

THE SAN ANTONIO  RIVER AUTHORITY

RIVER REACH

The COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER *of the* SAN ANTONIO RIVER AUTHORITY



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Leaders in Watershed Solutions

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Sustain and Enrich Life in the San Antonio River Watershed



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SARA'S GOALS - MEASURING UP

By Steve Graham

What is important to the San Antonio River Authority (SARA)? What is our agency's moral and cultural foundation? What defines us and the entity we strive to become? These are questions SARA staff has asked. For us, the answer lies with three simple core values that we have identified and try to exemplify:

Stewardship

We are passionately committed to the preservation, protection and sustainability of the San Antonio River Watershed. SARA seeks to make the river safe, healthy and enjoyable for our communities by applying innovative and sustainable solutions. We are not complacent in achieving our goals and vision.

Integrity

We are accountable to the SARA Board of Directors; citizens and stakeholders of the communities we serve; and our partners. We are entrusted to efficiently use limited public resources. We are honest and reliable in our dealings

with others. We base our decisions on prudent financial management and sound scientific and engineering principles and practices and will not misrepresent facts or distort research, our capabilities or expertise.

Excellence

SARA is focused on results. We are committed to collaborative, adaptive and strategic engagements that address watershed issues and priorities. We expect the best from ourselves, learn from our experiences and continuously work to advance our capabilities. We do not make excuses or avoid responsibility for our actions.

We believe strongly in these core values. We strive to consistently reflect on, and live up to, these standards daily. Our business decisions, staff actions and personal conduct will always be measured and aligned with these tenets. By living and acting according to our core values through what we do and our public service, we endeavor to be the "leaders in watershed solutions" for those we serve. ★

EMPLOYEE HIGHLIGHT

By Kim Garcia

The San Antonio River Authority (SARA) proudly introduces Michelle Garza, who works in our Environmental Sciences Department (ESD). Michelle recently celebrated 20 years of service with SARA. Over the last 20 years, Michelle has held several positions within SARA. She started her career as Receptionist in 1990, a position she held for five years. In 1995, she transferred to ESD as Staff Secretary. Looking to advance within SARA, she took the position of Utilities Office Manager in 1999. Three months into that position, the opportunity arose to return to ESD as a Water Quality Planner I. In 2002, Michelle was promoted to Water Quality Planner II until she was promoted once again to her current position as Environmental Information System Specialist.

In Michelle's current position, she manages three projects; conducts GIS Mapping and database mapping for her department; is a SARA Information Management System subject matter expert; assists as a Laboratory Information Management System Administrator; and



is a team member on various SARA projects. She also represents her department on several SARA subcommittees such as Tuition and Training Focus Group, GIS/Modeling Center of Expertise Core Group and United Way Representative. Michelle says, "A typical day for me is working on my projects, assisting co-workers and dealing with unexpected assignments and requests."

Outside of work, Michelle enjoys spending time with her husband, Ceasar, to whom she has been married for 18 years, her 12 year old daughter, Victoria, and 9 year old son "Li'l C". They enjoy going to the coast, fishing and camping.

Michelle says, "Twenty years; how time flies! It's been great working with professionals in improving and sustaining our rivers and environment for future generations to enjoy. Thanks for the opportunity to be part of such a great organization for all these years, and I look forward to more years at SARA." ★



BIG CHANGES ON THE HORIZON

By Gaylon Oehlke, SARA Board Member, Karnes County



The Eagle Ford Shale formation is a large rock formation located thousands of feet below the surface of 14 South Texas counties, including Karnes and Wilson Counties in the San Antonio River Basin. This shale formation contains large amounts of oil and natural gas, and many oil and gas companies have initiated drilling operations

in the area. For many years, geologists have known that oil exists in this formation, but until recently, technology was not advanced enough to access the oil.

The amount of oil and gas that is expected to be produced from the Eagle Ford Shale formation is substantial. Some speculate that it will be one of the largest oil supplies in the world. Clearly, this will have a tremendous impact on the area, potentially changing the economic landscape of South

Texas for years to come. Although the prospects of what will come from this drilling activity are very exciting, disturbing the natural environment to access the oil does not come without possible risks.

The San Antonio River Authority (SARA) is committed to protecting the ecosystem of the river basin, and because drilling could possibly impact the river, SARA is taking a leadership role on this issue. SARA has not traditionally dealt with issues regarding petroleum production and geology, but we are working to increase the agency's knowledge so SARA has the facts on any environmental threats that may exist. SARA is also working to ensure that lines of communication are open so drilling can occur with the least possible impact on the environment and the river.

Additionally, SARA is title holder to the bed and banks of the river, so companies interested in installing pipeline across the river must contact the SARA Real Estate office to acquire a permit. For more information on acquiring a river crossing permit, visit www.sara-tx.org, and for more information about the Eagle Ford Shale oil boom, see page 5. ★

BE WATERSHED WISE!

By Brissa Renteria

"Pollution" is a word we hear frequently these days. Recycling is becoming more commonplace and most of us put trash where it belongs. However, when thinking about our creeks and rivers, we may need to expand our eco-friendly behaviors. There are many behaviors that can lead to an unwitting increase in the risk of non-point source pollution, which has a negative impact on the environment. Luckily, we can develop good habits that can prevent non-point source pollution and help the overall health of our environment.

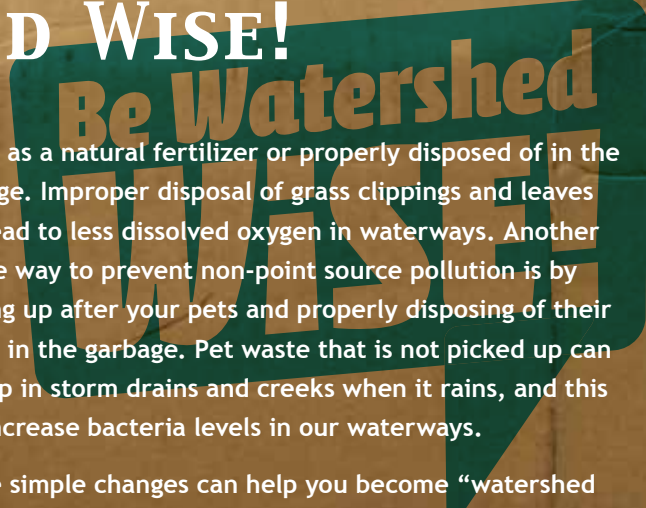
Non-point source pollution occurs when rainfall, snowmelt or irrigation water runs over land or through the ground, picking up pollutants along the way and then depositing those pollutants into rivers, lakes, the ocean or ground water. Non-point source pollution from storm water runoff is the primary contributor to water quality degradation in the San Antonio River Basin. This pollution is primarily caused, often unknowingly, by the over two million people who live in the basin. Therefore, by making some simple changes to our behaviors, each of us can help protect the San Antonio River Watershed.

Simple behavior changes include not dumping or blowing grass or leaves into creeks and storm drains; rather, these remains can be added to a compost pile, left in your yard

to act as a natural fertilizer or properly disposed of in the garbage. Improper disposal of grass clippings and leaves can lead to less dissolved oxygen in waterways. Another simple way to prevent non-point source pollution is by picking up after your pets and properly disposing of their waste in the garbage. Pet waste that is not picked up can end up in storm drains and creeks when it rains, and this can increase bacteria levels in our waterways.

These simple changes can help you become "watershed wise" and bring us closer to leading a healthier life for ourselves and our environment for generations to come. The San Antonio River Authority (SARA) is a leader in environmental stewardship and continues to develop initiatives in environmental awareness.

You can use the SARA-developed *San Antonio River Basin Creek Book* as a guide to gain better knowledge of how you can help protect our basin's natural resources. You can download a free copy or learn about other simple changes you can make to become "watershed wise" at www.sara-tx.org. ★





THE EAGLE FORD SHALE OIL BOOM & WATER USAGE

By Melissa Bryant

The Eagle Ford Shale formation has become a major source of oil and gas in South Texas. Throughout Wilson and Karnes Counties, oil and gas companies are leasing land from property owners to explore and begin production. The production of oil and gas in this area has been made possible by a relatively new process known as hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking.” Shale is very dense, and in the past, it was difficult to extract oil from this rock. Through fracking, pressurized fluid is pumped into underground formations to create tiny fractures that allow crude oil and natural gas to flow from the oil reservoir.

Fracking is a water-intensive process. Companies use an average of 0.322 acre-feet of water per well for the drilling process, and then as much as 15 acre-feet of water per well for the fracking process. The total estimated use of water in this area last year was 2,280 acre-feet of water. It is anticipated that usage will eventually rise to 4,500 acre-feet per year as oil production increases.

Groundwater from the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer is currently the primary source of water for oil production in this area. However, oil and gas companies are researching alternatives to groundwater, including reuse water and surface water (which includes water from the San Antonio River). Presently, reuse water is not a financially feasible option,

although companies are hopeful that costs will decrease as technology improves. Surface water is a much more affordable option and companies are beginning to contract with surface water rights permit holders to lease their water.

Surface water rights permits are regulated by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). Permits obtained from the TCEQ will regulate dates when water can be pumped and the rate and amount of surface water diversion. New permits will also have environmental flow restrictions, which will restrict pumping if river flows do not meet a specified level.

Historical permits can also be regulated during times of drought, restricting pumping until flow levels increase. Oil and gas companies that lease surface water rights must abide by the same restrictions as current permit holders and will be required to report their daily usage to the local TCEQ Watermaster.

Oil production along the Eagle Ford Shale formation is already proving to be a significant economic boom in several counties in the San Antonio River Basin. The San Antonio River Authority (SARA) is working closely with regulators to ensure the river and its ecosystem remain healthy during oil and gas production. ★





COLLABORATION, INNOVATION, OUR FUTURE

Watershed Integrity Team Seeks to Develop Results through Cooperation and Collaboration

By Russell Persyn, P.E., Ph.D

Holistic Watershed Approach

The Holistic Watershed Approach has been endorsed by many agencies, and is the approach the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) seeks to implement internally and externally. The newly formed Watershed Integrity Team (WIT) at SARA is working to implement this approach with SARA internal staff and external partners. This approach is an ongoing cycle of steps:

- **Planning:** Determine the watershed planning unit and identify the stakeholders and resource personnel.
- **Data Collection:** Collect routine water quality and quantity data at specific locations.
- **Assessment and Targeting:** Compare current water quality to state and federal standards or establish desired future conditions.
- **Strategy Development:** Develop goals and strategies to maintain or achieve water quality standards and meet future demands.
- **Implementation:** Implement goals and strategies through permits, best management practices (BMPs) and education. Measure progress to make sure the implementation is results oriented.

The Holistic Watershed Approach does not itself yield positive results for water quality and quantity in the watershed. However, it does provide a framework through which collaboration can help SARA move forward. In the past, we have worked within our very specific agency mission and disciplines to make improvements in the watershed, but the public we serve and future solutions require us to think differently. We have to recognize that the optimum solution to achieve measurable results will require creativity and approaches that we might not have previously considered.

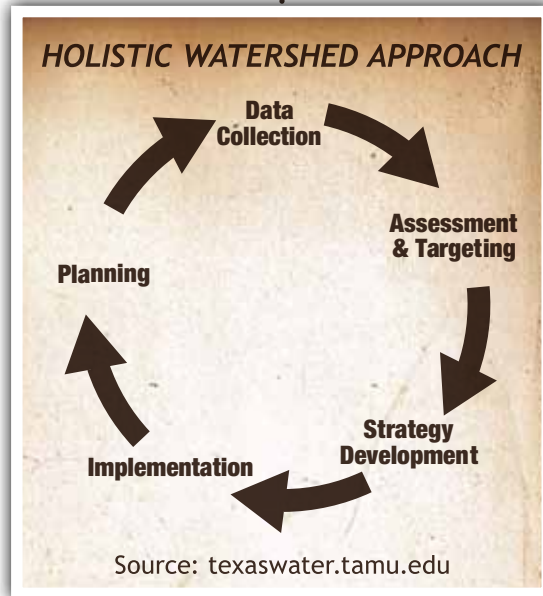
New, Innovative Thinking

One example of how we need to think differently is our past focus on flood mitigation, a noble cause that is of major importance as we move forward. But is it possible to have a multi-purpose facility that mitigates flooding and improves water quality? Does the solution have to be one that is engineered, or could a simple policy change by a partner agency have more impact? Are there opportunities to enhance recharge with a flood mitigation project? Is impervious cover a challenge only over the aquifer? Does a flood mitigation project have the ability to serve as an access point and provide recreation that supports SARA's Nature Based Park vision? How about a public-private solution to flood mitigation that incorporates conservation easements?

There are still many questions to answer, and SARA is focused on thinking holistically to find innovative ways to capitalize on current investments and decisions to achieve good, long-term results.

New Partnerships

Planning and implementation will continue with our traditional partners, but how does SARA better leverage new partnerships in this endeavor? Last year, SARA submitted a grant application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture - Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA - NRCS) to capitalize on securing additional federal cost share dollars for our downstream producers and to leverage our current water quality monitoring to help focus on how BMPs and target areas might be prioritized. This grant fostered discussion among SARA, NRCS and the soil and water conservation districts in our basin, and although it was not funded, the grant scored very well. SARA has an opportunity to resubmit this year. More importantly, SARA staff started a dialogue with partner agencies on how a complementary, collaborative effort could happen regardless of the funded grant.





The Mission Reach Project is a good example of achieving multi-purpose objectives such as flood control, ecosystem restoration, recreation, connectivity and cultural/historic connections.

The WIT also sees that we have new potential partnerships that are not yet fully developed. How does SARA better integrate with Agri-Life Extension and leverage their expertise and local community involvement? Is it possible to partner with universities, public and private, local and non-local, to develop research and implementation grant possibilities? SARA seeks national priorities for funding by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, USDA, National Science Foundation and private foundations to conduct their cutting edge work within our basin and help us develop the next level of employees and partners, as well as the next generation of solutions.

This year, the WIT is supporting internal SARA opportunities to learn about projects and concepts that help us broaden our horizons with respect to holistic watershed planning. We are also looking to engage in additional external partnerships, both with agencies and higher-education institutions.

• The WIT is using the Medina River Watershed as a pilot watershed. This watershed has potential for development in years to come, and with it, SARA has an opportunity to forge new approaches to be creative in maintaining watershed health as changes occur. The Medina River Watershed will require new thinking and cooperation and collaboration with partners within and outside of our district.

• There is much to do to continue to meet the challenges and opportunities in our community. The WIT is excited about the opportunity to engage SARA and our partners in enriching and sustaining life in the San Antonio River Watershed. ★

The WIT also sees that we have new potential partnerships that are not yet fully developed.



SARA'S NEW HOLIDAY TRADITION

By Sally Buchanan, SARA Board Member, Bexar County At-Large



Being on the river was even more dazzling this holiday season. We have long enjoyed the holiday lights in the trees and the weekend luminarias on the river banks in the Paseo del Rio during this season. This holiday season, there were 50 holiday lights in the water to walk by or glide over on a barge in the Museum Reach River of

Lights that extends north of Lexington Avenue up to the Pearl turning basin.

The San Antonio River Authority (SARA), along with sponsor CPS Energy, brought this new holiday tradition to our community. In addition to the colored underwater lights, energy efficient fiber optic lighting elements brought a kaleidoscope of changing color to the water features along the Museum Reach. Alternating lamp posts were wrapped with energy-saving LED holiday lights. The lamps and other

existing lights on bollards and along sidewalk railings also had colored gels and coverings to bring even more festive light to the walkways.

To complement the month-long River of Lights celebration, SARA hosted a holiday event on Saturday, December 11 on the San Antonio Housing Authority property on Brooklyn Avenue adjacent to the lock and dam complex. Snow was the big feature at this event with an oversized sleigh as a prop for family photos. Children were able to play, enjoy a petting zoo and create goodies to take home. Inergee played on the San Antonio River Foundation stage. All this activity on December 11 was part of the scene along with the Paseo del Rio, the Southwest School of Art, VFW Post 76, the San Antonio Museum of Art and Pearl with their grand ¡Tamale! Festival.

The new and unique lighting used for the Museum Reach River of Lights was such a hit, we're already looking forward to the 2011 holiday season. If you missed the lights this year, they will be back on display, even bigger and better, from December 3, 2011 to January 4, 2012. ★

BRWM PARTNERS TAKE ON ILLEGAL DUMPING

By Luke Habenicht

On May 6, 2009, the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) hosted a summit to discuss the serious problem of illegal dumping in Bexar County. This illegal dumping summit included representatives from law enforcement agencies, city and county departments and citizen groups. Attendees discussed efforts to combat illegal dumping in Bexar County. The discussion focused on improving coordination among different agencies and organizations, as well as of the need to increase public education regarding the problem of illegal dumping.

This summit led to the formation of an Illegal Dumping Task Force for Bexar County under the auspices of the Bexar Regional Watershed Management (BRWM) partnership. The task force is focused on three areas:

- Improving communication, coordination and training between departments and agencies involved in illegal dumping issues.
- Developing and implementing a coordinated public education initiative to raise awareness of illegal dumping issues. The task force was able to secure a \$50,000 grant

through the Alamo Area Council of Governments to fund a public education campaign this year which included ads on VIA buses and in newspapers asking citizens if they were "okay" with illegal dumping. The BRWM website, www.bexarfloodfacts.org, provides access to information regarding legal waste disposal options, how to report illegal dumping and how to get involved in clean-up efforts such as Basura Bash or the soon-to-be announced Adopt-a-River program.

- Investigating the use of technology to help solve illegal dumping issues; for example, the use of surveillance cameras at illegal dumping hot spots for enforcement and evidence gathering, developing a comprehensive database of illegal dumpsites and hot spots in a geographic information system and participating in an online discussion group, which facilitates closer coordination to discuss and solve problems.

The task force continues to meet bi-monthly and is well on its way to implementing effective responses to the ongoing problem of illegal dumping. ★



PLANNING UNDERWAY FOR GET OUTDOORS! 2011

By *Laura Waldrum*

Attention families, nature lovers and anyone interested in learning about outdoor recreation and environmental education! The third annual Get Outdoors! event is scheduled for Saturday, March 5, 2011 in San Antonio. Once again, the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) and the National Park Service (NPS) San Antonio Missions National Historical Park are joining forces to celebrate the many outdoor recreation opportunities in the San Antonio River Basin and surrounding areas. This free event designed to get area youth outdoors and engaged with nature will be held at Mission San José from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Last year, more than 60 vendors were on hand with exciting booths, demonstrations and hands-on learning opportunities for over 5,000 attendees. This year's event is expected to be even bigger and better! The first 1,500 children (ages 5 - 15) in attendance will receive a free Explorer backpack loaded with giveaways. Attendees will be eligible for exciting door prizes throughout the day, and kids that visit at least 20 activities or booths will receive an additional free gift.



The location for this event, Mission San José, lies just west of the San Antonio River and the Mission Reach Ecosystem Restoration and Recreation Project. One component of the Mission Reach project is to reconnect the San Antonio River with San Antonio's four historic missions. This will be accomplished through a series of portals that will encourage visitors to circulate between the missions and the river. SARA will have a booth and onstage demonstrations where attendees can learn more about the Mission Reach project and how it will enhance outdoor recreation in our area.

Hosting a booth is free and vendors will be provided two chairs, a table and a 10-foot by 10-foot space. There are also sponsorships available to companies or organizations interested in receiving a higher level of visibility at the event. If you are interested in a booth, donating a door prize or becoming a sponsor for Get Outdoors!, contact Laura Waldrum at (210) 302-4247. Visit www.sara-tx.org for more information and to see photos from last year's event. ★



THE SAN ANTONIO BAY PARTNERSHIP

By Brian Mast

Ever wonder what happens to the water flowing in the San Antonio River? Well, most of it enters San Antonio Bay, where the San Antonio and Guadalupe Rivers mix with water from the Gulf of Mexico to create one of the seven major estuaries along the Texas coast. The San Antonio Bay/Guadalupe Estuary System (bay system), which includes San Antonio Bay and the minor bays of Guadalupe, Espiritu Santo, Mission Lake, Hynes and Mesquite, comprises approximately 205 square miles of the middle Texas coast.

There are many stakeholder groups and economies that depend on the health of the bay system, including commercial and recreational fisheries, eco-tourism, water recreation, petrochemical processing and real estate development. In addition to providing for these human uses, the bay system provides myriad ecological resources, including marsh complexes which are the winter home for the last wild flock of the endangered Whooping Crane (*Grus americana*).

Almost a year ago, on January 12, 2010, a meeting was held at the University of Houston - Victoria to gauge interest in developing a program to protect and conserve the bay system. That day, over 80 stakeholders representing diverse interests confirmed they were willing to participate in a

• voluntary, collaborative, stakeholder-driven, non-regulatory
• planning and management program for the bay system.
• They now comprise the San Antonio Bay Partnership (SABP).
• During two subsequent meetings, SABP stakeholders created
• and adopted an “SABP Purpose and Goals Statement,” and
• got to know their neighbors throughout the river basin and
• bay areas.

• In November, the SABP held a “Science and the Stakeholder
• Workshop” in Victoria. Scientists outlined information to be
• included in the “Status and Trends Reports” to characterize
• the ecological, economic and recreational resources
• closely associated with the bay system. These reports are
• the first step in developing the “San Antonio Bay Plan,” a
• comprehensive, science-based blueprint for protecting,
• restoring and enhancing the ecological resources and human
• uses of the bay system.

• This process involves a great deal of stakeholder input
• in addition to the scientific information currently being
• captured in Status and Trends Reports. There is still time
• to get involved, so if you are interested in joining the
• SABP or would like additional information please visit
• www.sabaypartnership.org. ★





WATERSHED MODEL DEMONSTRATES CONNECTIVITY

By Matthew Driffill

The San Antonio River Authority (SARA) is dedicated to educating the citizens that live in the San Antonio River Basin about the environmental issues that affect the health of the River, and subsequently, the quality of life for those who live in the San Antonio River Watershed. A new tool to assist in this educational outreach is the watershed model.

This model is a three-dimensional 1:250,000 scale replica of the San Antonio River Watershed representing all of Bexar, Wilson, Karnes and Goliad Counties and a significant portion of the other counties that make up the watershed. It is constructed out of an acrylic substance that is waterproof, impact resistant and very durable. The lightweight model is very classroom friendly, and it allows students to simulate rainfall in the basin by spraying water on the model.



The approximate, vertically-exaggerated contours demonstrate how water works its way over land, through the system of creeks and tributaries to the San Antonio River where it eventually joins with the Guadalupe River before emptying into San Antonio Bay.

This model is a great tool for teaching students about topography, storm water runoff, non-point source pollution, erosion and water quality. Over 1,000 students have already had access to the model through SARA's education team since the model was completed in August. When not in use, the watershed model is on display in the lobby of SARA's main office at 100 E. Guenther Street in San Antonio. To schedule an educational program with

the watershed model at your school, contact Maura Nowalk at 210-302-3286 or mnowalk@sara-tx.org. ★

SOUTH TEXAS NATIVES

Long-eared Sunfish - *Lepomis megalotis*

By Maura Nowalk

The Long-eared Sunfish is one of several species of sunfish that inhabit the San Antonio River and its tributaries. This species can be distinguished from other types of sunfish by its elongated, black and white-trimmed opercle flaps. Opercle flaps extend backwards from the head and look like ears, although they are actually an extension of the gill cover, or operculum. Adult fish rarely grow longer than six inches, and during the breeding season, Long-eared Sunfish are some of the most colorful in the San Antonio River Basin; males are a bright shade of orange or red, with turquoise markings on the head and fins.

Long-eared Sunfish prefer pools and backwater areas away from strong currents. Adults feed primarily on insects, but will also eat small fish. During their nesting in late spring or early summer, males scoop nests out of gravel bars to which they attract passing females. After a female selects and lays eggs in a nest, the male chases



her away and stands guard until the eggs have hatched, sometimes even until the larvae are gone.

The Long-eared Sunfish can withstand some water quality and habitat impairments, as it has an intermediate tolerance to aquatic pollution. This fish species has been frequently documented in the San Antonio River Basin by San Antonio River Authority (SARA) biologists. For those who like to fish, Texas Parks and Wildlife suggests that Long-eared Sunfish are both easy to catch for inexperienced fishermen using natural bait and a challenge for fly fishermen.

Less inclined to go fishing, but still want to see this beautiful fish up close? Check out the *F.I.S.H.*

installation by artist Donald Lipski under the I-35 bridge in the new Museum Reach Urban Segment. These colorful, internally lighted sculptural pieces, which were funded by the San Antonio River Foundation, are modeled after the Long-eared Sunfish. ★



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82ND LEGISLATIVE SESSION IS UPON US

By Suzanne Scott, General Manager

The 82nd Session of the Texas Legislature convenes on January 11, 2011. It is anticipated to be a very busy session. The highest priority issues for the legislature will be redistricting following the 2010 Census; approving a state budget, including addressing a significant funding shortfall; and sunset review of key agencies, including the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB), Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT). With so many significant issues to face, it is unlikely major water issues will be tackled this session, but we are preparing just in case.

The San Antonio River Authority (SARA) does not anticipate filing legislation, but will closely monitor water issues that impact our service areas and mission. Key areas of focus will be funding for the TCEQ Clean Rivers water quality monitoring program; initiatives to address emerging contaminants, such as pharmaceuticals in surface water; and efforts to prevent illegal dumping. We will also monitor legislative actions relating to



in-stream and environmental flows, reuse, state water planning, wastewater utility service, groundwater districts and the Edwards Aquifer. SARA will watch deliberations on the recommendations from the Sunset Committee on the TCEQ and TWDB, as well as monitor the legislature's response to recommendations of the BexarMet Legislative Oversight Committee. In addition to water policy issues, SARA will diligently track election, taxation, human resources, eminent domain, insurance and other governance issues.

Pre-filing of bills began on November 8. Staff is tracking, reviewing and analyzing bills for potential impacts to SARA. Staff reports monthly to the board of directors for direction on proposed legislation. We have several new legislators from our district including Representatives Jose Aliseda (House Dist. 35), John V. Garza (House Dist. 117) and Lyle Larson (House Dist. 122). We congratulate them on their election to the Legislature and look forward to working with them and our valued returning members throughout the session. ★