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**GBEP CONSERVATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

**GBEP Contract Number: 582-7-77793**

**FINAL REPORT**

**September 1, 2006 – February 28, 2009**

## **Executive Summary**

The Trust for Public Land (TPL) program described in this report is in response to the Galveston Bay Estuary Program's (GBEP) request for services for its Conservation Assistance Program, with the goal to help organizations provide technical, programmatic, and grant-writing assistance to multiple local governments interested in acquiring, protecting, or restoring wetlands, other unique habitats, or low-impact water-based recreational sites. Objectives to accomplish the goals of the Initiative included: (1) administering the grant appropriately; (2) identifying sites for conservation projects, including general funding strategies; (3) Coordinating watershed stakeholder groups, facilitating dialogue to provide guidance and support to the overall project; (4) Conducting a planning process in two subwatersheds to develop "greenprints" for open space preservation / acquisition; (5) developing funding strategies, and develop or assist to develop grant proposals, in collaboration with government representatives, for at least three properties identified for conservation; and (6) providing assistance to local governments in initiating, negotiating, and closing conservation-related real estate transactions.

The results of the Initiative demonstrated accomplishment of the objectives. The current project list is attached. Successful funding solicitations were accomplished for McAllis Point Phase I, Clear Creek Park Phase I, Spring Creek, and McAllis Point Phase II. Additional applications were prepared and submitted for McAllis Point Phase II and the Armand Bayou Prairie/Woodlands. Acquisition assistance was provided to complete two greenbelt/bayou assemblages – along Brays Bayou and Japhet Creek – and two other riparian projects – McAllis Point and Spring Creek. The greenprinting project for West Galveston Island was completed, with the City of Galveston as lead. A greenprint is underway for Chambers County, with a weeklong Stewardship Exchange hosted there in May 2008.

In addition to the basic skills for land transactions, a successful land conservation program will benefit from: (a) skillful partnering to identify projects and funding sources, and the time to assemble the funding quilt; (2) making the time to meet frequently, and individually, with stakeholders to gain their investment in the process; (3) recognizing that there is no substitute for local knowledge in developing the data for greenprint models; (4) combining, in time, an ongoing land conservation project with a greenprinting process to enhance the outcomes of both; and (5) shepherding of community resources toward land conservation following completion of a greenprint to bring greater on-the-ground results.

The Coastal & Southeast Texas office of the Trust for Public Land is greatly appreciative of this opportunity to work with GBEP and local stakeholders to save our coastal heritage, through direct land conservation and through cultivating a culture that will facilitate land conservation into the future.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Since its beginning in 2002, TPL's work for the Galveston Bay Estuary Program's Conservation Assistance Program has focused on assisting local governments in acquiring, protecting or restoring lands that: possess unique conservation value, provide significant public access to the Galveston Bay, and serve multiple purposes including recreation, wetlands conservation, water quality protection and flood control.

In furtherance of this overall purpose, the Initiative's goals for the current contract were to:

***1. Help acquire, protect, or restore lands that:***

- Possess unique conservation value, such as wetlands, bottomland hardwood forests, floodplains, and associated habitats;
- Have a direct link to coastal riparian areas, coastal prairies, or Galveston Bay, and preferably within or proximate to the state Coastal Zone Management boundary;
- Provide significant public access to Galveston Bay and its coastal tributaries;
- Control or prevent nonpoint source pollution by providing stormwater abatement; or
- Serve multiple purposes, such as large multi-jurisdictional regional parks with strong conservation, recreational, linear trail, water quality protection and storm water abatement/flood control components.

Potential acquisition and/or other types of conservation projects will be directly linked to coastal riparian areas (streams, creeks, rivers, wetlands), coastal prairies, or Galveston Bay. The GRANTEE will focus efforts on projects falling within or proximate to the state Coastal Zone Management (CZM) boundary.

- 2. Support planning and project working groups of local stakeholders*** for project input and to build sustaining support for open space conservation that meets the goals of this program.
- 3. Provide technical, programmatic, and grant-writing assistance to multiple local governments interested in land conservation.***

## **PROJECT METHODOLOGY**

To accomplish the above goals and the contract's Project Objectives and Major Tasks, the following tasks were described in the *Project Activity Plan*:

***“1. Administer grant in manner consistent with Texas Uniform Grant Management Standards and the contract documents.***

“TPL will manage the project to: (a) meet GBEP contract requirements, including financial and programmatic reporting, (b) stay within budget, and (c) find and use other resources for project needs not covered by GBEP.

“TPL will submit deliverables as provided in the project agreement and outlined below. TPL will maintain accurate time sheet and expense records. Any proposed changes in budget items or schedule of deliverables will be submitted for approval of the GBEP project representative.

***“2. Identify sites for conservation projects, including general funding strategies.***

“Using resources such as the *Habitat Conservation Blueprint*, greenprints, and local park plans, sites will be identified through TPL stakeholder groups, other existing groups (such as the Buffalo Bayou Partnership), and in coordination with government representatives. Projects will be directly linked to coastal riparian areas and associated wetlands, coastal prairies and pothole complexes, or Galveston Bay. Efforts will be focused on projects falling within or proximate to the state Coastal Zone Management boundary and areas adjacent to waterways likely impaired by non-point source pollution. A spreadsheet inventory list of potential acquisition sites meeting the goals of this grant will be maintained and submitted with quarterly reports. The list will include site information on acreage, habitat types, linear feet of shoreline, and additional funds leveraged, as appropriate.

***“3. Coordinate watershed stakeholder groups, facilitating dialogue to provide guidance and support to the overall project.***

“Stakeholder groups will provide guidance and support to the overall project and will be comprised of local government officials, nonprofit conservation organizations, natural resource agency personnel, conservationists, and representatives from various sectors of the community. TPL will maintain support for the Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership, West Galveston Island group, the Chambers County group, and the Clear Creek Watershed Partnership.

“TPL will convene and facilitate meetings of the larger groups at least once per year, and at least three times per year for coordinating committees and task forces, providing resources and facilitating dialogue with stakeholder groups and other interested parties to: (a) increase public support for open space preservation, (b) identify properties of interest and develop priority criteria; and (c) cultivate partnerships for acquisitions and related open space initiatives. Written meeting summaries and a list of participants will be provided to GBEP and members of the stakeholder groups.

***“4. Conduct a planning process in two subwatersheds to develop “greenprints” for open space preservation / acquisition.***

“This “greenprinting” process will involve: (a) coordinating with the City of Galveston and with Chambers County to participate in greenprints of part or all of their communities; (b) working with local coordinating committees in each community; (c) collecting, reviewing and analyzing GIS data and information; (d) identifying unresolved issues and information needs; (e) preparing funding feasibility analyses for one or both of the communities; (f) planning for a stewardship exchange of local and outside experts and community members; and (g) working toward an implementation plan for specific projects.

***“5. Develop funding strategies, and develop or assist to develop grant proposals, in collaboration with government representatives, for at least three properties identified for conservation. [This task combines tasks 5 and 6 in Article 2 of the contract.]***

“TPL will identify funding sources suitable for acquisition and work with key agency partners to match community-identified projects with the appropriate funding sources. TPL will pursue funding, through grant proposals or other assistance, for at least three conservation projects. The projects will be developed in cooperation with stakeholder groups.

***“6. Provide assistance to local governments in initiating, negotiating, and closing conservation-related real estate transactions.”***

“TPL will inform local governments of TPL’s available expertise, and provide assistance as needed, in initiating, negotiating, conducting due diligence, and closing at least three conservation-related real estate transactions (identified in collaboration with local entities and stakeholders).”

## **PROJECT RESULTS**

### **Review of Accomplishment of Objectives**

1. Grant Administration: Contract performance evaluations by TPL have consistently resulted in “exceeds expectations” or “satisfactory” reviews. TPL has submitted deliverables as provided in the project agreement and modified by contract amendments. TPL maintained accurate time sheet and expense records. Three contract amendments were submitted and approved relating to budget, deliverables and timing.

With regard to finding and using other resources, TPL obtained Coastal Management Program funding to assist with the Chambers County greenprint, and Houston Endowment and other foundation and corporate funding to assist with general conservation operations and support of community stakeholder processes.

2. Sites and Strategies: The most recent transaction project list is attached, which covers those acquisitions that: (a) have been completed during the contract period, (b) are in progress, (c) have funding applications pending approval, (d) are still pending consideration by partners and TPL, or (e) have been suggested by partners, but abandoned for lack of funding or other issues. Included in the spreadsheet is information on funding strategies and project partners.

3. Stakeholder Facilitation: TPL has hosted annual meetings of agency partners to facilitate dialogue and prioritize projects for acquisition and funding applications. Meetings of the Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership have continued, though on a less regular basis than before. Resumption of a regular schedule for Armand Bayou and West Galveston Bay had been planned for 2009, allowing time for the communities to address immediate recovery efforts related to Hurricane Ike. The Clear Creek Watershed Partnership was not maintained specifically, but coordination with the City of Webster continued for funding and acquisition for Clear Creek Park.

In completing the West Galveston Island greenprint, during the contract period, TPL facilitated seven meetings of the Coordinating Committee, three meetings of the Technical Advisory Committee, and, with the full stakeholder group, a Priorities meeting and two final recommendations meetings.

For the Chambers County greenprint, during the contract period, TPL facilitated ten meetings of the Coordinating Committee, six meetings of the Technical Advisory Committee, three meetings of the larger stakeholder group, and five Strategy Exchange round table discussions.

4. **Greenprints:** TPL completed the West Galveston Island Greenprint for Growth, publishing a final report and Implementation Action Plan, and is nearing completion of the Chambers County Greenprint. The latter was originally slated for completion by 3/31/09, but has been delayed to allow the communities some time to recover from the immediate impacts of Hurricane Ike.

5. **Funding Strategies and Grant Proposals:** A previous deliverable contains copies of grant proposals submitted under this program. Below is a summary of funding strategy and grant proposal activities for projects underway during the contract period.

| <i><b>Project</b></i>            | <i><b>Funding Source(s)</b></i> | <i><b>Date of Application</b></i> | <i><b>Applicant</b></i>                      | <i><b>TPL Role</b></i>   |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| Armand Bayou / Baywood           | Congress; CELCP                 | Prior to current contract         | TPL; Harris County Precinct Two              | Provided info to Congress; Prepared application for submission by Co. to NOAA  |
| Armand Bayou / Willow Springs    | Congress; CELCP                 | Prior to current contract         | City of Pasadena                             | Provided info to Congress; Prepared application for submission by City to NOAA (project later abandoned)                     |
| Armand Bayou / Woodlands-Prairie | CIAP                            | Jul '08                           | TPL  | Prepared and submitted application to GLO  |
| Brays Bayou                      | Congress; CELCP                 | Prior to current contract         | TPL; Houston Parks Board                     | Provided info to Congress; Assisted HPB with application to NOAA   |
| Buffalo Bayou / Hidalgo          | Congress; CELCP                 | Prior to current contract         | TPL; Houston Parks and Recreation Department | Provided info to Congress; Assisted City with application to NOAA  |
| Buffalo Bayou / Japhet Creek     | Congress; CELCP                 | Prior to current contract         | TPL; Houston Parks and Recreation Department | Provided info to Congress; Assisted City with application to NOAA  |
| Clear Creek Park, Phase I        | CELCP (NOAA)                    | Mar '07                           | City of Webster                              | Prepared application for submission by City to GLO to NOAA (NOAA approved, but insufficient funds appropriated by Congress.) |
| Clear Creek Park, Phase I        | CIAP                            | Oct '06                           | TPL  | Prepared and submitted application to CIAP   |
| Clear Creek Park, Phase I        | CIAP                            | Sept '08                          | HARC   | Assisted HARC with application to CIAP   |

| <i>Project</i>         | <i>Funding Source(s)</i>                    | <i>Date of Application</i> | <i>Applicant</i>             | <i>TPL Role</i>  |
|------------------------|---|----------------------------|------------------------------|--|
| McAllis Point Phase I  | CELCP;<br>CWPPRA;<br>GBEP;<br>private; etc. | Prior to current contract  | TPL;<br>TPWD;<br>TPL;<br>TPL | Provided info to Congress;<br>Assisted with application by TPWD to CWPPRA;<br>Submitted applications to NFWF and private sources |
| McAllis Point Phase II | CMP;<br>Private and other                   | Oct '06;<br>Fall '08       | TPL                          | Prepared and submitted application to CMP and private sources  |
| McAllis Point Phase II | CIAP  | July '08                   | TPWD                         | Provided support for CIAP application by TPWD  |
| Spring Creek / Carter  | HCFCFCD                                     | Mar '07                    | TPL                          | Worked directly with HCFCFCD – no application necessary  |

6. Transaction Assistance: The accompanying transaction project list includes the projects for which TPL has provided assistance in initiating, negotiating and closing transactions.

**Other Evaluation Criteria**

In addition to the above description of accomplishing the objectives and tasks, the Conservation Assistance Program is also evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Number and geographic distribution of potential sites in ongoing list: In the current transaction list for this contract period, eight acquisitions were completed and three more are in progress. The projects range from urban bayou tributaries of Galveston Bay for inner city access to preservation of suburban tracts along less disturbed tributaries to the bayshore on West Galveston Island.
2. Number and variety of interests participating in stakeholder groups: People with particular knowledge and expertise related to the project area, from the scientific view to human uses and community values, were recruited for the committees of the West Galveston Island and Chambers County greenprints. Below is a table of those entities serving on the committees.

| <i>Stakeholder Committee</i> | <i>West Galveston Island</i>   | <i>Chambers County</i>  |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Coordinating Committees      | City of Galveston Planning<br>City of Galveston Public Works<br>Friends of Galveston Island S.P.<br>Galveston City Council<br>Galveston County Parks<br>Galveston Island Nature Tourism<br>Galveston Park Board of Trustees<br>Homeowners Associations (2)<br>U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service | Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge<br>Chambers-Liberty Counties<br>Navigation District<br>City of Beach City<br>Chambers County<br>Entrix (consulting firm)<br>Hunting & fishing guide<br>USDA Natural Resources<br>Conservation Service<br>Waterborne Education Center |

| <i>Stakeholder Committee</i>  | <i>West Galveston Island</i>  | <i>Chambers County</i>  |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Technical Advisory Committees | City of Galveston Public Works<br>Galveston Bay Estuary Program<br>Galveston County Appraisal District<br>Galveston Economic Development Partnership<br>Houston-Galveston Area Council<br>NOAA Fisheries<br>NOAA Restoration Center<br>Texas Commission on Environmental Quality<br>Texas Parks & Wildlife Dept.<br>U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service<br>UT Bureau of Economic Geology | Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge<br>Chambers County<br>County Surveyor (retired)<br>Galveston Bay Estuary Program<br>Galveston Bay Foundation<br>Houston-Galveston Area Council<br>NOAA Fisheries<br>NOAA Restoration Center<br>U.S. Army Corps of Engineers<br>U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service<br>USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service |

In the larger stakeholder meetings, a very broad diversity of interests participated. The Chambers County Kick-off meeting on March 27, 2007, attracted 66 people – the largest attendance of any TPL stakeholder meeting in the country to that time. In addition to most of the people on the committees, attendees included representatives of Chambers County Commissioners Court, the fishing industry, landowners, local newspapers, chambers of commerce, City of Anahuac, City of Mont Belview, and farmers and ranchers. Though smaller in attendance numbers (~20), participants in the West Galveston Island stakeholder meetings to develop recommendations were also diverse, and achieved at least partial buy-in from some who had opposed the process early on. Over the course of the Chambers County Strategy Exchange Week, a total of 63 participants with interests in the diverse issues attended the four round tables: increasing wildlife-based uses for greater income diversification; accessing and utilizing existing funds and creating new non-federal funds for land conservation; conserving corporate owned lands for habitat purposes; and viably producing alternative crops for farmers markets.

3. Completion of at least two funding solicitations: TPL submitted the following grant proposals for funding for land acquisitions:

- 2006 TPL grant application to Coastal Management Program for McAllis Point Phase II
- 2007 TPL grant application to the Coastal Impact Assistance Program for Clear Creek Park Phase I
- 2008 TPL grant application to Houston Endowment for funding for McAllis Point Phase II
- 2008 TPL grant application to the Coastal Impact Assistance Program for Armand Bayou acquisition

TPL assisted with the following proposals submitted by others:

- 2008 TPWD grant application to National Coastal Wetlands Program for McAllis PointPhase II
- 2008 Houston Advanced Research Center for a Coastal Impact Assistance Program application for Clear Creek acquisition

Finally, TPL directly approached the following for matching contributions:

- Harris County Flood Control District for match funding for Armand Bayou FY06 CELCP funding
- ExxonMobil for land contributions along Armand Bayou and Clear Creek

4. Acquisition of at least three conservation properties (may include more than one parcel), meeting at least two of the project goals for acquisition: Eight conservation properties were acquired. All are directly linked to riparian areas or Galveston Bay, and all but one are within the Coastal Zone Management boundary. Of the eight, four are part of a Brays Bayou greenway assemblage, and two are part of a Buffalo Bayou/Japhet Creek greenway assemblage. These greenways also provide opportunities for significant public access to coastal tributaries. The McAllis Point project addresses four of the five project goals: unique conservation values of wetlands, direct link to Galveston Bay, significant public access to Galveston Bay, and prevention/abatement of nonpoint source pollution from the upland portion of the island in that area. The Spring Creek project is not within the coastal zone, but addresses the same four goals as McAllis Point, plus bottomland hardwood forest.

## **PROJECT CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED**

Success at accomplishing the goals of the Conservation Assistance Program requires the following skills, among others: identifying and cultivating partners for projects; writing grants; negotiating land deals; conducting due diligence; maintaining strong and positive relationships with local governments, agencies, and environmental leaders; and facilitating stakeholder meetings.

Experience continues to teach lessons for a successful program of land conservation in this region:

1. Effective implementation of a land conservation project entails much more than the mechanics of land negotiations and due diligence of a land transaction: It requires extensive partnering to identify projects and funding sources, along with the time to apply for and assemble the funds prior to closing the deal.
2. Developing community consensus on greenprinting for growth requires a time commitment to meet frequently, and even individually, with local stakeholders to gain their investment in the process.
3. There is no substitute for local knowledge in developing the data for greenprint models. Participants will often volunteer extensive time and talent to contribute to and review the data.
4. Land acquisition projects in a community undergoing a greenprint do not need to wait for completion of the greenprint to begin. In fact, there is a strong synergy in defining a land conservation project early in the greenprinting process – one that is targeted to meet

likely community goals. Stakeholders in the greenprinting process will support (often financially) the acquisition, and those interested in the acquisition (including donors) will be drawn to the greenprinting process for additional community protection.

5. Once a greenprint is developed, stewardship of the community process is needed to help bring additional land conservation projects to the table. Even before the greenprinting process begins, local interests are already pulled in many directions, and an ongoing shepherding of community resources toward land conservation following completion of the greenprint is likely to bring greater on-the-ground results. This shepherding should include regular stakeholder meetings and an outreach program to take the greenprinting results out to the larger community.