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<http://www.mysanantonio.com/opinion/commentary/article/Plan-to-spray-herbicides-along-Rio-Grande-6907655.php>

Plan to spray herbicides along Rio Grande alarming, risky

Tricia Cortez, For the Express-News Updated 4:58 pm, Thursday, March 17, 2016



Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board and other officials release Arundo wasps into a stand of carrizo cane as part of a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) pilot eradication program for carrizo cane in Starr County. Now, some state official are pushing a dangerous plan to spray herbicides along the Rio Grande. [less](#)

We are alarmed at a new proposal from Austin and San Antonio that calls for aerial spraying of potent chemicals onto the banks of the Rio Grande.

The target is carrizo cane, an invasive plant, also known as giant river cane or Arundo donax. The first of the target locations are Del Rio and Starr County.

This is the first step in an effort led by San Antonio state Sen. Carlos Uresti and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board. The expected launch date is within the next 90 days, with public taxpayer dollars

No environmental studies have been done to gauge the risks, or to measure the potential off-target drift of these chemicals onto other living things. The most important question is why has the state chosen to ignore the work being done by the **USDA** along a 558-mile stretch of the Rio Grande, from Del Rio to Brownsville?

Results from the past seven years — which have been peer-reviewed and published — show a dwindling of the cane's biomass by nearly 25 percent. The Border Patrol attended USDA demonstrations in Laredo this year to witness the USDA's two-pronged approach of using biological agents (i.e., wasps) and a new cane topping method with special fitted tractors. This finally gives Border Patrol its long-desired, clear line of sight needed to do their job.

The USDA science team has shown that this method has generated a savings of \$4.4 million with 6,600 acre-feet of agriculture water saved each year. This is significant since the Rio Grande remains one of the 10 most endangered rivers in the world precisely because of insufficient water supply.

Maybe Uresti, the governor, and the conservation folks in Austin think it's OK to push ahead with aerial spraying because they don't live here, and they don't have to drink the Rio Grande tap water as we do.

That these state politicians now propose to do what the feds agreed not to do is a clever and cynical runaround of the 2009 settlement. It is an affront to the people of Laredo, and to all residents who live alongside and depend on the Rio Grande.

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