



# Request for Proposals: Ag Producer Outreach for Comanche Springs

## About Texas Water Trade

Over the next thirty years, Texas' population is set to double. While the economic powerhouses of Texas—its cities and industries—are positioned to capture the water they need to enable this growth, the state's agricultural producers, its rural communities, and its environment are predicted to be less water secure than ever before. Avoiding this looming water crisis will require investments that transcend sectors and deploy innovative tools that work in Texas' pro-property rights culture. Texas Water Trade (TWT) was incorporated in 2018 in recognition of the scale of this challenge, with the mission of channeling the power of markets and technological innovation to create a future of clean, flowing water for all Texans.

## About The Project

In April 2020, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) awarded TWT a \$1.1 million Regional Conservation Partnership Project (RCPP) for work to restore flow at Comanche Springs. With NRCS contributions of \$1.1 million and TWT contributions of \$1.5 million, the project's goal is to demonstrate that year-round flow at Comanche Springs can be restored.

NRCS' commitment includes roughly \$775,000 of Financial Assistance to incentivize crop switching and irrigation efficiencies in the Leon-Belding Irrigation Area and more than \$300,000 in Technical Assistance. TWT will bring an additional \$1.6 million in Financial Assistance to assist producers in undertaking crop switching and/or irrigation efficiency improvements.

The five-year partnership is expected to commence in Fall 2020. Over this period, TWT will be engaging agricultural producers in the Leon-Belding Irrigation Area who are actively using groundwater to support crop production. Our objective will be to broker voluntary agreements to temporarily reduce groundwater pumping from the Edwards-Trinity Aquifer (and potentially other formations) to demonstrate the potential of aquifer levels to rebound sufficiently to extend the rate and/or duration of spring flow at Comanche Springs. Through the partnership, TWT will define the criteria that will be used to determine project eligibility

and to score projects for funding. Participating producers will be required to forbear the volume of water saved through the partnership for a period of time in order to assess aquifer and spring response to reduced pumping volumes.

With financial support from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the City of Fort Stockton Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, and in partnership with The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University, TWT has already undertaken an extensive analysis of the cropping and irrigation practices in Leon-Belding Irrigation Area. That analysis included an identification of the producers whose wells are in the zone most correlated to springflow at Comanche Springs, an area known as the "Proposed New Management Zone 1" of the Middle Pecos Groundwater Conservation District (MPGCD). There are less than ten agricultural producers in that focal area, with the primary crop types being pecans and alfalfa. Roughly 30% of acres are flood irrigated. TWT has conducted outreach to producers in the area of interest, with communications being returned by more than 50% of producers. The knowledge gained through this initial opportunity assessment and outreach will inform our strategy for coordinating the RCPP.

In parallel to the RCPP, TWT will also be coordinating science in the field with Texas State University, MPGCD and other stakeholders. This will in part be supported through a \$150,000 Applied Science grant awarded by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to advance groundwater-surface water modeling in the Proposed New Management Zone 1 and to run well tests that can provide additional insights into Comanche Spring's subterranean flowpath and the communication between aquifers underlying the Proposed New Management Zone 1. This work is needed to evaluate the potential springflow benefit of redirecting some level of agricultural and municipal demand in the Leon-Belding Irrigation Area away from the Edwards-Trinity Aquifer (the primary source of Comanche's flow) and toward alternative formations such as the Rustler, Dockum or Capitan Reef Aquifers. To create the most seamless interaction with irrigators, and to enable deeper water conservation than what can be achieved through water efficiency alone, TWT will integrate opportunities to conduct well tests into discussion with irrigators we engage for the purposes of our RCPP.

## About The Services We Are Seeking

In order to meet our goals for the RCPP, TWT is seeking an individual with substantial experience in agricultural production in the Fort Stockton region to coordinate outreach to agricultural producers in the Leon-Belding Irrigation Area and to manage project planning and execution in coordination with NRCS. The contract position will be established for an initial year, with the potential to extend for the remaining four years of the RCPP.

The individual will be expected to provide the following:

- Coordinate as needed with TWT's Chief Executive Officer and other TWT staff and contractors involved in the multi-party work to restore Comanche Springs;
- Participate in a weekly check-in call with the TWT CEO and other staff or contractors;
- Review and comment on outreach materials prepared by TWT staff for engagement with irrigators;
- Establish contact with priority irrigators in the Leon-Belding Irrigation Area who have been identified by TWT staff or contractors;
- Through one-on-one outreach and on-farm visits, orient priority irrigators to the objective of our RCPP and the opportunities it may present for them to achieve improved efficiencies or other operational benefits;
- Develop a resource inventory for each producer engaged for potential application to the RCPP;
- Coordinate development of a conservation plan for each producer engaged for potential application to the RCPP with appropriate NRCS staff and irrigators (conservation plans must include either irrigation efficiency improvements, or crop scheduling changes to shift toward less water-intensive crops, or both);
- Participate in planning calls as needed to develop the screening and scoring criteria for the RCPP funding process;
- Inform TWT's process for establishing dates to notice funding opportunities through the RCPP based upon irrigator schedules in order to best align the program with producers' cycles;
- Support priority irrigators in preparing applications for funding opportunities through the RCPP;
- Coordinate with NRCS staff to ensure effective planning, design and delivery of irrigation and crop shifting projects;
- Coordinate with TWT staff or contractors to plan for Financial Assistance that TWT will need to secure to enable irrigator participation;
- Join calls or meetings as needed to ensure coordination with TWT and its partners or contractors on science that would inform development of opportunities to invest in alternative water supply sources for willing irrigators;
- Ensure that TWT is managing the RCPP efficiently with NRCS staff and in accordance with NRCS protocol.

The duties above are estimated to require on average 40 hours per month. The contract would be developed based upon this average time requirement for a twelve month period, with a maximum contract amount not to be exceeded. Should the actual work require more than the contract maximum, TWT and the contractor will have the opportunity to amend the contract. TWT will reimburse expenses for personal vehicle use.

The ideal contractor will have:

- Direct experience navigating NRCS conservation programs, including water conservation and irrigation efficiency programs;

- Substantial experience engaging agricultural producers on opportunities to identify and achieve conservation outcomes through their farming practices;
- Long-term experience engaging with agricultural producers in the Fort Stockton region;
- A deep knowledge of soil types, water quality, irrigation scheduling and crop rotations in the Fort Stockton region;
- Current credentials with NRCS enabling access to software, or the ability and willingness to be recredentialed for that purpose;
- Enthusiasm for lending expertise and momentum to a multi-party effort to restore Comanche Springs' flow.

In selecting the consultant, Texas Water Trade will consider the respondent's:

- History of work delivering water conservation projects with agricultural producers in West Texas;
- Knowledge of natural resources and farming practices in the Fort Stockton area;
- Familiarity with the NRCS system;
- Ability to be credentialed by NRCS to enable access to software and systems instrumental to delivery of the RCPP.

Competitive proposals will include:

- Examples of at least 2 projects on which the contractor has facilitated water conservation with agricultural producers;
- Full cost estimate, using TWT's estimated average of 40 hours per month over 12 months, based upon the contractor's proposed hourly rate;
- Resume;
- Two references who can offer perspective of the candidate's work style and background.

Proposals will be accepted until September 1, 2020 and can be sent to Christine Ann Rosales at [rosales@texaswatertrade.org](mailto:rosales@texaswatertrade.org).