

**Sustainable Agricultural Water Conservation in the Rio Grande Basin
FINAL REPORT – YEAR 6**

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Participants and Investigators:

Principal Investigators: Andrew Sansom and Emily Warren

Participants: Big River Foundation (Stephanie Mahathey, Stephen Kaczor and Eric Ellman)

Project Coordinator: Meredith Blount Miller

Graduate Research Associate: Laura Clark

Table of Contents

Abstract/Executive Summary.....	1
Introduction and Background of the Project	2
Objectives	3
Survey Methodology	4
<i>Survey Administration</i>	
<i>Analysis of Survey and Focus Group Results</i>	
Survey Results.....	6
<i>Surveys - Description of Overall Results</i>	
<i>Focus Groups– Description of Overall Results</i>	
Implications	14
Recommendations	17
Materials and Information Compilation Methodology.....	18

- ❖ Please note that eight educational modules are attached (Labeled 1-8 as separate documents).

Abstract/Executive Summary

The transboundary watershed of the Rio Grande river is a region with enormous potential for recreational river program development. However, for most Laredo residents, the Rio Grande River is a place to avoid. Any opportunities to advance developments in recreation activities are often hampered by media coverage of illegal activities and environmental degradation in the basin. The fewer people who enjoy the river, the less likely it is to be understood and protected. In order to increase local concern for the river, the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment (Meadows Center) has completed a study that both provides an explanation for the general lack of public concern for watershed health and explores options for sustainable agricultural water conservation in the Rio Grande Basin. This report includes the following elements:

- 1) an assessment of the base-line attitudes of the local population about recreation on the Lower Rio Grande;
- 2) outdoor-activity oriented teaching models;
- 3) festival planning guidance; and
- 4) groundwork activities for corporate investment in future binational river festivals.

Analysis of these elements will help residents of both countries understand, appreciate, and respect their greatest natural resource.

One goal of this project is to compile information for developing recreational and educational programs in order to increase the local estimation of the river in both community residents and tourists. Curricula for experiential river-based programs was researched and compiled for this project, as were educational and informational river related resources. These materials include watershed and river educational programs, handouts, and other materials. Findings were integrated into a river festival planning guide and toolbox.

In order to determine the Laredo community's baseline attitudes and perceptions of Rio Grande recreation, a 10-question survey was administered both online through email and partner websites and to focus groups in an interactive setting. A total of 948 people completed the 10-question survey over a 90 day period. Of those who responded, 82% stated that they would not endorse recreational activities on the Rio Grande. When asked during the focus groups, "what can people do around here for fun," river recreation never was mentioned. The most common reasons (42%) given by participants who never engage in Rio Grande recreation were either a "lack of access" or the participant "never learned [to play one of various river-related sports]". A combined 53% of the population surveyed either had "no reservations" or was neutral to the idea of recreation on the Rio Grande. All of these findings confirm that opportunities existence for reforming public opinion in communities along the Lower Rio Grande through creation of new access points; outdoor environmental educational programs and activities; and providing a venue for recreation based activities, such as festivals.

Introduction and Background of the Project

The Rio Grande basin is a transboundary body that stretches across three US States and five Mexican States. Concerns relative to the condition or use of the river and its resources are binational. Cultural and socio-economic differences on both sides of the border between the US and Mexico must be considered in all collaborative efforts regarding sustainable use of the river and its resources.

Sustainable use and effective management of the Rio Grande largely depends on local understanding of the river and related environmental, ecological, political, economic, and social issues. It is essential to increase watershed knowledge and awareness in communities in both the United States (US) and Mexico, specifically regarding the critical nature of this watershed and its importance to the joint cultural and economic development of this international borderland. Los Caminos Del Rio Heritage Trail Program and the Big River Outfitter Foundation have initiated tourism and recreational activities, which include river races and festivals on the Rio Grande in the vicinity of McAllen, Texas. These organizations are in the process of expanding the range of river activities to the Laredo/Nuevo Laredo area. Publicity for such events attracts hundreds of participants and observers, including recreational river visitors such as paddlers and outdoor enthusiasts from other communities. The experience of future attendees may be enhanced and their understanding of issues pertaining to the river increased if environmental education and outreach materials are included in the events.

A primary purpose of this project was to measure local attitudes regarding river recreation in the community of Laredo, TX in the Lower Rio Grande area. This was done in order to better understand local concerns so as to be able to address them through future education and outreach events.

This project addresses both the need and availability of information and educational materials in the Lower Rio Grande/Laredo area. Such materials include curricula for environmental education and environmental stewardship containing bilingual, bicultural materials, and case examples. Local resources can be used in conjunction with binational community river events (such as festivals and kayak races) to increase interest and community knowledge of the unique nature of the Rio Grande watershed and its resources. A survey of Laredo/Nuevo Laredo community members was incorporated into this project to obtain a baseline of local perception, awareness, and prioritization of the river and river recreation. Methods for incorporating education into the toolbox of activities, including a paddling trail plans and guides, festival concepts, and binational river races are included to outlining future capabilities in environmental education in the Lower Rio Grande and throughout the watershed. Through education and outreach, the entire basin population in both US and Mexico (including water resource decision-makers) can be made aware of the problems and hinderances to sustainable use of the water resources of the Rio Grande Basin.

Objectives

The following are the stated research objectives for this project:

- 1) Improve understanding of community perceptions regarding river related recreation in the Laredo/Nuevo Laredo/Lower Rio Grande area
- 2) Compile substantive content for educational programs for appropriate reaches of the lower Rio Grande and Watershed
- 3) Develop a methodology to integrate those materials into river related community events Laredo and Nuevo Laredo
- 4) Provide a protocol and planning process to enable the Big River Foundation and other organizations to host river-related community events throughout the region

The potential benefits that result from this project are:

- increased educational value to recreational river events on the Rio Grande including both local community members and visitors;
- increased the public's knowledge, awareness, and understanding of the value and importance of the Rio Grande, thus leading to support stewardship and sustainable management; and
- analysis of the effects of environmental education related to awareness of critical management issues and river stewardship.

The chief deliverable resulting from this project is a collection of binationally recognized bilingual education and outreach materials specifically developed for communities in the Lower Rio Grande and the Rio Grande Watershed. A longitudinal evaluation of the effect of river events and educational materials on attendees and participants was a potential additional deliverable. However, due to changes in festival schedules and changes in resource allocation, the team was unable to produce this deliverable. Meadows Center researchers plan to track and evaluate the effects of educational materials and river related events on attendees in a future study.

Survey Methodology

Survey Administration

In anticipation of the annual river festivals throughout the Lower Rio Grande in December 2010, Meadows Center employees distributed surveys to Laredo residents in order to establish baseline attitudes both on the general topic of river recreation and in the community. As of 2010, the population of Laredo was 236,091¹, making it the third largest city on the United States-Mexican border, after San Diego, California and El Paso, Texas, *ibid.* This makes the area ideal for hosting public events to raise awareness regarding the Rio Grande River. Laredo, along with its Mexican sister city, Nuevo Laredo comprise the Laredo-Nuevo Laredo Metropolitan Area, with an estimated combined population of 636,516².

This project involved two types of survey participants in the Laredo area (primarily within Laredo proper): 1) general community members who may or may not participate in any form of outdoor recreational activities and 2) those who do potentially participate regularly in recreation activities of some form. During a 90-day period (Dec 2010 – Feb 2011) participants in the study received surveys and provided answers. The study population consisted of 948 individuals surveyed in Laredo, the state of Texas, and online. Participants received the online 10-question via www.SurveyMonkey.com, through links provided on the Big River Foundation's website, and through e-mail in the community. Surveys received by participants through this method accounted for 25% of responses. Approximately 50% of came through via links available to teachers and students at Martin High School and Laredo's Non-traditional High School. A local sporting goods store, Academy Sports+Outdoors®, catalogued the remaining 25% of survey responses. It is estimated that one-half of the survey respondents represent the portion of the community who likely do not participate in any regular outdoor recreation activities. The other half of respondents is periodically engaged in some form of outdoor or sport related recreational activity. These two groups are equally represented within the sample population. Therefore, responses combined into one group gave a better understanding of community-wide perceptions.

Survey responses from focus groups provide a more specific picture of the perceptions of Laredo community members' view of the river. In order to gather opinions, seven focus groups provided information about public perceptions of the Rio Grande and its related issues. Participants were not screened or preselected based on any specific criteria. Focus group members were from the following factions:

1. Laredo Community College Microbiology course - Dr. Kuppuswami (10 participants);
2. New Horizon Rotary Members and local guests (10 participants);
3. San Felipe de Jesus Church's Clergy (6 participants);

¹ US Census. 2010 [cited 11/27/2012]. State & county quickfacts. Available from: <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48000.html> .

² INEGI. 2010 [cited 11/27/2012]. Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas. Available from: <http://www3.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/mexicocifras/default.aspx?e=28#L> .

4. Martin High School Master Teachers (10 participants);
5. Laredo Visitors Bureau Members (5 participants);
6. Martin high School Science Teachers (5 participants); and
7. Laredo Fire Department #7 Members (6 participants).

The moderator introduced a 2-minute video titled “Laredo, Meet your River” (visit <http://rsiriogrande.org/bigriver> to view the video). Each focus group was divided into several discussion segments based on the 10 questions mentioned below. The moderator took notes (See Appendix A) as the group discussed the concepts in conversation. The reviewer collated discussion statements looking for direction and insights that might guide future surveys and programs; and presented direct quotes from participants (with moderator observations). These reactions were summarized into conclusions and recommendations.

Analysis of Survey and Focus Group Results

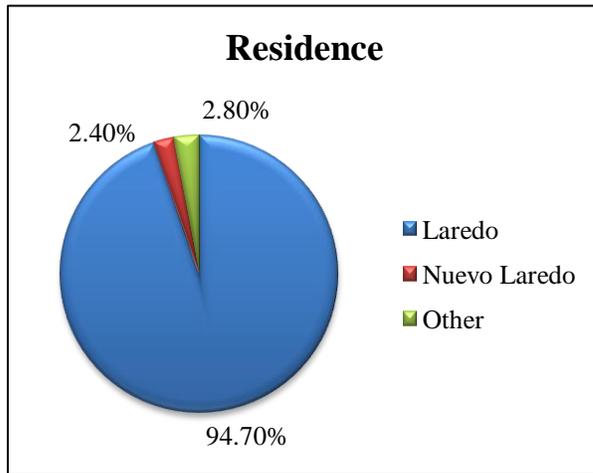
Using Microsoft Excel survey results from all sources were then organized, counted, and presented in graphic format.

Key word content analysis was performed for focus group responses. Key words, phrases, and sentences are identified in Appendix D. Perceptions were identified based on common use of key words and phrases and are discussed in the section below.

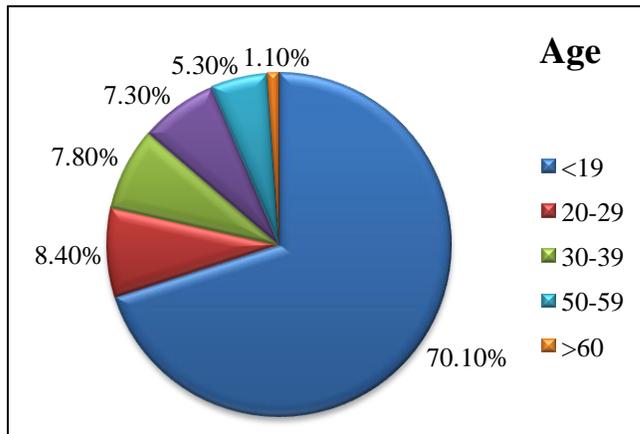
Survey Results

Surveys - Description of Overall Results

- 1) **Question: Where do you live?** Of the 948 respondents, the majority sampled (94.7%) are from Laredo, 2.4% sampled are from Nuevo Laredo and 2.8% are from another location near the Laredo area.

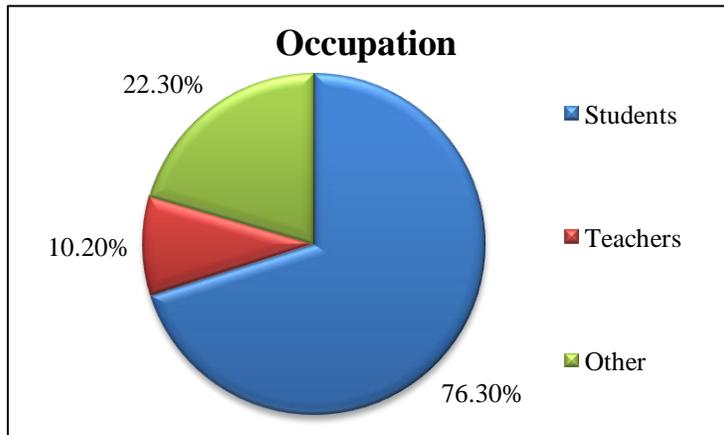


- 2) **Question: Age?** School-aged participants (K-12) are the primary group of interest for the proposed educational watershed programs. The majority of survey participants report being under 19 (70.1%), while 8.4% are between 20-29, 7.8% are between 30-39, 7.3% are between 40-49, 5.3% are between 50-59, and 1.1% report being 60 and over.



- 3) **Question: Occupation?** The majority of survey participants are students (76.3%). Teachers account for 10.2% of the survey population. The remaining 22.3% are categorized as "other" (2.2% of these are Academy Sports+Outdoors® employees). This remaining 20.1% of participants are employed in the following fields: administrative, professional, tradesman,

government, medical and unemployed. The purpose of surveying students was to determine the attitudes and perceptions of future community members of Laredo.



4) **Question: How often do you enjoy river recreation (on any river)?** Participant response is based on the six types of river recreation (fishing, bird watching, paddling, swimming, rafting/tubing, and other) and the five levels of activity (never, rarely, occasionally, frequently, and often). *Rarely* is defined as annual recreation; *occasionally* is defined as more than annually and less than monthly; and *frequently* is defined as more than monthly recreation; and *often* is defined as monthly recreation. The majority of respondents *never* or only *rarely* enjoy river recreation. Below are the percentage breakdowns of participant response to the six types of river recreation.

Fishing

The results are from all responses for this type of recreation is as follows: 42.4%, responded never, 28.8% rarely fish, 19.5% occasionally fish, 4.8% reported fishing often, and 4.5% frequently fish.

Bird Watching

The results are from all responses for this type of recreation is as follows: 50.4% responded never, 25.4% rarely bird watch, 16.8% occasionally bird watch, 3.8% often bird watch, and 3.6% frequently participate in bird watching.

Paddling

The results are from all responses for this type of recreation is as follows: 70.8% never paddle, 16.3% rarely do so, 8.4% occasionally paddle, 2.1% often paddle, and 2.4% frequently paddle.

Swimming

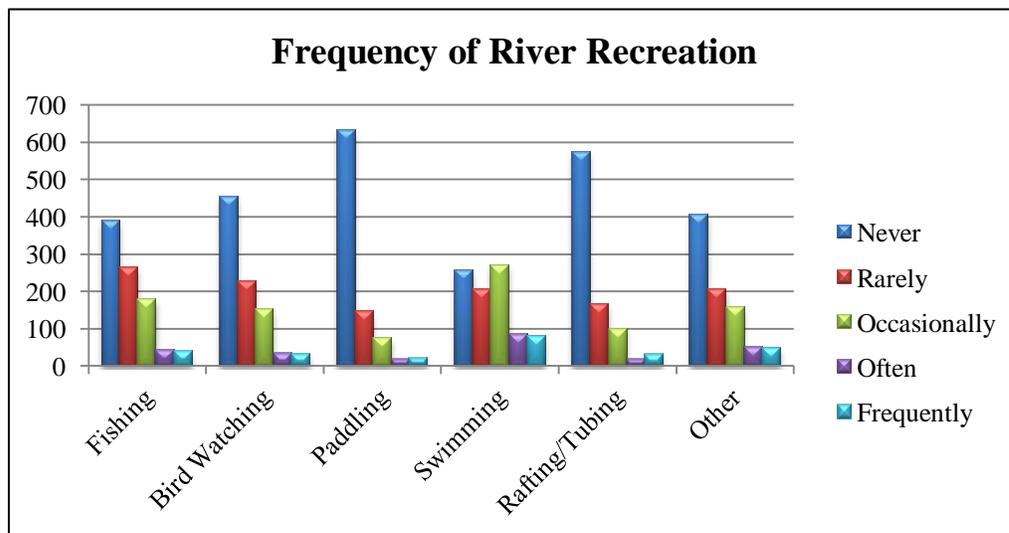
The results are from all responses for this type of recreation is as follows: 28.7% never swim, 22.8% rarely swim, 30.1% occasionally swim, 9.4% often swim, and 9.0% of participants swim often.

Rafting/tubing

The results are from all responses for this type of recreation is as follows: 64.7% never raft or tube, 18.6% rarely do, 11.2% occasionally participate, 2.1% often participate, and 3.4% frequently raft or tube.

Other river activities

The results are from all responses for this type of recreation is as follows: 46.7% of participants never participate, 23.7% rarely participate, 18.0% occasionally participate, 5.9% often participate, and 5.7% report frequent participation.

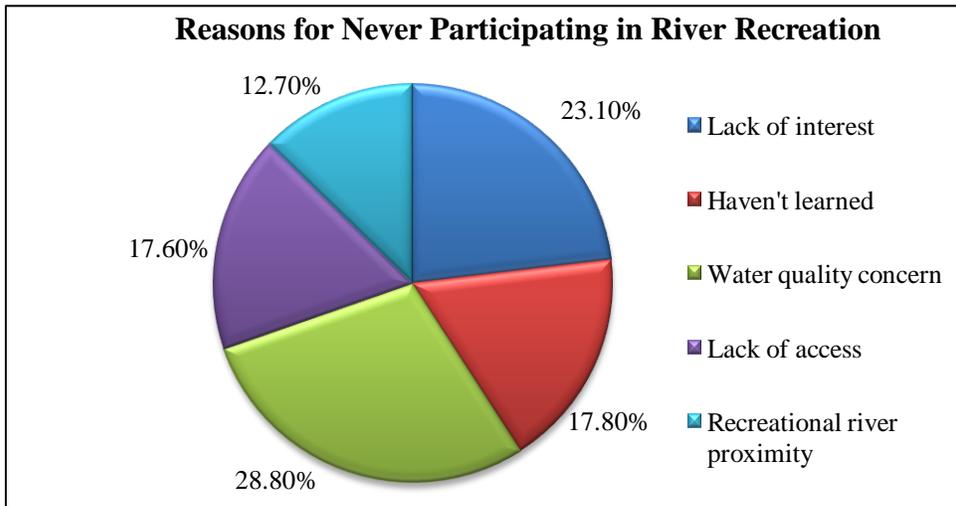


5) Question: If you have never enjoyed river recreation (on any river), why not?

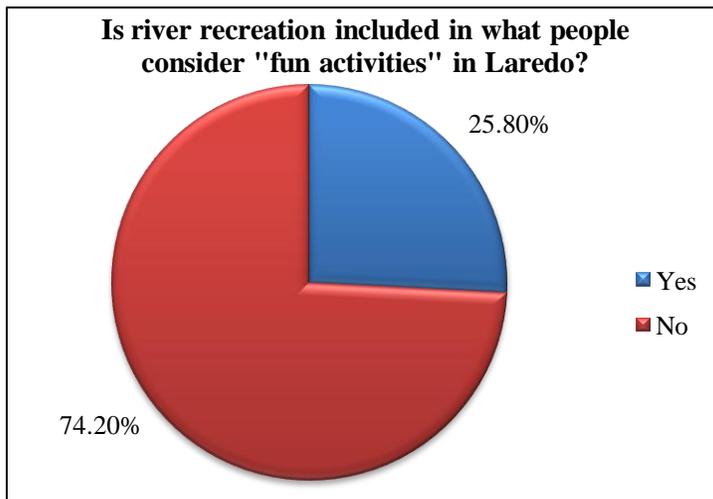
Only 792 of the 948 survey participants responded to this question. The remaining 156 participants skipped this question. There were five answer choices for this question:

1. Lack of interest
2. haven't learned
3. water quality concerns
4. lack of access, and
5. proximity to recreational rivers.

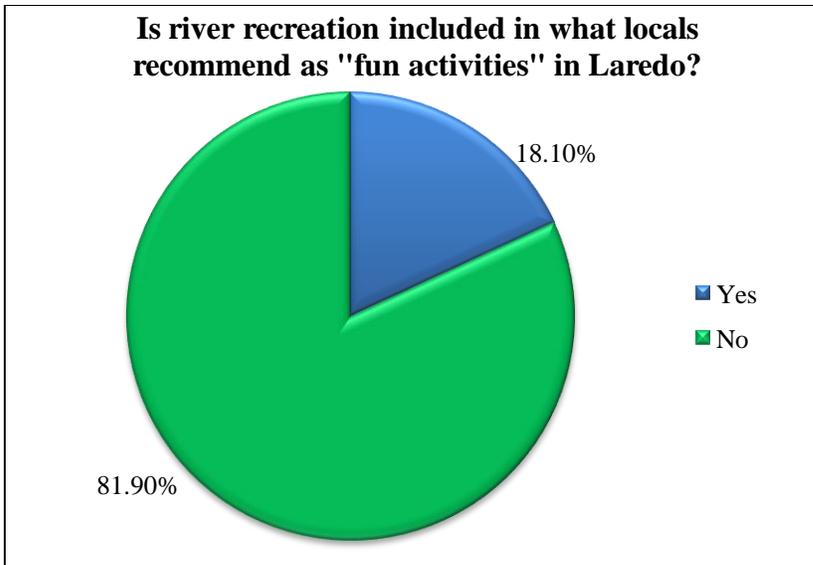
Of those participants who answered this question, 23.1% never enjoy river recreation because of lack of interest, 17.8% because they haven't learned, 28.8% because they are concerned about the water quality, 17.6% due to lack of access, and 12.7% because of the distance (proximity) to river recreational activities.



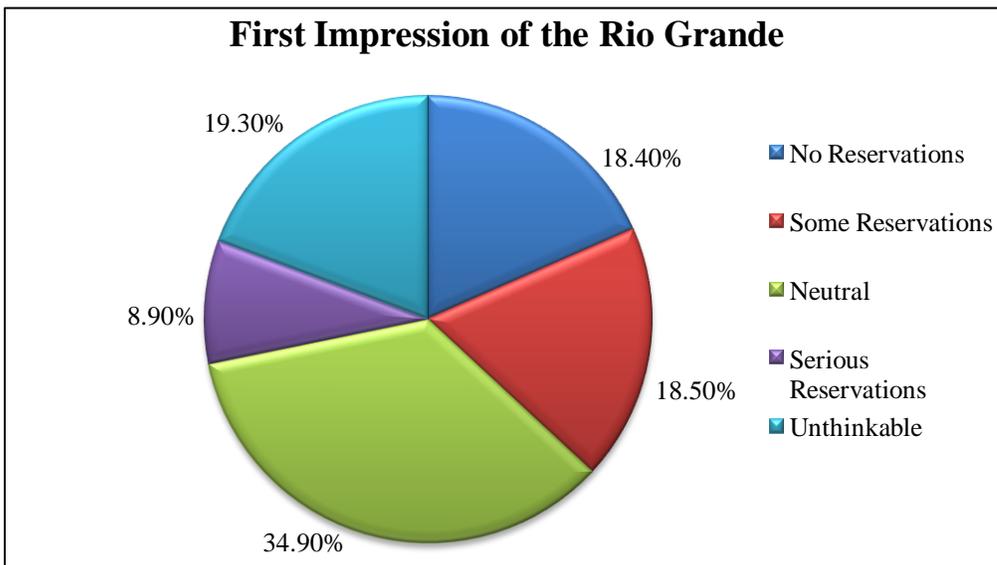
- 6) **Question:** When friends/family/visitors from out of town ask, “*What do people do for fun around here?*” do you mention river recreation? The majority, over 74% of respondents answered *No* to this questions while only about 25% responded *Yes*.



- 7) **Question:** When friends/family/visitors from out of town ask “*What do you do for fun around here?*” do you recommend the Rio Grande? The majority (about 82%) of respondents answered *No* to this question, while about 18% answered *Yes*.

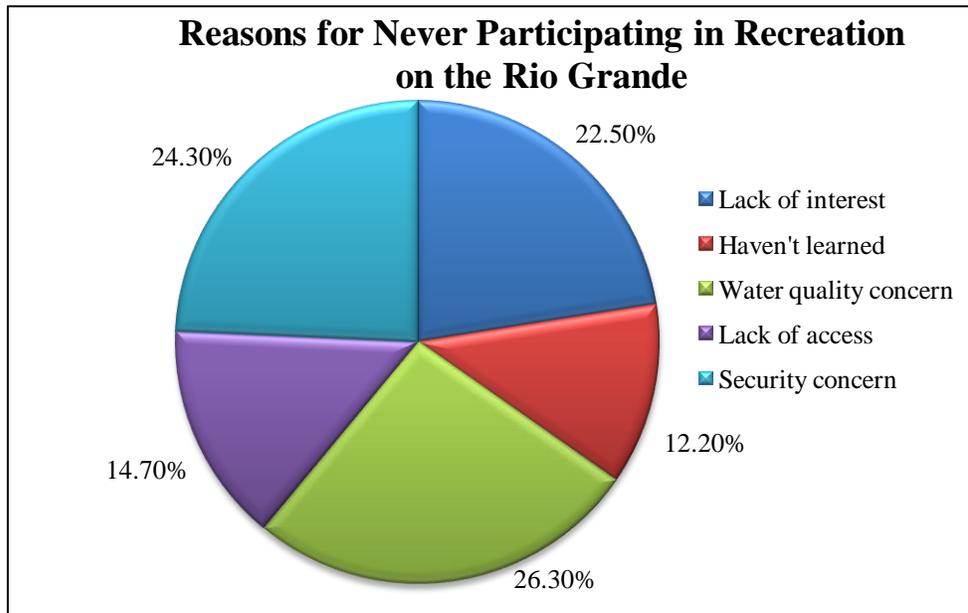


8) **Question: Which description best describes your first impression about recreation on the Rio Grande?** There are five answer choices for this question: *no reservations*, *some reservations*, *neutral*, *serious reservations*, and *unthinkable*. The most prevalent answer was having a *neutral* (34.9%) first impression of the Rio Grande. The second most common was an *unthinkable* (19.3%) concept of the river, followed by some reservations (18.5%), and *no reservations* (18.4%). Serious reservations of first impressions of the Rio Grande accounted for only 8.9%.

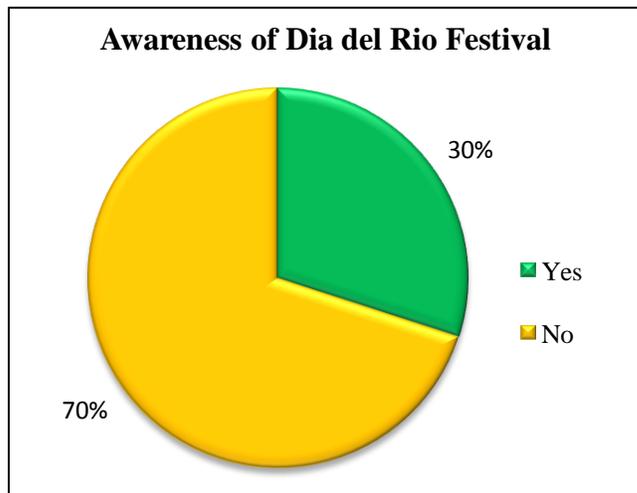


9) **Question: If you never enjoy recreation on the Rio Grande, why not?** Only 869 of the 948 survey participants responded to this question. There are five answer choices for this

question: *lack of interest, haven't learned, water quality concerns, lack of access, and security concerns*. Of those respondents who answered this question, 23.1% never enjoy river recreation because of lack of interest, 17.8% because they haven't learned, 28.8% because they are concerned about the water quality, 17.6% due to lack of access, and 12.7% due to security concerns.



10) Question: Have you heard of the annual “Dia del Rio” festival? Exactly 70% of survey participants have not heard of Dia del Rio Festival and 30% were aware of the event.



Focus Groups– Description of Overall Results

1) How do you feel about river recreation?

Overall, participants agree that river recreation is great for tourism and an inexpensively active way to have fun. Some group participants recommended hiking and biking trails, more areas for picnics and fishing, and safe areas for children and teachers to explore along the river. A participant commented that construction of a river walk would “attract people for fun activities.” The majority agreed that it is unfortunate that “you have to leave Laredo for recreational activities.”

2) What is your perception of the Rio Grande?

The overall perception of the Rio Grande in the study area is varied. Residents in the community associate the Rio Grande with the following key phrases: illegal immigrants, very poor water quality, security danger due to the drug cartels and drug trafficking, wildlife sightings, and good bird watching. There are two migratory bird routes for birds from Florida. One group participant recalled living on the river in the past and seeing birds, nature, *chachalacas*, and alligator gar. Another participant remembered his mother mentioning how they used to have picnics and swim at the river, but this does not take place anymore. One participant recollected hearing by word of mouth that the city of Nuevo Laredo was dumping their waste into the river. Another participant recalled photos of runoff, horse debris, and tractor-trailers during a flood event. Participants also discussed other elements that potentially make the area unsafe including people drowning, floating dead bodies, horses and cows on the shore, and the fact that the river is not deep enough for sports.

The majority of participants agree, “the Rio Grande needs to be cleaned up.” One participant mentioned that the river was once clear and now it appears dirty and has poor water quality. As Mexico is across the river, there is a high potential for people to cross. Participants confirm that “there is a lack of involvement and a lack of appreciation overall because there’s a lack of education.”

3) How do you feel about your local watershed?

Work group contributors do not feel that their watershed was accessible and that information regarding accessibility is not commonly known or available. Participants believe that “no one controls the water usage, and therefore, [the water level] is going down.” Participants are also unaware of any Mexican environmental controls. The local watershed was mentioned as “an opportunity for quality time for your children through connecting them with nature and teaching them about their environment.” One participant mentioned, “the watershed is a great body of water with limited access and has great potential if political problems were resolved. In order to increase access, local people need an accessible point of entry to the river.” Another participant mentioned, “the one thing the community has not come around to being is a steward of the river.” It was

further mentioned that there is “no respect for the green space ordinance.” One participant recalled visiting Hernandez Ranch and paying \$1.00 for access to the river and fishing. However, on one occasion “there was a group of Mexican nationals with fire arms.” That incident was 15 years ago, and the participant never went back. All group members agree that “both the US and Mexico could work together to clean the river and make a park with access on both sides of the river.”

4) Are you aware of any river or watershed-based events?

One participant mentioned Dia del Rio. However, it was only in association with a river clean-up event. Some of the participants present had attended Rio Fest. Additional events mentioned during the focus group include: Abrazo on the Bridge, Make a Difference Day, Tom Miller’s events, Camp Huisache, Boy Scout developments, various local park activities, city fishing derby at the lake, county fishing derby for handicapped children, CVB’s Birding Festival and the Rio Grande Raft Race. Participants declared, “there are a lot of regulatory steps to create an event with Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas (CILA) or the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC).”

5) Which of your programs highlight environmental or ecological issues? [asked to teachers only]

Freshmen in high school have the option to take an environmental science class. High school Spanish classes have a section on “medio-ambiente” or “the environment.” This statement was repeated several times by the teachers in attendance: “to educate children about wetlands and the surrounding environment, teachers and youth leaders have to take the place of the parent and look into liability issues [related to taking students outside of the class room/to the river.” One participant mentioned, “the city once had an environmental program for young students.”

6) Do you cover local watershed issues in depth? [asked to teachers only]

One participant mentioned, “they used to monitor the water quality approximately 10 years ago.” Respondents agree that local watersheds are not covered in depth.

7) Do you have printed environmental or ecological curricula available? [asked to teachers only]

Only one teacher responded. No materials were available.

8) Do your classes make field trips to the river, streams, or lake? [asked to teachers only]

Unanimously, participants responded “No!” about whether their classes made any field trips. The main reason for not having field trips for students was funding. The daily cost for school bus rental is \$900 USD. This is in addition to the cost of lunches, lost traveling time (about 2 hours), logistics, and administrative paperwork.

9) Would a pre-packaged “Field Trip to Go” enable you to make more such fieldtrips? [asked to teachers only]

A school principal stated “The pitch would have to be made to the central office.” Group participants agreed, “Instruction outside of the classroom is just as important as or better than in the classroom because it is hands-on and more involved.” One participant mentioned, “you only become inquisitive after observation.” All participant responses followed a central theme: a package including materials and lesson plans would be very helpful, but the primary barriers to taking students outside of the classroom are funding, logistics, and liability. These issues must be resolved at the administrative level.

10) Would you be interested in creating school-based events to focus on watershed issues?

Dr. Kuppaswami, from the Laredo Community College mentioned that he/college staff “are very interested in working with us on ‘ecological characterizations’ of water quality (particularly, microbiologically).” Overall, group participants said “Yes,” that they would be interested in creating school based events focused on watershed issues.

Implications

Community Perceptions

While river recreation is not the foremost thing on the minds of community members in the area, findings suggest a great opportunity to increase awareness of and participation in river related recreation activities. The majority of those who “never” partake in Rio Grande related recreation report feeling neutral to the proposition.

Security in this area, in the sense of criminal encounters, is episodic. In 1992, Laredo crime peaked and with homicide at a rate of 16.4 per 100,000 population. Cities of comparable size averaged homicide rates of 9.4 per 100,000 people.³ Since then, the homicide rate has drastically decreased to 4.4 per 100,000 people, *ibid*. This drop over the last decade attributed to the following “crime rate reduction factors”: a falling crack epidemic, a rise in incarceration, and an increase in locally present Federal law enforcement agents in the region, *ibid*. Though the rate has not consistently decreased since 2011, crime reduction on the US side of the basin has been markedly better than in Mexican cities in the basin. It is expected that as knowledge about the river increases, community members will participate in more river related and activities, and concerns regarding security are likely to lessen.

Laredo, Texas is the most heavily traversed and busiest port of entry with an interstate highway along the Southwest border.⁴ This common passage from Mexico to the US has become

³ Albuquerque, Pedro H. 2007. Shared legacies, disparate outcomes: why American south border cities turned the tables on crime and their Mexican sisters did not. *Crime, Law & Social Change*. 47:2 p69-88.

⁴ McCaul, Michael T. 2006 [cited 1/1/2012]. A Line in the Sand: Confronting the Threat at the Southwest Border. *The House Committee on Homeland Security*. Available from: http://www.house.gov/sites/members/tx10_mccaul/pdf/Investigaions-Border-Report.pdf

appealing to organized criminal groups, human smugglers, and drug cartels. Drug trafficking and human smugglers use the interstate highway and trains for transportation to enter the US. However, since the expansion of Operation Safeguard in Laredo, Texas for border security, the number of annual arrests has decreased substantially.⁵ As security increases along the border and criminal activity continues to decrease, then community members in Laredo may become more inclined to participate in river-related events.

Water quality monitoring in the border cities of the US and Mexican border cities has vastly improved in the since the passing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)⁶. Over that time, billions of dollars have been spent on wastewater treatment; as a result, the condition of the river has vastly improved. Involving the public in water quality improvements and voluntary monitoring programs enables local stakeholders to become more knowledgeable about water quality in the Rio Grande.

The most encouraging paper survey responses were from those who “never” make use of the Rio Grande because they do not know where to access the river or have never learned a river recreation sport. This problem is fixable through the promotion of existing access points and creating new ones. Every river festival and community river related event should include instructional clinics or information and resources for beginners.

The perceptions quantified in this project show an apparent opportunity to improve public opinion of, and relationship with, the Rio Grande. We have identified programs and projects, necessary alliances, and have assembled tools to aid in the accomplishment of changes in perceptions and awareness. Resources from stakeholders in city, county, and business communities are required to implement the necessary initiatives. The city and county have already committed to be involved and have levied modest third party funding initiatives. Immediate action is required to target fundraising opportunities for the programs and projects detailed in this report.

Community Events to Improve Awareness and Access to Recreational Activities

The oldest river festival in Laredo is not well attended nor is it well-known in the community. Community kayak races are a recent development to increase interest and participation in “Dia Del Rio.” The new RioFest planning group has asked for fundraising assistance for prize money. Big River Foundation (BRF) seeks to bolster these fall events and then to launch a spring event, the Big River Ruckus.

⁵ Haddal, Chad C. 2010. Border Security: The Role of the U.S. Border Patrol. *Congressional Research Service*.

Fund-raising efforts include recruitment of major south Texas business leaders and indentifying hundreds of Laredo-area individuals, businesses, and business associations to support year-round recreation efforts on the Rio Grande and develop tools and strategies needed.

The website, BigRiverFoundation.org, was recently developed as the professional front for approaching potential funders. This organization also establishes a context for river festivals throughout the Valley, and provide a variety of useful tools for anyone wishing to plan an event from Laredo/Nuevo Laredo to Brownsville/Matamoros.

BRF has staged three consecutive “Quarterly Community Kayak Races,” as a new series of private-sector supported events. These races have raised thousands of dollars for local charities while demonstrating the feasibility and safety of river recreation. new paddlers are recruited through the community each quarter, and the races are growing in popularity.

Laredo’s RioFest planning group has directed BRF to raise funds on the festival’s behalf. Jorge Verduzco, the Vice President and Director of Marketing for the International Bank of Commerce held a meeting June 10, 2011 with other business leaders to discuss potential involvement and under-writing of not just Laredo RioFest, but other festivals elsewhere throughout the Rio Grande Corridor.

Upon Mr. Verduzco’s suggestion and with the assistance of Ed Ramirez, President of the Chamber of Commerce, BRF and other river festival planners have requested a meeting with the Faskin family, owners of Laredo’s oldest hotel, La Posada. La Posada is situated on the riverside and is struggling in part because of the location of the property. The Faskins run the Prairie Foundation and are major property owners along the river. In order to improve business, La Posada has added a kayaking package to the their website as an option for guests at check-in.

Cognizant of the large and still growing list of energy companies exploiting the Eagle Ford Shale, the researchers have compiled a list of 20 major energy companies working in this region. Those with clearly articulated corporate responsibility policies have been identified. Schlumberger, Wetherford, and Baker Hughes are companies that have been contacted via e-mail and phone, and have received marketing materials (online at www.LaredosRiofest.com). BRF board member Bill Collier will be meeting with representatives of each of those companies in Midland, Texas. Owners of Laredo-based energy companies, Bruni Energy and Laredo Energy, are being solicited for a meeting through personal contacts.

Though not directly related to fund raising, BRF has exchanged correspondence with the IBWC Director Ed Drusina who whole-heartedly endorses efforts to reform the Rio Grande’s reputation through recreation. Personal endorsement of this Presidential appointee is key for convincing corporate entities on either side of the river to support this effort.

Focus group and survey outcomes show that both the public and the educational community are often unaware of river related events and resources, and lack knowledge regarding watershed health and safety.

Results show that 75% of people surveyed were not aware of Dia del Rio Festival. This statistic shows that there is opportunity for increasing publicity and advertisement both for this event and awareness of river-related resources and education.

Recommendations

1. Increase publicity, advertisement, and community participation in established and future river-related events by obtaining advertising funds via local citywide or countywide fundraising.

In order to secure capital for community-driven river events, funding requests will be made to the respective City Councilmembers and/or the County Commissioners in the event location. This funding comes from hotel and motel tax revenues. Event coordinators should schedule a date to present the request for funding. During the presentation, coordinators should focus on the amount requested; methods for attracting people to the event; and the projected number of event attendees (or likely number of rooms booked). Once awarded funds from the city, county, civic, or private association, give a press release to the media to publicize the event immediately. After generating a print or television news story, develop the digital version of the press release and distribute it on your event or organization's website and additional online media. Securing cash prizes is a great way to garner free advertising from organizations, such as United State Canoe Association, Texas Canoe and Kayak Racing Association, and other clubs that promote outdoor recreational river activity. Local consultants are also a valuable resource.

2. Increase the availability of community based educational materials, information, and river access at community events and river-related events.

Suggested materials and resources were gathered and are included in the appendices of this report. It is anticipated that event planners will invite community groups and local/regional and state agencies to river related activities to assist with the dissemination of materials and informational resources. A list of potential entities is also provided in Appendix I. Furthermore, with the dissemination of this report and related activities organized through United Nations Development Programme-Global Environmental Fund (UNEP-GEF) funded initiatives, these and other identified community groups will be provided with educational materials that can be utilized at any time and will also encourage participation in planned events.

3. Increase field trip opportunities to the Rio Grande by obtaining liability insurance either for the affiliated organization, or with another policy as a rider (check with the District's insurer).

Having liability insurance will alleviate the concern of injury or accident during a field trip. The relevance for the field trip must be clear and multidisciplinary in order to maximize the value of the trip for the student. Contact school administrators to discuss field trip opportunities.

4. Make environmental education training available to teachers, youth groups and civic organizations.

Project WILD and Aquatic WILD are outstanding nation-wide environmental education programs for anyone trying to instill greater environmental understanding in youth. Participation in daylong training is just \$20.00 USD and includes a lesson book with plans that encompass a multitude of learning objectives. Organize a group of six people interested in the training and contact Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to schedule a training session. The Boys and Girls Club of America offers an after-school venue for students to do homework in a supportive environment and are always open to suggestions and new material. Youth ministries at local churches can also be contacted as collaborative partners. Additionally, find a local home-school network and offer to organize a meeting for parents looking to enrich their children's studies.

5. Increase park and river access for recreational purposes by requesting that a city or county sponsor a Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Paddle Trail.

Paddle Trails are from four to 12 miles in length. These trails require a sponsor to police the put-in and take-out for litter, as well as build and install informational kiosks. The cost of a pair of kiosks is about \$1,000.00 USD. An application for a Paddle Trail is available through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/fishboat/boat/paddlingtrails/inland/>. Once approved, TPWD will advertise the paddle trail on the TPWD website and in printed literature, which they make available to the nations estimated 10,000,000 paddle sport fans. Use your plans to create a paddle trail as part of any request you make to City and/or County funders for hotel/motel tax revenues.

Materials and Information Compilation Methodology

Educational materials for this document were compiled using internet-based searches using local, state, regional, federal, non-profit and private entities' webpages. Educational materials were also created based on research that has been conducted at the River Systems Institute. Due to the lack of availability, the educational materials referenced are not necessarily related to the Rio Grande. However, they were collected under the criteria that the materials could be altered for applicability and use in the Lower Rio Grande Region. A list was composed of relevant local,

regional, and state government as well as non-governmental agencies and organizations whose presence will be valuable to present educational information at planned events. Community-based and environmental organizations will receive this report to increase awareness, access to river-related materials, and invitations to attend and participate in event planning (See Appendix I).