Guadalupe River including birds nesting on the SH 16 Bridge, large flocks of domestic waterfowl congregating in the lakes, septic systems, and pollution from general urban runoff. The ultimate goal of the project is to reduce the bacteria levels in the Guadalupe River to a concentration that does not represent a health risk to swimmers and will allow this segment to be removed from the impaired water body list.

For more information on the bird exclusion netting project or the Bacteria Reduction Plan, please contact UGRA at (830) 896-5445 or tbushnoe@ugra.org.

Upper Guadalupe River Authority is the respected, efficient, responsive, and forthright steward of the Upper Guadalupe River and its tributaries.

Let's Keep Our River Clean