



## **“Currents” January 2012**

### **Conservation Continues to be a Priority**

On average, December and January are the two driest months of the year. However, our rainfall totals over the past eight weeks have been above average, so that means the drought situation is improving, right? Not necessarily. The drought that began in October 2010 is now in its sixteenth month and despite recent precipitation, climatologists are predicting La Niña will persist and we'll continue facing this prolonged lack of rain. Conservation needs to stay at the forefront of our thinking and continue to be a priority both in our everyday lives and in future water planning.

Conservation provides one of the most economical sources of water supply by making the most of what we have. It includes using less water and water reuse. Residential landscapes traditionally use up to 50 percent of the household water budget. Reducing irrigated turf and installing native or drought tolerant plants that need less water is the first step in conservation. Also, utilizing rainwater catchment systems and grey water reuse for landscape watering needs are excellent ways to extend water supplies.

Similar to conservation is the concept of water enhancement. Water enhancement seeks to maximize the effects of the rainfall we do get. The Edwards Plateau Aquifer in western Kerr County and the Guadalupe River are highly connected and dependent systems. The aquifer leaks through numerous spring openings which join together to form the headwaters of the Guadalupe River. At times 100 percent of the flow in the river comes from springs located in the Edwards Plateau Aquifer. Increasing recharge to this aquifer in turn provides for greater springflow to supply the river. One strategy to achieve increased recharge is through brush management, specifically cedar removal. Studies have shown that 40 percent of rainfall is either intercepted in cedar tree canopies or the litter beneath the trees. This water is rapidly evaporated back into the atmosphere and lost for our use. Removing cedar cover allows more rainfall to reach the ground and to recharge the aquifer. UGRA partners with the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board to assist landowners in removing cedar trees with the goal to increase recharge to the aquifer and enhance river flow.

Another water enhancement technique being implemented by UGRA is the use of water and sediment control basins also known as spreader dams. Strategic placement of these structures will slow down overland flood flows during rain events. Spreader dams delay the runoff of flood flow which not only provides erosion control and protects water quality, but also sustains springflow by slowly releasing the flood water over time.

The presence of a clean and reliable water source is arguably the most importance resource for a thriving community. The Hill Country's naturally arid climate and increasing propensity for extreme weather conditions does complicate our ability to plan for future water use. Therefore, regardless of the specific strategies taken in the future, conservation will always be essential.

### **Let's Keep Our River Clean**

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