THE WILLIAMS CREEK WATERSHED PROJECT

In 1949 or 1950, a seven (7) year drought began in Gillespie County. However, during this drought period – September of 1952 -- this area had 24" of rain within a 24-hour period causing severe damage not only on the Williams Creek Watershed, but also along the Pedernales River. I was only 11 years old at the time, but I personally went with my father and looked at the damages caused downstream. What is now Ranch Road 1 was U.S. 290 at the time, and the floodwaters washed out the pavement, devastated the vegetation, especially the pecan trees, and at Johnson City it washed out the main bridge on U.S. 281. This devastation was not caused by just floodwaters from the Williams Creek Watershed; therefore, it caused all the landowners in the entire Gillespie County to be concerned about a solution to such flooding. They began thinking about holding the rainfall rather than just letting it flow into the lakes downstream. Over the following years, the landowners in this area seriously pondered this issue and banded together to seek a solution.

The creation of any Water Control and Improvement District within Texas is governed by the statutes of the State of Texas. These statutes are usually contained within the Water Code. For the creation of a water control and improvement district to be designated, the statute required that a petition be signed by fifty (50) people holding title to land in the proposed District. By 1956 enough interest had been created in Gillespie County, and on July 23rd, the County Commissioners Court was petitioned by more than fifty (50) landowners under the Provisions of Section 59 of Article XVI of the State Constitution and Chapter 3A of Title 128, Vernon's Annotated Civil States of Texas. This Petition described the name of the District, the area and boundaries of the District, the purpose of the District and a statement of the general nature of the work to be done within the District. The purpose as set out in the petition of this District was to be controlling, storing, preserving and distributing its water and flood waters; and thereby abate, control, and amend any shortage or harmful excesses of water from local storms. The petition was then to be filed with the county clerk of the county. Again, the Gillespie County Water Control and Improvement District No. 1 was petitioned for creation on July 23, 1956. Then on November 24, 1956, an election was held in the city and county for the purpose of voting on the confirmation of said District which encompassed all of Gillespie County, not only the Williams Creek Watershed. The vote was favorable. On December 4, 1956, a special meeting of the Commissioners Court appointed a five-man Board of Directors consisting of Hilmar

Weinheimer, Kurt Hansen, Charles Peril, Alfred Kusenberger and C.B. Renick, convened to adopt and approved the election results.

After the creation of the WCID, the Directors, with the assistance of the Soil Conservation Service, began the task of developing a work plan for the Williams Creek Watershed Project. The flood of 1952, already mentioned, was followed on October 4, 1959 by another flood with estimated damages of $30,500. Watershed planning continued steadily and then during a flash flood in 1962 an automobile was washed from the low water crossing at Albert and four (4) people drowned. This incident really brought to the fore with renewed urgency the necessity of controlling the flood waters of Williams Creek tributaries, and the Texas Department of Transportation took action to install the current bridge on 1623.

Very detailed investigations, studies, testing, etc. along with getting landowners' easements were accomplished with the help of Federal, State and local governmental agencies. The WCID Directors during this time were Otto Schumann, Troy Foster, Dean Hopf, Richard Kasper and Adolph Kott.

In September of 1964, the Williams Creek Watershed Work Plan was completed. It is significant that all costs for the development of the Plan were paid by **other** than public Law 566 Funds. This is a national law for constructing flood prevention structures nationwide. This included county funding, Soil Conservation Service technical assistance, and many hours of donated time by local landowners and the Gillespie County Soil & Water Conservation District.

The Williams Creek Watershed has an area of 30.29 square miles (or 19,400 acres). The Plan stated that four (4) flood water retarding structures would be installed at an estimated cost of $446,010. Of this Public Law 566 would pay $415,410.

The total estimated cost, including land purchases, land damages, right-of-way, easements, road relocation, and land treatments came to $620,710. At today's rates for such a project, this amount is really minimal. However, as I went through the invitation to bidders, I saw in one instance why the costs were so low as compared to today's costs for such projects. One reason was due to the labor rates which I found set out in the invitation to bidders document. Labor rates were as follows: Top carpenter - $2.00 per hour; concrete finisher - $1.75 per hour; bulldozer operator under 80 hp - $1.75 per hour; bulldozer operator over 80 hp got a whopping

$2.00 per hour; crane and backhoe operators also got $2.00 per hour; and common labor for the project was $1.40 per hour.

It took another three (3) years for all the preparatory and engineering work to be completed. On July 17, 1967, the invitation went out to contractors to bid on the construction. Construction got started in August of '67, and it took about two (2) years to complete the project.

The dedication services of the four completed structures of the Williams Creek Watershed Project were held on September 15, 1969. A tour of all four completed structures ended on the Otto Schumann ranch, site #3. Otto Schumann, the then Chairman of the Gillespie County WCID, welcomed the crowd. Bill McReynolds of WOAI Radio and TV was the Master of Ceremonies. A barbecue dinner was then served after the dedication, and it should be noted that many state officials, high officials of the Soil Conservation Service, and local officials were in attendance.

Site #1 is primarily located on the Arthur Jenschke property, and is also on property owned by J.B. Ruebsahm (formerly Henry Wilke property) and Peggy Haynes (formerly Willie Schumann, Jr. property). 42 surface acres are covered at normal level. 139 acres are covered at the emergency spillway level.

Site #2 is all located on property owned by Shirleen Sager (formerly owned by Willie Schumann, Jr.). It covers 28.7 acres at the normal level, and 69.2 acres at the emergency spillway level.

Site #3 is located on property formerly owned by Otto Schumann, Edwin Itz, and J.W. Danz. Now these properties have been divided among family members. At the normal level this site covers 29.3 acres, and 88 acres at the emergency spillway level. The Danz property is only covered at the emergency level.

Site #4, which covers 29.9 acres at normal level, and 72 acres at the emergency level, was originally owned by Truman Odiorne and Harry Wilke. This site is presently on property owned by the Hersheys.

In Texas there are over 2,000 PL566 structures. Nationwide, I don't know how many structures there are, but I have seen information that Oklahoma leads in total number per State.

The WCID is probably the least understood of all the governmental units in the county. Originally Directors were elected annually; now elections are posted every four (4) years. Originally, the District was supported by a county tax rate of .0035 per $100 valuation. Presently, the rate is .0001 per $100 valuation.

As I mentioned before, the District takes in the entire county and therefore every property owner pays a small amount each year in property taxes which is used for maintenance of the dams, spillways, fences, etc. As you can see by this map (show map), relatively few landowners actually benefit from these structures, but we greatly appreciate the effort put forth by all property owners in the county, the Soil Conservation District and Directors of the WCID to control and conserve harmful excesses of water in our area and downstream.

CURRENT WCID DIRECTORS:

David Hopf, President
Ernest Kott, Vice-President
Charles Schumann, Secretary-Treasurer
Roy Itz, Director – Replaced By Tom Hammer, Feb 2012
Kenneth Sultemeier, Director

THIS REPORT WAS PREPARED BY CHARLES O. SCHUMANN ON APRIL 22, 2007.