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For Immediate Release

Controlling brush can help save water

Excerpt courtesy of the Texas Water Resources Institute

STANTON, Texas (August 23, 2012) - As the drought continues through 2012, we are reminded of just how precarious the State's water resources situation has become. The problem is simple. While water demands, spurred on by rapidly increasing population growth, will increase, it will be difficult to boost water supplies. Among the measures being considered is clearing mesquite, juniper and salt cedar to increase ground and surface water supplies.

Studies of brush control show that mesquite, juniper, and salt cedar may be using, or wasting, as much as 10 million acre-feet (AF) of water in Texas each year. Modeling efforts suggest that removing brush should create water savings.

In 2000, a comprehensive study assessed the feasibility of brush control to free up water yields in eight Texas watersheds (the Canadian, Frio, Concho, Nueces, Pedernales, Upper Colorado and Wichita rivers, as well as basins that flow over the Edwards Aquifer recharge zone). These studies were funded by the Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board. Participants included lead Texas Agricultural Experiment Station scientists, USDA, NRCS and USDA Agriculture Research Service personnel.

The goal was to predict the hydrologic impact of brush control practices within each watershed, based on computer-based methods including digital elevation models, geographic information systems (GIS), and the use of the Soil Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) modeling software.

The computer-generated information was verified and ground-truthed through the use of extensive physical surveys within each region. The project produced a comprehensive technical report that identified the amount of water that could be expected to result from brush control efforts at specific sites, as well as the costs, benefits, and amount of government funding that would be needed to introduce brush control at given sites. Most of the studies conducted, showed that removing brush reduced the amount of water used and also helped reduce erosion in the examined areas.

As water supplies continue to dwindle in surrounding areas of West Texas, highly-concentrated research on brush water use is becoming even more crucial to local ranching and farming producers. When mesquite, juniper and salt cedar brush species are managed, benefits can be seen in the water quantity, in some cases water quality, and erosion. For more information regarding brush control, visit our website at www.pbuwcd.com.

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The Southern Ogallala Conservation & Outreach Program is the education and public relations division of the Permian Basin UWCD. SOCOP's mission is to spread underground water awareness and encourage water conservation practices. For more information, visit savingh2o.org.