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Clearing brush helps rivers and aquifers

Staff Report
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There is no greater environmental tragedy than a dry creek, riverbed or lake.....
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It is not just the clearing brush..... but a whole lot more before, during and after a project that determines success. Often as not, it does not work. As some of the previous writers have said while I was out of town - take this "report" with a huge grain of salt and wash it down with skepticism. Bottom line, a tremendously wet year making a dismal project look at the moment ok - maybe.

Want a good watershed management project using selective brush management to improve water yields? Some of my years of personal experience and observation have pointed me in this direction: first, do a very long-term study of the proposed basin with a collaborative team of geologists, hydrologists, ecological range specialists, wildlife biologists, soils experts, brush management experts, economists and probably several other disciplines I am forgetting. Plus, some good experienced and knowledgeable USDA and extension education folks to work with the landowners the next ten years on becoming good land stewards so the brush does not reinvade (as it will) so the quality herbaceous cover remains. Much of the work done so far in Texas points to targeting karst limestone geology watersheds with certain shrub/brush species mixes and at least an 18 inch per year annual rainfall and hopefully a non-politically charged project. Intense follow-up work monitoring ground and surface waters, vegetation, wildlife, livestock production and other environmental factors would be a great benefit and the only way to really gauge a win. Ideally, you have monitoring prior to the project to accurately judge the results. But, no where are the rules and regs written in stone - we need a lot of good long-term research and studies and data collection before that will be even partially true. Watershed research is by its very nature, long-term (10 - 20 years ideally) so that the weather variables and extremes can be minimized. This year was unusually wet in many parts of Texas and far from our "normal" dry conditions. This was the sage advice from a wise old range professor and US-AID expert (Dr. Don Huss of Menard) told us in our basic range management classes - ranch for the dry years, not the wet ones. And protect those riparian systems to have quality, clean water and all the other benefits they provide us including wildlife habitat and quality livestock forage.

Way too many variables in natural systems to be sure about anything.

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