



West Texas Maintenance Area Established; Assessment Structure Changes

The Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) has adopted a new provision to boll weevil eradication regulations changing the way the program operates within 11 of the state's 16 boll weevil eradication zones. The rule, TITLE 4 PART 1 CHAPTER 3 SUBCHAPTER K RULE §3.700 of the Texas Administrative Code, became effective January 20, 2015. It provides for both the establishment of the West Texas Maintenance Area (WTMA), and a per-bale maintenance fee to be collected on all cotton grown within the WTMA in lieu of an annual per-acre assessment.

These changes came about at the urging of grower steering committees in the functionally eradicated zones of West Texas, looking for ways to further reduce program expenses. The Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Foundation's (TBWEF) board of directors and program management agreed consolidation would provide just such an opportunity.

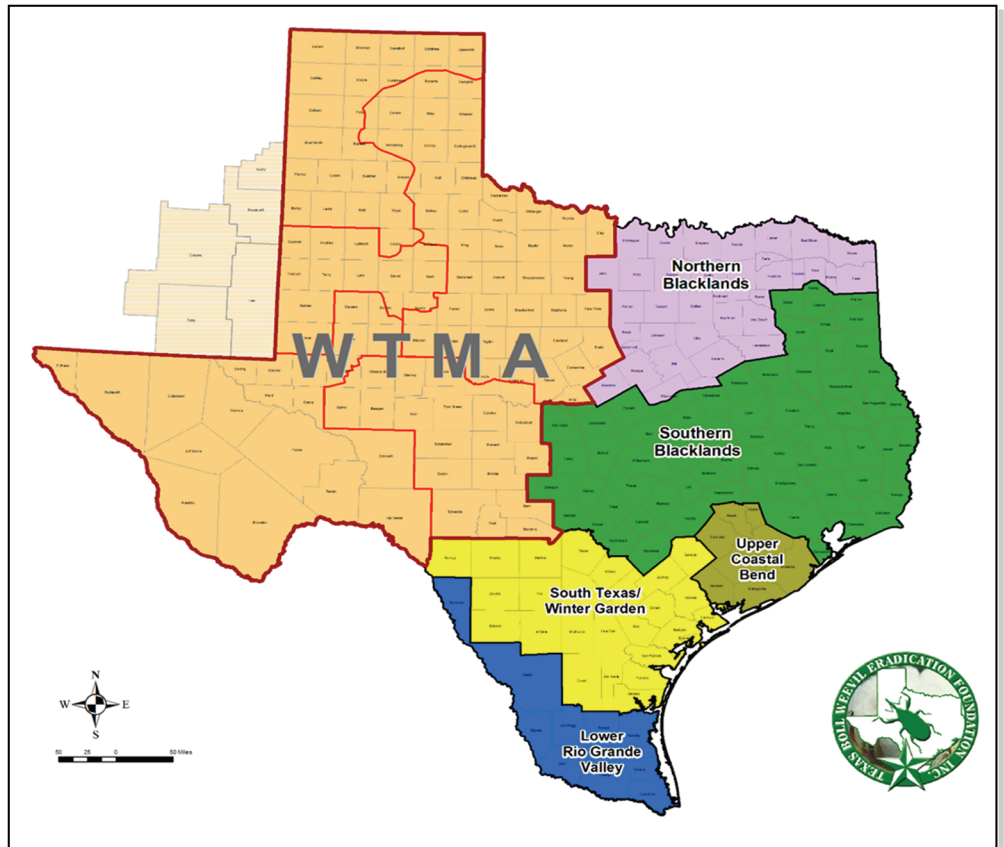
"This is what we promised cotton growers and legislators several years ago," said TBWEF Board Chairman Woody Anderson. "These changes were recommended by grower steering committees across West Texas, approved by the farmers serving on our board, and adopted by the Commissioner of Agriculture; and it makes good economic sense."

West Texas Maintenance Area Established

The newly formed WTMA is made up of 11 boll weevil eradication zones including: El Paso/Trans Pecos, Northern High Plains, Northern Rolling Plains, Northwest Plains, Panhandle, Permian Basin, Rolling Plains Central, Southern High Plains/Caprock, Southern Rolling Plains, St. Lawrence, and Western High Plains. Also included are Sterling, Sutton, Edwards, Bandera, Real, Kimble, and Kerr counties. Although none of these counties had previously been in an eradication zone, the maintenance statute provided for their inclusion as they border eradication zones in the WTMA.

The once-separate zones operated at different program phases, with different assessment levels, zone-specific

2015 Texas Boll Weevil Eradication Zones & Maintenance Area



resources and individual management structures. As those zones saw success, resources and personnel were consolidated reducing operational costs and assessment rates began to equalize between zones. With no weevils present, the TBWEF's Technical Advisory Committee saw fit to recommend lower trap densities, further cutting operational costs. And while trapping remained at a level effective for reinfestation protection, zone boundaries prevented a more efficient trap monitoring model.

"Today, all 11 zones are on the same page operationally," said TBWEF President and CEO Lindy Patton. "The creation of the WTMA allows us to further decrease costs without being limited by zone borders."

The legal requirements for a zone to enter a maintenance phase have been in place in the state's boll weevil eradication law since 2005, when the Texas Legislature adopted a separate subchapter with provisions for the operation of the program's maintenance phase.

To be eligible for inclusion in the WTMA, zones were legally required to be functionally eradicated with all program debt satisfied. Grower steering

committees also had to consult with program management regarding inclusion, and a formal request to TDA was necessary from the Foundation's board.

Per-Bale Maintenance Fee Replaces Traditional Assessment in WTMA

The new rule also provides for a per-bale maintenance fee to be charged on all cotton grown within the WTMA in lieu of the annual per-acre assessment previously billed by the Foundation. The commissioner set the 2015 maintenance fee at \$1 per-bale. The fee will be collected at the warehouse as part of the receiving charge.

The per-bale fee allows for a more efficient collection process, diminished reliance on data from the USDA Farm Services Agency (FSA), reduced legal and administrative costs, and an end to assessments on failed acres.

"Many growers and landowners have been frustrated with having to pay assessments on failed acres. The per-bale assessment resolves that issue," said Patton.

As program costs and assessment rates were reduced, a more efficient collection system has become necessary. In 2014,

the Foundation sent 22,000 assessment statements to producers and land owners in the 11 zones now contained within the WTMA. More than 80 percent of those statements were for less than \$500, and over half were for less than \$100. As in previous years, the Foundation relied heavily on the availability and accuracy of FSA data to produce those statements.

“FSA has long been a partner in our eradication efforts, and we are grateful for the help they’ve provided,” said Patton. “As they face funding and staffing cut-backs, and congressional changes to the farm program, we can’t be sure data provided in the past will be available in the future.”

Program management met with WTMA grower steering committees and allied industry representatives over the past year to develop the new collection process.

“The warehouses have been very helpful,” said Patton. “It’s clear they know firsthand it’s the success of the grower that provides for the success of the cotton industry. They are very aware of the positive economic impact the program has had on their bottom line.”

National Cotton Council data demonstrates since the program began in earnest in 1998, Texas cotton yields have increased dramatically. Total average production has increased over 55 percent or 218 lbs per-acre. Total bales harvested have increased 34 percent providing an additional 1.4M bales per year to the Texas cotton industry.

The Foundation is working with warehouse representatives to develop and fine tune the collection process, such as how to deal with cotton grown outside the WTMA being inadvertently charged the maintenance fee. In these situations, growers can apply to receive a refund,

providing they can certify production came from outside the WTMA.

“This is new territory for the Foundation and Texas cotton warehouses,” said Patton. “As we move through the 2015 season, we will work hard to ensure the process is as smooth as possible, and that it works well for all involved. Communication has always been key to our program’s success. We urge anyone with questions to call us.”



South Texas Continues the Fight Sub-tropical Conditions, Migratory Weevils Present Challenges

No one is more accustomed to dealing with challenges facing boll weevil eradication than the South Texas cotton producer. Subtropical conditions, volunteer cotton and proximity to inaccessible, hostable plants are just a few the persistent realities growers there encounter annually, and this year is no different.

According to 2015 airport rainfall data, in August alone, the area had 600 percent more rain than usual. Rain in this volume makes treatments more difficult and less effective, and provides huge opportunity for volunteer cotton. And although South Texas producers are especially diligent at destroying these plants, inaccessible cotton is clearly visible across the river in Mexico, an area also affected by this year’s excessive rainfall.

Mexico does have an active boll weevil eradication program, but it, too, is afflicted with its own trials. Early in August, for example, Mexico’s program ran out of chemical, suspending treatments for two weeks. Their trapping data shows a spike in weevil numbers shortly thereafter.

As of early September, nearly 80,000 weevils had been trapped in the Lower

Rio Grande Valley (LRGV) zone. While that number sounds considerable, it is 99.8 percent less than the number of weevils trapped when the program first started in the Valley. Of the weevils captured in 2015, the majority were trapped in an area between Mission and Weslaco, in close proximity to cotton fields across the river.

“Seeing the overall reduction in weevil numbers in the Valley is promising,” said TBWEF Program Director Larry Smith. “But, we remain on high alert. The weevil is a tenacious insect, and it would be a mistake to forget how quickly populations can grow, and migrate from only a few weevils. This is not the time for us to let our guard down if we want to protect what we’ve accomplished so far.”

The program monitors trap lines across the state to measure for weevil migration. So far this year more than 24 weevils have been captured along lines heading north out of the LRGV zone.

Smith reminds everyone to be diligent in cleaning harvesting equipment moving out of the LRGV. Any suspected dirty harvesting equipment should be reported to the Foundation or TDA.



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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Please Review. Important Program and Assessment Changes Disclosed.