

Record

January 5, 2000

50¢

87th Year No. 205

Wild rice moved to hatchery

SAN MARCOS, Texas (AP) — More than 100 endangered Texas wild rice plants along the San Marcos River have been rescued after withering when a nearby spillway dam collapsed, causing the water level upstream to drop by 12 inches to 18 inches.

Federal and state environmental officials on Tuesday moved 80 plants into a federal fish hatchery and transplanted 30 others into deeper water.

The area affected by Friday's collapse was one-fourth of the habitat for the wild rice. The plant's numbers have decreased about 40 percent over the past three years after a severe drought and flood.

Scientists planned to move 20 more plants to the fish hatchery on Wednesday.

The water level has stabilized, officials said, and a preliminary inspection of a 6-foot breach in Cape's Dam indicated that it is not in immediate danger of further collapse. Repairs are likely to be months away, however.

Scientists hope to move the rice back to its natural habitat once the dam is repaired and the water level restored to normal.

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Breached: Wildlife officials rescue wild rice after dam fails

By Anita Miller
Staff Reporter

A widening of last week's breach at Cape's Dam necessitated the relocation of more Texas Wild Rice plants on Thursday.

Personnel from the National Fish Hatchery & Technology Center, Texas Parks & Wildlife and the US Fish & Wildlife Service, assisted by college student, gingerly dug up about 25 of the federally-endangered plants that were part of a major stand near the Little League fields.

About 160 of the plants had already been moved to the Fish & Technology Center, where they are being kept in raceways specially designed to supply the flowing water they need to flourish.

The breach at Cape's Dam, which is located on the San Marcos River just downstream of IH 35, occurred on New Year's Eve. **The breach lowered the river level all the way up stream to Rio Vista Dam.**

Dr. Bill Sewell of the US Fish & Wildlife Service said that part of the river is home to two of the six major wild rice stands remaining in the San Marcos River. **"About 25 percent of the total rice in the river is in that section,"** he said.

Texas Wild Rice, which is actually an aquatic grass, grows nowhere else and is one of five federally-endangered species that live in the river and the Edwards Aquifer that feeds it.

Plants relocated to the federal fish hatchery are supplied with the same Edwards Water.

Sewell and biologist Paula Power of the national fish hatchery said some plants were moved the day of the dam's breach and more on New Year's Day. Still more were taken on Tuesday.

Power said some other wild rice plants were simply transplanted into deeper water.

Although the breach lowered the water level only inches, Power said that was enough to threaten their survival. "it made the difference between the plants being in the water and being out of the water," she said.

Plants relocated on Tuesday were already showing the signs of stress. Power said leaves that had begun to dry out have died but more green leaves are surviving. "It looks like they will come through okay," she said.

After the dam breach widened Wednesday, the upstream water level dropped another two inches, surfacing the stand that was relocated Thursday.

Texas Wild Rice was listed as a federally-endangered species in 1978 and as a state-endangered species in 1983. A perennial, it grows leaves up to 45 inches in length and flowers in the spring and autumn.

To be healthy, the plants must have free flowing water.

Sewell said it's too soon to say whether the plants will be moved back to the river,* regardless of when or whether Cape's Dam is repaired or reguilt. "We have the drought to consider," he said. "I'm not sure we'd want to put them all back even if we get the dam fixed because we do have an extreme drought and dropping spring flow."

Robert Thornton, whose family owns Cape's Dam, said he has been in conversations with deferal officials for a few years about repairing or replacing the old structure, which was originally built late in the 1800s to power a cotton gin.

"They've been looking at it and studying it," he said, adding that the best option may be to rebuild. "I don't think they can fix it, but maybe they can," he said.

The dam is constructed of rocks and timbers and has failed before, Thonton said. "Two years ago a part blew out but it filled back up with debris before I could get anyone to take a good look."

He said that in the 1960s portions of chain link fence were laid over the dam and pinned to it as reinforcement.

Other endangered species in the San Marcos River and Edwards Aquifer include the Texas Blind Salamander, the fountain darter, the San Marcos Salamander, and the San Marcos Gambusia.

** Note: This article seems to suggest that once Texas Wild Rice is removed from the San Marcos River to live its life out in a laboratory and unnatural conditions, the Texas Wild Rice is never returned to the live in the river naturally, again. This in turn suggests that Texas Wild Rice is being removed from the San Marcos River, and never returning, except in forced, transplanted stands (such as the stands transplanted onto Texas State University lands, as well as upstream from Rio Vista), not stands where Texas Wild Rice has naturally chosen to grow.*

Marcos Daily Record

Friday

January 7, 2000

50¢

87th Year No. 207



Wild rice rescue

Tyson Galusky with the US Fish & Wildlife Service carefully cradles a Texas Wild Rice plant he was about to lift from the San Marcos River on Thursday. The endangered plants were moved after a dam breach lowered the river's level. (Photo by Anita Miller)

Breached

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By ANITA MILLER
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Texas Wild Rice, which is actually an aquatic grass, grows nowhere else and is one of five federally-endangered species that live in the river and the Edwards Aquifer that feeds it.

Plants relocated to the federal fish hatchery are supplied with the same Edwards Water. Sewell said attempts to grow the plants elsewhere with different water sources have been problematic.

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