

**The University of Texas at Austin Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs**

**Lower Rio Grande Water Quality Initiative**

**SEP No. 2013-11**

**Project Description**

Third-Party Administrator shall assist communities in the Lower Rio Grande region (from the Falcon Dam to the Gulf of Mexico) by working with TCEQ, EPA, Comisión Nacional del Agua (CONAGUA), and Comisión Estatal del Agua de Tamaulipas (CEAT) to improve Rio Grande water quality. Third-Party Administrator shall support the bi-national technical committees associated with state, national, and international water institutions currently taking steps to improve water quality on the Lower Rio Grande by bringing to their attention the voices and concerns of the Lower Rio Grande region's municipalities, counties, and irrigation districts.

Third-Party Administrator shall use SEP Funds to provide technical assistance, such as creation of maps and graphics, analyses of surveys, and interviews with Texas stakeholders, to the technical groups working under the guidance of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) and its Mexican counterpart Comisión Internacional de Limites y Aguas (CILA). Third-Party Administrator shall develop a list of water and waste water infrastructure improvements that could improve water quality. This list, along with other information, will be presented to Lower Rio Grande stakeholders, including local community leaders as well as state and federal agencies and their Mexican counterparts. Third-Party Administrator shall examine the impact of each of the potential infrastructure investments using water quality modeling and by conducting surveys of public opinion and preferences on improving water quality on both the United States and Mexican sides of the border.

This Project will be conducted by Third-Party Administrator staff through fieldwork within the Rio Grande Valley, giving presentations, participating in the bi-national meetings held along the border, report drafting and document preparation, gathering and analyzing survey data in communities along the border, and modeling of water quality data gathered by IBWC.

**Environmental Benefit**

The Lower Rio Grande does not meet its designated use for contact recreation due to high levels of E. coli, a fecal indicator bacterium. High levels of E. coli may indicate the presence of pathogenic organisms such as viruses, protozoa (parasitic organisms), helminthes (intestinal worms), and bioaerosols (inhalable molds and fungi). The diseases they may cause range in severity from mild gastroenteritis to life-threatening ailments such as cholera, dysentery, infectious hepatitis, and severe gastroenteritis.

For many years, Mexico and the United States have sought to improve water quality along the lower Rio Grande. This Project will support efforts by decision makers to choose the most cost-effective options to improve Rio Grande water quality. The information provided by this Project will help agencies make decisions on investments that will improve water quality within the lower Rio Grande.

**Eligible Areas and Counties**

Andrews, Brewster, Brooks, Cameron, Crane, Crockett, Culberson, Dimmit, Duval, Ector, Edwards, El Paso, Hidalgo, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kinney, Kleberg, Loving, Maverick, Nueces, Pecos, Presidio, Reagan, Reeves, San Patricio, Schleicher, Starr, Sutton, Terrell, Upton, Val Verde, Ward, Webb, Willacy, Winkler, and Zapata Counties

**Minimum Contribution Amount**

\$100

**Total Project Budget**

\$25,008