

2012 TEEA Winner Civic/Community Category:

Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership, Rio Grande Valley

Texas Water Resources Institute, College Station

Narrator:

For those who live in South Texas, the Arroyo Colorado is as much a part of the landscape as the border itself.

Jamie Flores, Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership, Texas Water Resources Institute:

When you grow up you learn how to fish in the Arroyo.

Donnie Valdez, Grower and AgriLife Extension Specialist, Texas AgriLife Extension Service:

This Arroyo Colorado is our backyard.

Narrator:

The Arroyo stretches nearly 90 miles, from the city of Mission to the Texas coast, before emptying into the Laguna Madre, an estuary protected by federal and private lands.

Jamie Flores:

The health of the Laguna Madre is ultimately tied into the health of the Arroyo Colorado.

Narrator:

Arroyo Colorado Watershed Coordinator, Jaime Flores says pollution from runoff endangers its fragile ecosystem.

Jamie Flores:

The fish and the crab species that live in the Lower Laguna Madre use the Arroyo Colorado as a nursery, 'cause it's protected.

Narrator:

The threat prompted the region's business leaders, farmers, and cities to join the Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership that now has 700 members. It's posted signs as well as markers that warn against pollution. The city of Pharr invested in a cutting edge wastewater treatment plant.

Eddie De Leon, Utilities Superintendent, City of Pharr:

There was a need to reduce pollutants going into the Arroyo, and we took that first step.

Narrator:

Another plant in nearby San Juan created wetlands. They're an education tool for area teachers, and also serve as a final filter for water headed to the Arroyo.

Donnie Valdez:

Twenty, thirty, forty years ago, we probably didn't know what was the right thing to do.

Narrator:

Donnie Valdez is the third generation in his family to farm this land. Scientific soil sampling has enabled him to adapt to a new era.

Donnie Valdez:

We're being more precise. The reason is...one is cost, two is protection, three it's the right thing to do.

**Jude Benavides, Ph.D., Associate Professor, UT
Brownsville, Chair, Partnership Steering Committee:**

I think that's gonna be the only way that we improve the water quality in the Arroyo, protect the resources in the Lower Laguna Madre, and at the same time permit us to grow economically.

Narrator:

The payoff can be found by everyone who enjoys this body of water.

Jamie Flores:

It doesn't matter if you're a farmer or if you work at a wastewater treatment plant, your way of life depends on everybody working together.