

ALO 2002 GRANT – PLANNING SESSION IN RIO GRANDE CITY

We were fortunate to be awarded our second USAID ALO grant to the Center via TAES and our partner, the Consortium of Northeast Mexico Universities. This grant is for “Restoring and Sustaining Degraded Critical Ecosystems Common to the Semi-arid Regions of Northeast Mexico and South Texas” in the amount of \$100,000. It follows the grant received in 2001 for “Student and Faculty Exchange for Institutional Development and Sustainability”, also for \$100,000.

The new grant is for the establishment of a demonstration site (or sites) in Mexico that will provide accessibility for grazingland producers from both sides of the border to observe restoration and conservation practices that can be applied on their land. The Executive Committee of the binational group in Rio Grande City, Texas held a planning session on November 21-22, 2002. Messrs. Omar Garza and Ray Margo of the Border Coalition joined the Committee meeting.

It was agreed that the funds available in the grant should be concentrated in as few locations as possible to still show the different kinds of practices applicable for land conservation in the area. It was also agreed that actual and in-kind resources from private, state and federal agencies in order to install and maintain the demonstrations sites must augment funds provided by ALO in the grant. Still another agreement was that the demonstrations installed should be, whenever possible associated with graduate and undergraduate student projects.

A team was formed to have the function of reviewing potential sites and research/demonstration projects and recommending a plan of action to the Executive Committee. The following personnel were selected to serve on the team, Homero Hernandez (N.L.), Emilio Olivarez (N.L.), Erasmo Gutierrez (N.L.), Humberto Ibarra (N.L.), Assefaw Tewolde (Tam.), Abelardo Saldivar (Tam.), Wayne Hanselka (TAMU), Manuel Piña, Jr. (TAMU), Carlos de Luna (Coah.), Reginaldo Villareal (Coah.), and Lucio Rodriguez (Coah.). Omar Garza and Ray Margo will be given an opportunity to participate in all activities of the project. Each state will involve at least one graduate student in the team activities.

On November 22 several members of the Executive Committee visited a potential site for the project in Mexico, La Reforma Ranch near Diaz Ordaz. The site is about 30 miles from the border crossing at Rio Grande City. The ranch is owned by Emilio Olivarez and is managed by his brother, Jose Luis Olivarez. There is an excellent stand of buffelgrass of several varieties that should provide opportunities for several different demonstrations. All committee members that made the tour agreed the La Reforma would be an excellent site for demonstrations/research.

MEETING IN PIEDRAS NEGRAS MOVES FORWARD WITH ALO GRANT

Following a teleconference on January 28, 2003, a meeting was planned in Coahuila, Mexico to look at an additional site for a demonstration project. The site that has been previously selected in Nuevo Leon near Diaz Ordaz will be primarily involved with the planting, establishment and managing of improved perennial forage species, such as buffelgrass, *Cenchrus ciliaris*. Several members of the Executive Committee felt that a more rangeland-based demonstration was

needed where practices involving brush management, wildlife habitat management and revegetation could be applied. A meeting was scheduled for Piedras Negras, Coahuila for February 22, 2003.

Doug Tolleson from the Texas A&M Grazing Animal Nutrition Lab and Wayne Hamilton traveled to Eagle Pass, Texas on February 21. Dr. Bob Lyons, Texas Cooperative Extension Range Specialist from the Uvalde Research and Extension Center, joined us in Eagle Pass. Dr. Carlos de Luna and Dr. Ricardo Silva met us in Eagle Pass and took us to the cattlemen's assembly in Piedras Negras the morning of February 22.

The assembly was the Annual Meeting of the Regional Cattleman's Association of Piedras Negras. We were guests of the Association and met with their Board of Directors to discuss the potential for establishment of a demonstration site in Coahuila near Piedras Negras. Hamilton, Lyons and Tolleson all addressed the Directors in this meeting. Hamilton stressed that splitting of the available funds from ALO for two demonstrations projects, one in Nuevo Leon and one in Coahuila, must be carefully considered and that the project could only provide "seed" money. Industry and organizations like the Cattleman's Association would need to provide both actual and in-kind support. During this discussion, several kinds of demonstrations that could be installed in the area and that would have a high level of interest to cattlemen were identified. Doug Tolleson made a formal presentation to the entire assembly on NIRS and NUTBAL technology.

Brush management is a high priority problem in the area. Wildlife management is growing in importance and is now an accepted alternative income. We visited the Buena Vista Ranch about 25 minutes from Piedras Negras and observed an outstanding white-tailed deer management program. This ranch is producing very high quality white-tailed deer by any standards. Beef cattle performance evaluation utilizing body condition scoring and the NIRS and NUTBAL technology was also identified as a priority area for demonstrations. Fecal profiling and tailored supplemental feeding programs both for livestock and for deer were discussed. Dr. Silva and his students are particularly interested in this aspect of the project.

The Cattleman's Association has a roller chopper and a crawler tractor that is available for use in the demonstrations. We observed use of the chopper on the Buena Vista Ranch and determined that it had a high potential for successfully reducing brush stature, preparing an excellent seedbed and developing a fine fuel load for followup prescribed burns to maintain the treatment over time. The use of the equipment would open several opportunities for demonstrations involving variable rate patterning, revegetation, soil moisture infiltrations differentials, influence on wildlife populations, etc.

The general impression from the group was that a demonstration using the Buena Vista Ranch and perhaps others in the immediate area for demonstrations such as NIRS fecal profiling would be a worthwhile project for the Executive Committee to consider. Dr. de Luna indicated that he would like for Universidad de Antonio Narro to host a meeting of the Executive Committee and have representatives of the Cattleman's Association present to support the demonstration project at Piedras Negras. Dr. de Luna indicated that he would make the necessary contacts with Executive Committee members to obtain agreement for the meeting and make any arrangements.

It would appear that we have two very good potential sites for demonstrations. The Rancho La Reforma site near Diaz Ordaz in Nuevo Leon is contained within the approved proposal from ALO and is ready to go. The Executive Committee needs to formally approve the Piedras Negras site. As soon as this is done, the Project Team may begin receiving one-page proposals with an estimated budget for projects to review and select. Those selected will then be developed into final proposals (we will furnish a simple, short format) with a final budget and presented to the Executive Committee for approval and funding. We need to remember that it is important to get students involved in the research/demonstrations and to make sure that the sites selected *will agree to organized public access for field days and demonstrations.*

While we have not discussed the maximum amount of funding available for each demonstration, it is obvious that amounts will be relatively small and should be combined with inputs from other sources. The proposal also calls for the involvement of at least two Masters level students from Mexico and one from Texas to study promising technologies and one each from Mexico and Texas to study the economic, financial and social impact of the technologies.

As stated earlier, this project appears to have a lot of potential for providing very practical information for South Texas and Northeast Mexico producers. If we can get the support of industry and organizations for the demonstrations, we can make it a highly successful effort and increase chances of extended funding opportunities.

A final note, Dr. Silva had two undergraduate students and one graduate student that are going to work on the NIRS technology. Dr. Silva and these students made arrangements with Doug Tolleson to travel to Texas A&M and the GAN Lab later this spring or early summer. This exchange will be part of the ALO 2001 funded project.

DEMONSTRATION PROPOSALS RECEIVED AT SALTILLO MEETING

On April 7 and 8, 2003 Manuel Piña, Jr., Andres de la Concha and Wayne Hamilton traveled to Monterrey and Saltillo for the purpose of receiving presentations by faculty from Universidad Autonoma Agraria Antonio Narro and other of the consortium universities for research and demonstration projects at the sites near Diaz Ordaz and Piedras Negras. The Executive Committee met in Monterrey on April 7 and reviewed business of the binational project, as well as the agenda for April 8 in Saltillo.

Dr. Carlos de Luna arranged the meeting in Saltillo and our host was the University Rector, Dr. Luis Alberto Aguirre Uribe. In addition to faculty, there were representatives from private industry and state and federal government at the meeting. Several faculty members made presentations to the Executive committee from Antonio Narro and Nuevo Leon who have graduate students that would like to be involved in the demonstration projects. Project that were proposed included livestock nutritional analysis and mediation using NIRS technology and the software program NUTBAL, rangeland brush management and revegetation, reduction of soil compaction in buffelgrass, individual plant control of woody regrowth in pastures, watershed management, alternate forages (establishment of cactus for forage), use of the roller-chopper for rangeland rehabilitation, rehabilitation of degraded pastures using different seedbed preparation

methods in three environments, and economic evaluation of practices for the improvement of buffelgrass pastures.

Hamilton agreed to furnish a form for submission of the project proposals. Several State of Coahuila officials were present at the workshop and pledged their support to the demonstration project. Representatives from Cementos Apasco and CONAZA, Comision Nacional de las Zonas Aridas were present and offered the assistance of their organizations. Representatives of both the Union Ganaderas Regional de Nuevo Leon and Coahuila were present and voiced their support, as well as the president of the Union Local Ganaderas de Piedras Negras.

The 2002 ALO project is now in the process of receiving formal proposals for funding for research and demonstration projects at the two locations. We are also in the process of visiting with Ray Margo on the possibility of a third location at his ranch, La Coma, in Texas near Rio Grande City.