

GALVESTON BAY ESTUARY PROGRAM

FINAL – Galveston Bay Council Meeting Minutes– April 19, 2017

Galveston Bay Council Chair: Nancy Parra (League of Women Voters)

Galveston Bay Council Vice-Chair: Helen Paige (Marinas)

Estuary Program Staff Lead: Sarah Bernhardt, Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP)

The April 19, 2017 quarterly Galveston Bay Council meeting was held at Harris-Galveston Subsidence District, 1660 West Bay Area Blvd., Houston, Texas, from 9:32 AM to 12:25 PM.

Members Present: Scott Alford, Caryn Brooks, Rebecca Hensley, Kelly Holligan, John Huffman, Brian Koch, Kristin Lambrecht, Mike Lee, Helen Paige, Nancy Parra, Hanadi Rifai, Ronnie Schultz, Linda Shead, Matthew Still, Bob Stokes, Chuck Wemple, Kirk Wiles, Kate Zultner

Members Not Present/Delegates: Bill Baker*, Andrea Catanzaro*, Glenn Clingenpeel, Mark Fisher, Albert Gonzales, Phillip Goodwin*, Carla Guthrie*, James Harcourt*, Jace Houston*, John Jacob*, Doug Jacobson, Luz Locke, Garry McMahan*, Ana Partin, Russ Poppe*, Aaron Rice, Mary Beth Stengler, Sharron Stewart, Rusty Swafford, Jeff Taebel*
Lori Traweek

(*=Member designated a proxy)

Proxies Present (council member absent/designated proxy): Bill Baker/Scott Alford, Andrea Catanzaro/Jennifer Morgan, Phillip Goodwin/Richard Chapin, Carla G. Guthrie/Caimee Schoenbaechler, James Harcourt/Audrey Kuklenz, Jace Houston/Jordan Austin, /Mary John Jacob/Carol Edwards, Garry McMahan/Jacqueline Munoz, Russ Poppe/Glenn Laird, Jeff Taebel/Todd Running, Rusty Swafford, Kate Zultner/Mollie Powell

Current Vacancies: None

Other Attendees: Stefanie Simpson (Restore America's Estuaries), Mark McCollum (Rail Road Commission)

Additional GBEP Staff present: Cynthia Clevenger, Lindsey Lippert, Lisa Marshall, Mary Stiles

Call to Order: Introduction of Members and Delegates

Action Item: Approval of January 18, 2016 Meeting Minutes

Nancy Parra (Chair) opened the meeting with approval of the January 18, 2017 meeting minutes and opened the floor for questions and comments. A motion was requested for approval of the minutes. John Huffman motioned to approve the minutes, followed by Brian Koch who seconded the motion. The minutes were approved with no changes.

Chair Report:

Nancy Parra reported upcoming mid-term nominations and the process of the chair. Nancy Parra asked everyone to review the council listing (P.17 of their handouts), and reported the positions highlighted in yellow have terms that will end in November 2017. Those members need to be nominated by their organizations or by GBC to take on a new term (2017-2021) or a new nominee/appointee needs to be identified to fill the position in November 2017.

Sarah Bernhardt reported one nomination from Great Houston Partnership Will Nipper, Dow, replacing Jarod Davis, Dow. Sarah reported approval of the newly appointed Railroad Commission member Audrey Kuklenz. Linda Shead suggested the agenda be modified followed by nomination approval vote. Modify the agenda by adding the action for the July council agenda, as well as adding the action item to the Texas Register Open Meeting Agenda and will check Robert's Rules.

Nancy Parra motioned for nomination approval from the council, Bob Stokes motioned for approval, Kirk Wiles second motion for approval. Federal agency representatives were deemed to have abstained:

Nancy read to the council a letter of support (handout) to Dr. Steven Penning, Director, UH Coastal Center. Nancy reported briefly to the council the support letter states the University of Houston Coastal Center is actively involved in performing the research and education and the services activities related to the coastal prairies. Nancy reported on legislative notices and if anyone like to receive email alerts members can provide their email address to create a list for future notices.

Report of the Program:

Sarah Bernhardt reported to the council budget changes due for Fiscal year 2017 (FY 17) (see handout). She reported GBEP gave up \$36,000 state FY 17 funding to TCEQ due to statewide budget shortfall.

Linda Shead commented that she had issues with the process changes that happened on the Galveston Bay Action Network (GBAN) project, GBAN was approved by the Council, but later removed from the work plan due to concerns from the TCEQ about the project being duplicative of TCEQ's own complaint reporting system.

Linda Shead moved to approve the FY 2018 work plan changes, seconded by Brian Koch. Rebecca Hensley, Kirk Wiles, and Bob Stokes abstained due to involvement in projects selected in the work plan.

Nancy Parra introduced the first presenter to the council, Stefanie Simpson with Restore America's Estuaries.

Presentation: Presenting the status of and opportunities for Blue Carbon in Galveston Bay, Stefanie Simpson, Restore America's Estuaries

Stefanie Simpson provided the following presentation notes:

Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) works nationally and with our member organizations (e.g. Galveston Bay Foundation) and other partners to advance coastal wetland restoration and conservation. We do this through recognition of the many

ecosystem services these habitats provide, including shoreline stabilization, resiliency to storms and flooding, key marine habitat, improved water quality, and carbon storage.

What is Blue Carbon?

Blue Carbon refers to the greenhouse gases (GHG) stored in, captured (sequestered) by and released by tidal wetlands, including seagrass, marsh, mangrove and other tidal wetlands. We are interested in this ecosystem service as a way to enhance the management of and public/private investment in coastal restoration and conservation efforts.

Blue Carbon Science

Coastal ecosystems capture carbon by 1) photosynthesis, 2) sediment transport, and 3) the buildup of dead/decaying vegetation. Coastal habitats accumulate carbon in the ground at rates 10 times more efficient than terrestrial forests. Coastal habitats store the majority of their carbon in the soil, where it can remain locked up indefinitely as long as the habitat remains intact.

When coastal habitats are drained or degraded, the stored carbon can re-oxidize, releasing what can be 100s of years of stored carbon back into the atmosphere in a matter of decades. Globally, an estimated half a billion tons of CO₂ is released every year due to coastal degradation – this is equivalent to the emissions of a country like Japan or Great Britain.

Market Opportunity

In the carbon market, businesses, governments and individuals can reduce their carbon footprint through the purchase of carbon offsets. One carbon offset is equal to one metric ton of CO₂ equivalents (other GHGs are converted to units of CO₂ for consistency). The purchase of carbon offsets goes to support projects that prevent or reduce atmospheric GHGs.

Activities in tidal wetlands that can result in a climate benefit and therefore generate carbon offsets include 1) wetland restoration, which increases carbon sequestration (via vegetative photosynthesis) and halting the emission of CO₂ from drained/degraded wetlands; and 2) wetland conservation, which protects the existing carbon stored beneath wetlands from being disturbed and emitted.

Galveston Bay Blue Carbon Study (ongoing)

With funding from Accenture, and through a partnership with Galveston Bay Foundation and Texas A&M University-Galveston, RAE is leading a blue carbon study to gather carbon data for restored and natural marsh in Galveston Bay. 12 sites were identified with the help of GBF, Galveston Bay Estuary Program, and TAMUG that include restored marsh of varying ages as well as 3 reference (natural) marsh sites.

The study approach includes collecting soil carbon cores to determine carbon storage and sequestration rates, and plant biomass + leaf carbon content to determine vegetative carbon storage.

Initial results show restored marsh vegetation stores as much if not more carbon as natural marsh, and soil carbon accumulation increases after restoration. Data is still be processed. There will be a final report to be presented in GB summer 2017. In addition, data from this study will be used in marketing materials to gauge interest from local industry groups to invest in coastal restoration projects for their carbon benefit, and RAE will be using the data to update ecosystem service reports for Galveston Bay to include carbon storage services and therefore valuing coastal wetlands for the full suite of ecosystem services they provide.

For more information, or to sign up for RAE's monthly Blue Carbon Buzz e-newsletter to keep up to date on blue carbon events, publications, webinars, resources and more, visit www.estuaries.org/bluecarbon or email Stefanie at ssimpson@estuaries.org.

Questions & Comments

Mary Carol Edwards commented on restored wetlands accumulating carbon at rates higher than undisturbed wetlands. Anna Armitage's theory is that the plants used in restoration could be hybrids, and the genetic composition could be more robust than the native grasses. Bob Stokes commented that it was the same with forests (higher on new forests versus existing).

Nancy Parra asked how you actually buy credits in the voluntary market, to which Stefanie replied that there are protocols in place to ensure carbon offsets are legitimate.

Kate Zultner question on whether this information supports restoring wetlands versus preserving wetlands.

Each Presentation Slides Are Available Upon Request.

Presentation: Status of the Galveston Bay Plan Revision and feedback on Workshop Two by Sarah Bernhardt

Sarah Bernhardt reported the following information:

- Workshop #2 was held on March 1, 2017 from 2:00pm - 4:00pm in La Marque, Texas.
- Purpose of Workshop #2 was to vet the prioritized framework and action plans with a focus on implementation feasibility.
- Fifty-Four stakeholders, including GBEP and Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) staff, attended.
- Digital Workshop #2 Questionnaires (12 in total) were provided to Galveston Bay Council and Subcommittee members unable to attend Workshop #2
- Open March 23, 2017 - April 5, 2017
- Feedback is being calculated; however will work on getting some type of status or cool graphics from Exercise #3 (grid).

As concluding points (based on review of the graph and end data), some corresponding stats were presented.

General: All of the specific objectives advance the program mission, 73% (29/40) strongly supported mission.

WSQ: Specific objectives contained the most variability between “Ease” and “Mission”, 63% (10/16) were considered easy to very easy to implement and 56% (9/16) strongly support mission implementation.

NRU: 63% (5/8) of NRU were considered easy to very easy to implement. Notable that Land Acquisition and Invasive Species Control were consider very difficult to implement, (75% (6/8) were considered strongly in support of the mission.

M&R: 100% (10/10) M&R objectives were considered strongly supporting, but only 40% (4/10) were considered easy to implement.

PPE: PPE clustered the most with three objectives, 50% considered easy to implement and three considered difficult, though only slightly. Nearly all 67% (4/6) were considered as strongly implementing the mission.

With regards to how these percentages were calculated and the purpose of Exercise #3, focused on implementation feasibility.

Each Presentation Slides Are Available Upon Request.

Discussion: Roles of the Galveston Bay Council Members and Vision for meetings.

Sarah Bernhardt reported the Council is an advisory committee to the TCEO and Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP). The Council will perform the following functions.

- Provide a forum for technical and stakeholder group review and input during Galveston Bay Plan implementation.
- Advise the TCEO staff during preparation of progress reports, evaluations, and Plan updates.
- Authorize and make appointments to subcommittees as necessary.
- Assess the success of action plan and initiate revisions.
- Address legislative issues and make recommendations to the Texas Legislature
- Advise the TCEO as to annual priorities for implementation of action plans
- Monitor the effectiveness of action taken pursuant to the Plan
- Review all federal financial assistance programs and federal development projects in accordance with Section 320 of the Clean Water Act.

Sarah informed the GBC members a follow up email or Survey Monkey will be in the works to ask each GBC member what they think the role of the members are on the

Galveston Bay Council. There will be non-attributed responses that we can revisit. If responses indicate, the GBC could form a task force and that could be described in the plan revision. Sarah asked council members if they had any suggestions on how we orient the Council meeting. Is there interest allocating some time to working group? Program updates? Topical presentations?

Considering following up with a survey:

Are the meetings productive?

Would they like to get together in work group? Eg. Form an advocacy workgroup.

Do they feel the subcommittee and the GBC communicate enough? Do they need more information from the subcommittees?

John Huffman and Hanadi Rifai commented that the format of GBC meetings are fine, but a working meeting for the Plan review and budget changes should be held for the July meeting.

Discussion: Revisiting the goals of the Galveston Bay Regional Monitoring Program

Sarah Bernhardt reminded the group that there was a Regional Monitoring Workgroup Meeting on February 23, 2017. Some of topics that were discussed at the meeting include: indicators that have been included in the status and trends database, how often should they be reviewed, the State of the Bay Report, the State of the Bay Symposium, a schedule for GBEP programmatic projects, the structure of the subcommittees and their interaction with the Council, etc. Some of the ideas will be incorporated into the new monitoring plan and some may be revisited as part of the adaptive management of the new monitoring plan.

The one topic Sarah hoped to discuss during this Council meeting was whether or not additional goals should be added to the new monitoring plan. For those that were not able to attend the meeting, she mentioned the two goals of the current monitoring program are: 1.) Are the goals and objectives set forth in the Galveston Bay Plan (GBP) being met? 2.) Is the health of the ecosystem changing?

Linda Shead suggested that we should look at how to provide support and more information to make our projects more effective.

John Huffman mentioned that there is a group at the Gulf of Mexico level that is discussing the standardization of monitoring protocols for restoration efforts. Maybe the M&R Subcommittee should be in contact with them.

If anyone has anything they would like to discuss concerning the regional monitoring plan, please contact Lisa Marshall.

Subcommittee Reports: (Subcommittee Handouts included in Packets if available)

Monitoring and Research (M&R) - The M&R subcommittee did not meet due to The Regional Monitoring Plan Workgroup met on February 23, 2017 in place of the M&R Subcommittee.

Public Participation and Education (PPE) - The Subcommittee meeting was held on

March 23. The HERE (Houston Environmental Resources for Educators) project was discussed. There will be a small group working on populating the HERE website for the Galveston Bay page. There has been some interest in having an education workshop/session at the next State of the Bay Symposium in 2019, and a small workgroup will be formed to head up this effort. Trash and plastic pollution continues to be a priority focus area for the subcommittee. Some groups are participating in the Trash Summit held at the Houston Zoo in May. Cynthia participates in the Public Pollution Prevention (P3) Partnership as well as Bayou Preservation Associations Nonpoint Source Pollution Prevention Committee. These groups are focusing on trash and plastic pollution. Bayou Preservation Association will be working on developing a white paper on trash and litter problems in the Houston area.

Water/Sediment Quality (WSQ) - The WSQ Subcommittee discussed the projects that subcommittee members are currently working on and challenges they are facing with those projects; the other subcommittee coordinators gave an update of projects that are being funded from their subcommittees.

Natural Resource Uses (NRU) - The NRU subcommittee would be having a joint meeting with Houston Wilderness on May 11, 2017 at the Estuary Program office. The purpose would be to discuss NRU overlaps with the Galveston Bay Oyster and Migratory Bird (GBOMB) Initiative, to attempt to better collaborate on our shared goals and priorities, while also taking into consideration the valuable time of our many stakeholders involved in both groups. In addition to improved collaboration, the meeting will help to inform implementation of the NRU Habitat and Species Conservation Action Plans currently under revision, provide information and direction to the subcommittee and Galveston Bay Council, and improve future conservation projects.

Budget and Priorities Subcommittee - Sarah Bernhardt reported that B&P met on April 4th and provided a summary during the report of the program.

Council Members Roundtable: News and Announcements:

Mary Carol Edwards (Proxy for John Jacob) - **Exploration Green** Wetland Planting Days April 15, 2017, May 13th and 17th, 2017. GBEP funded the nursery at Exploration Green.

Todd Running - **Basin Highlights Report will be available on May 15th**. Trash Bash Event held March 23, 2017, there were 538 tires total at all the sites

John Huffman - Fish and Wildlife Service will have their 33rd Annual Crawfish Boil, May 11th, 2017 at Challenger 7 Park, please RSVP by May 1, 2017.

Brian Koch - Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board Stewardship the Importance of Voluntary Land Stewardship Week of April 20th through May 7th, 2017 the focus this year is "No Land No Water."

Bob Stokes - Marsh Mania April 22, 2017, GBF Annual Meeting April 19, 2017, Bay Day May 13, 2017,

Mike Lee - USGS will have the Wallisville Gauge report online

Sarah Bernhardt – Thanked GBEP staff for their hard work with the Galveston Bay Plan and workshops

Nancy Parra – Announced to council members invitation to lunch

Linda Shead – The BPA annual awards luncheon will present Debra January Bevers with an award.

Caimee Schoenbaechler (Proxy for Carla Guthrie) – Positions open hiring until May 1, 2017

Glen Laird (Proxy for Russ Poppe) – Fund project 127 acres

Kelly Holligan – Regarding RESTORE:

- In consultation with the Governor's Office, Commissioner Baker has completed his review of the proposals submitted for RESTORE Bucket 1 (direct component) funding and has developed a list of draft projects. The draft list does not guarantee funding but is a significant step forward in the Texas' RESTORE process. Texas will now develop a multi-year implementation plan that will include the draft projects list before publishing for public comment in the Texas Register. Public comments received will be considered before a final implementation plan with projects will be submitted to the US Treasury for approval before making individual awards. At this point there is no timetable for development of the implementation plan or treasury approval. Roughly \$66 million is available under the 2016 Request for Grants Application.

Regarding the TMDL Program:

- The Tres Palacios Watershed Protection Plan was submitted to EPA for review and approval on 3/21/17.
- The Tres Palacios TMDL and Implementation-Plan and Jarbo Bayou TMDL are scheduled to go to agenda for release for public comment on July 7th, 2017.

Regarding the NPS Program:

- The draft Texas NPS Management Program update is scheduled to go to agenda for release for public comment on April 26, 2017. The update is due to EPA in 2017.

Regarding the 2016 Integrated Report:

- The TCEQ and EPA are coordinating to resolve remaining issues related to the assessment of nutrients in reservoirs. Once these issues are resolved, the IR will be released for public comment.

Regarding the Water Quality Standards:

- Standards are currently under preparation for the 2017 revision. It is anticipated that standards will be proposed for public comment to the Commission in late summer of 2017.

Regarding the Clean Rivers Program:

The calendar of upcoming Steering Committee Meeting dates may be accessed from the statewide Coordinated Monitoring Schedule. Meetings occur throughout the year and help to establish monitoring priorities. The 2017 Coordinated Monitoring Schedule has been updated and is available on the TCEQ website.

Kate Zultner – ECO Teachers... The Texas Coastal Resiliency Master Plan is complete and available online. Adopt a Beach will be held from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. on April 22, 2017

Audrey Kuklenz (RRC) – reported on the bay and offshore well monitoring, stating 75-80 of 300 wells had been inspected.

Public comments: No public comments were received.

Adjourn: Meeting was adjourned at 12:25pm

Upcoming Galveston Bay Council Meeting Dates: July 19, 2017, October 28, 2017. If there are known conflicts, Council members are encouraged to propose alternate dates to the Council. Proposed dates are all third Wednesday of each quarter from 9:30am to 12:30pm.