

Conservation Assistance Program

Galveston Bay Watershed



Final Report

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Prepared in cooperation with the Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP) a program of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Galveston Bay Estuary Program's (GBEP) Conservation Assistance Program (CAP) provides regional support for land conservation efforts within the Galveston Bay watershed. The CAP partnership between GBEP and Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF) provides financial resources to coordinate, develop and implement land acquisition projects, provide transactional support to local conservation organizations, and organize a workgroup of natural resource partners dedicated to perpetual land conservation efforts within the Galveston Bay watershed. Program objectives include identifying and developing priority land acquisition projects, implementing conservation strategies, negotiating fee simple and conservation easement acquisitions, and closing land conservation projects.

Tasks identified to accomplish the CAP objectives include: (1) grant administration; (2) coordination of a land conservation workgroup; (3) conservation project tracking; (4) preparation of grant proposals to secure acquisition funding; (5) implementation of conservation projects and identified strategies; and (6) public outreach related to regional land conservation efforts.

CAP efforts from 2011 to 2017 resulted in success of the program goals and objectives. Successful conservation projects were completed in Chambers, Galveston, and Brazoria Counties and high priority habitats were protected within target geographic areas. GBF led efforts on four successful conservation projects and provided support to partner organizations to complete five projects. The Galveston Bay watershed gained more than 5,000 acres of perpetually conserved lands as a direct result of CAP investment.

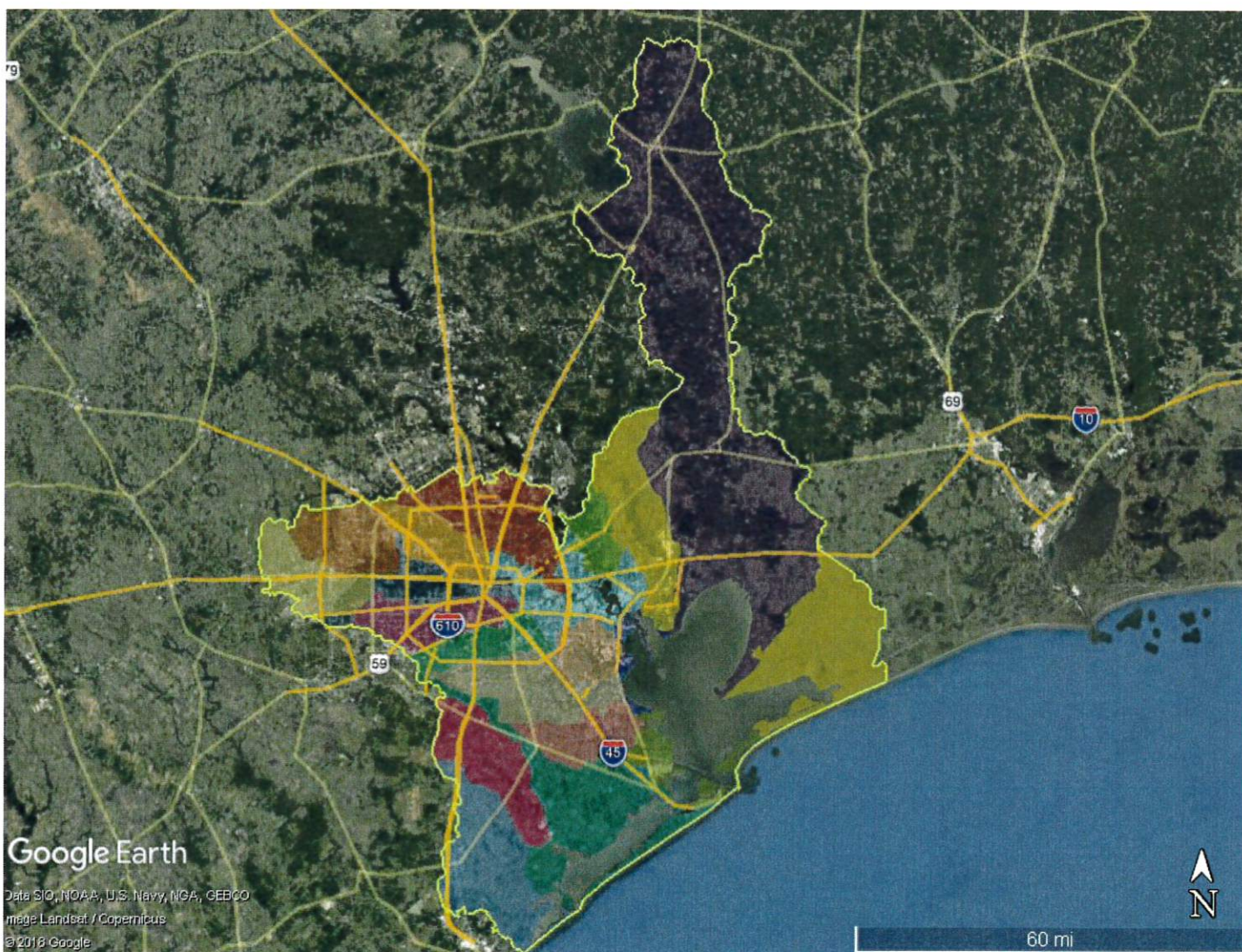


Figure 1: Lower Galveston Bay Watershed

INTRODUCTION

Population growth in the Houston-Galveston region continues to put pressure on remaining open space, threatening the productivity of existing wildlife and fisheries habitats, agricultural areas, and the quality of water in Galveston Bay. Conversion of natural areas, agricultural lands, and other open spaces to suburban residential and commercial land uses presents a real threat to the sustainability and productivity of the Galveston Bay estuarine system. Subdivision of large ranches and farms into smaller parcels diminishes the ecological value of those lands for migratory and resident wildlife populations along the coast. Also, the expanding suburban edge of the Houston metro area inflates land values of target conservation properties throughout the region.

In response to these factors, the CAP was initiated in 2011 and renewed multiple times through 2017 to accelerate acquisition of land resources throughout the watershed and protect critical natural landscapes with specific ecological values. The overall goal of the CAP is to support GBEP and its partners' efforts to preserve wetlands and other important coastal habitats within the Galveston Bay watershed to protect the long-term health and productivity of Galveston Bay. GBEP identified the following CAP goals:

- Identify priority conservation properties with the help and consensus of conservation partners.
- Develop funding strategies for land acquisition projects through grant identification, grant writing, and fundraising efforts.
- Work with willing sellers to negotiate fee simple or conservation easement transactions.
- Provide legal, title, and other due diligence transaction support for CAP projects.
- Finalize the sale and transfer of title to a third-party organization or government entity.

Specific objectives for the program were designed to reflect regional conservation priorities, engage conservation stakeholders, and provide support to land acquisition projects within the region. Three CAP objectives are outlined below.

Preserve coastal wetlands and natural areas:

The Galveston Bay Plan identifies perpetual land conservation as one of the best strategies for protecting the biodiversity and overall health of the estuarine system. Furthermore, the Plan identifies the need for an ecosystem approach that promotes physical and hydrological connectivity of habitats with existing ecological value. CAP conservation objectives address these needs by targeting land parcels 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;
- provide public access to Galveston Bay and its coastal tributaries; or
- reduce or prevent nonpoint source pollution by providing storm water abatement.

Facilitate a conservation workgroup

There are many local, state, and national organizations and government agencies actively seeking to protect land along the Texas coast for various conservation objectives. The purpose of this workgroup is to engage stakeholders already working within the Galveston Bay watershed, build consensus and support for land conservation projects, and identify opportunities for partnerships that will accelerate land acquisition within CAP target areas.

Provide transactional support.

The CAP provides due diligence and real estate acquisition assistance for conservation projects in the

Galveston Bay watershed. This includes identifying viable conservation projects, negotiating terms of conservation easement or fee simple sales, managing funding sources, and assisting with the completion of due diligence like surveys, appraisals, and environmental site assessments. The CAP can also provide partners with financial support for unfunded due diligence activities when funding is available.

Acquisition of intertidal wetlands, tallgrass prairie, coastal forests, and freshwater wetlands preserves existing foraging and nesting habitats for many avian species protected by federal law and nursery habitat for commercially significant fisheries species. The existence of two or more of these habitats in close proximity promotes overall biodiversity and productivity within the region.

A regional land conservation program helps support and ensure a healthy coastal ecosystem for Galveston Bay. The CAP's three-tier structure of building capacity within local non-profit organizations, engaging conservation partners, and providing support for acquisition projects has proven to be a successful model for regional land conservation initiatives.



Figure 2: Lone Pine Farm with bottomland hardwood forest along Austin Bayou

PROJECT SIGNIFICANCE AND BACKGROUND

Galveston Bay is the largest and most productive estuary in Texas, and second only to the Chesapeake Bay system among U.S. estuaries in fisheries productivity. Galveston Bay is the single defining geographic feature for the Houston metropolitan region, and serves as the foundation for its economy. Galveston Bay and its many waterways and diverse natural features afford an array of recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, and plays an essential role in maintaining a high quality of life.

Over five million people, or 75 percent of Texas' coastal population, reside in the five counties surrounding Galveston Bay. As a result, human activities have significantly altered the ecosystem and affected its productivity, converting coastal wetlands to human uses, and fragmenting remaining coastal natural areas. The Houston metropolitan area is growing rapidly, and its population is expected to nearly double by 2035 (H-GAC, 2007). This growth will place increasing pressure on coastal natural resources, and likely result in additional coastal habitat loss and fragmentation. The U.S. EPA characterizes coastal wetland and associated habitat loss in Texas as severe (EPA, 1999), and this is a continuing concern because of the many important functions and values these features provide. Wetland loss in the Galveston Bay system is greater than in other areas of the state.

Many local scientists and resource managers believe that continued habitat loss poses the greatest single threat to the Galveston Bay ecosystem. Galveston Bay Estuary Program's habitat loss studies primarily focus on wetlands. However, the bay system features a diversity of habitats, including extensive coastal prairies and forests that contribute to the health and productivity of the estuary, and provide many important functions and values to humans. The upland components of these habitat complexes receive limited regulatory protection, and are subject to significant loss and fragmentation. While minimal data exist on fragmentation and loss of these valuable upland features, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) reports that less than one percent remains of the once vast expanses of coastal prairie, and considers coastal prairie ecosystems to be "critically imperiled" (USFWS, 2000).



Figure 3: Gordy Marsh brackish wetlands

METHODS

The CAP focused on promoting land conservation within the Galveston Bay watershed by helping stakeholders complete fee simple and conservation easement transactions. The process established to provide this assistance includes strengthening local land trusts, engaging conservation partners, identifying land conservation priorities, implementing conservation strategies, and educating local communities on the benefits of land conservation.

Build Capacity

To accomplish regional land conservation goals, the CAP needed to develop transactional expertise to share with the conservation community and strengthen partnering land trusts. The CAP invested in the education of GBF staff to maintain status as an Accredited Land Trust, implement national standards and practices for perpetual land conservation, and bring tools and strategies to the Galveston Bay region that have been successful in other parts of the state and country. GBF attended the Land Trust Alliance Rally, Texas Land Trust Council Annual Conference, and helped form the Gulf-wide Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation. These educational and capacity building opportunities strengthened GBF as a land trust and expanded expertise in real estate transactions.

Facilitate a Conservation Workgroup

GBF contracted with a local conservation consultant, Linda Shead, to coordinate with regional land conservation entities and facilitate the conservation workgroup meetings. Her local knowledge of conservation projects, governmental process, funding sources, and local partners brought credibility and substance to the workgroup meetings.

Meetings were scheduled an average of three to four times per year, depending on stakeholder availability, and were held at easily accessible local forums such as the Harris-Galveston Subsidence District and Armand Bayou Nature Center. Agendas were distributed prior to meetings and summary notes were kept on file to document discussion. Meeting conversations were typically dominated by updates on acquisition projects, development of funding strategy, and new opportunities for land conservation within the watershed. Handouts with project information, maps, and habitat descriptions were provided to attendees and Google Earth was displayed with a projector to provide spatial context and aerial imagery.

Maintain a List of Conservation Projects

Over the course of the grant many projects were proposed, debated, and investigated for conservation merit. Many of these were deemed worthwhile, while others were not as attractive due to various circumstance. The conservation workgroup decided to keep a running list of projects, categorized by level of activity, to track progress and acquisition efforts. Ongoing projects actively seeking funding or completing due diligence activities were compiled on the "Active Projects List". Projects that had consensus as high conservation value but were unsure about willing sellers, future holders, or funding sources were tabulated on the "Project

Investigation List". Projects that were identified as good projects but lacked any sort of communication with landowners or traction for acquisition were classified on the "Potential Projects List". These lists focused CAP efforts, organized regional projects and lead partners, and helped determine the need for CAP resources and assistance.

The current project lists are attached to this report as Appendix A.

Project Selection

Conservation partners of the Workgroup were encouraged to bring projects for discussion and consideration for CAP assistance. Conservation partners were instructed to fill out Project Information Sheets for each project to provide property attributes like size, location, habitats, and other pertinent information for the group to consider. To qualify as a CAP project, the targeted land parcel must include one or more of the following attributes:

- 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;
- Provide public access to Galveston Bay and its coastal tributaries; or
- Reduce or prevent nonpoint source pollution by providing storm water abatement

Conservation Initiative Areas

The CAP identified two initiative areas to help focus acquisition efforts. Limited time, resources, and funding provide a significant challenge when attempting to address land conservation on such a large scale. The size of unprotected land parcels, presence of high quality target habitats, proximity to Galveston Bay waters, and relatively low price per acre were some of the factors considered when delineating these initiative areas.

Having set initiatives and selection criteria did not preclude projects that are outside of the initiative boundary from receiving CAP assistance, but those projects needed to provide justification of their ecological values and overall conservation benefit. The intent of the project selection criteria was to focus efforts and resources to complete projects that have the most ecological value for the region.

West Bay Conservation Initiative

The West Galveston Bay (hereafter West Bay) watershed is a highly biologically productive area. Because of its rich natural features and relatively high water quality, West Bay and its watershed support an abundance and diversity of fisheries and wildlife. Preserving wetlands and natural areas is critical to maintaining the water quality in this relatively pristine region, and to protecting valuable fish and wildlife habitat.

The greater Galveston Bay watershed lost nearly 35,000 acres (20%) of its wetlands between 1950 and 1990, and 1800 acres (70%) of its seagrasses. Much of this wetland loss and nearly all the seagrass loss occurred in and around West Bay. Recent studies indicate that the system continues to lose wetlands at a rapid rate. The Houston metropolitan area is expected to grow rapidly in coming decades, and subsequent wetlands and habitat loss is expected, including continued loss in the West Bay area. Increased urbanization will also likely impact water quality.

The West Bay Conservation Initiative, formally established by GBEP in 2005, is a concentrated effort in West Bay comprised of numerous conservation, restoration, and habitat protection projects supported by nonprofit organizations, state and federal agencies, and private partners.

Habitat protection and restoration measures are being implemented to protect or restore several biological communities critical to the Galveston Bay ecosystem including fringing intertidal and high marsh, tidal flats, freshwater wetlands, and coastal prairie. These ecosystem components provide nesting and foraging habitats for avian species; including protected migratory and endangered species; and commercially and recreationally important finfish and shellfish species.

Since 2011, the land acquisition under this effort has been carried out through the CAP. The CAP work group consists of many of the members of the original West Bay partners, and provides strategic guidance and technical expertise for the initiative. The CAP workgroup identifies conservation projects, develops funding strategies, works with landowners to negotiate conservation transactions, carries out due diligence, and finalizes purchase and transfers of title to the appropriate land conservation entity. GBEP works with the GBF through the CAP to conduct any transactions necessary for the conservation of targeted sites. The CAP workgroup also identifies other conservation organizations to hold fee title or hold conservation easements for target sites.

Project partners previously completed a habitat and land use assessment of the West Bay watershed to identify and prioritize key natural areas, and are actively pursuing conservation through a variety of mechanisms including purchase of development rights (PDR), under the PDR program administered by the Texas General Land Office (GLO), conservation easements, and fee simple purchase.

Project partners believe that it is essential to maintain geographic and mechanistic fluidity to achieve the goal of this project, rather than attempting to commit to individual tracts and types of agreements for two important reasons:

1. Conservation partners can approach landowners from a position of relative bargaining strength with funds in hand. Approaching landowners with the prospects of securing funds at some point many months in the future has proved to be an ineffective approach.
2. Even in cases where the landowners agree to wait several months or years on the availability of grant funds, these individuals are likely to be approached with purchase offers during the waiting period. The higher the offer and/or the longer it takes to secure funds for conservation purchase, the more likely the landowner is to accept other offers.

East Bay Conservation Initiative

A special conservation initiative is focused on the East Galveston Bay watershed (hereafter East Bay) and fringing areas to protect the rich natural features and water quality. Conservation partners, specifically informed through the Trust for Public Land's Chambers County Greenprint for Growth and Conservation, have identified East Bay as a high-priority region because of its relatively pristine nature. East Bay's wildlife habitat is integral to its economic and environmental health. Because of its rural character and already protected lands, much of its natural habitat remains intact. Habitat types of concern for conservation in East Bay include: fresh and estuarine marshes, riparian corridors, oak mottes, coastal prairies, and flyway corridors for migratory birds. Currently conserved lands in East Bay include County parks, privately managed preserves, state wildlife management areas, and national wildlife refuges (NWR).

The dominant change in land use and habitat loss occurring in East Bay is the conversion of farm and ranch land to building sites for single-family homes. The trend toward exurban development, driven in part by increased mobility of people and jobs in the 21st century economy, is common throughout the Houston-Galveston region. Increased urbanization resulting in habitat loss has the potential to degrade water quality and the region's ecological productivity.

The GBEP, through the CAP, proposed working with local stakeholders to identify and place natural areas crucial for water quality and wildlife protection, as well as coastal hazard mitigation, under long-term conservation. This initiative is implemented by the CAP workgroup, who will identify and prioritize areas, and actively pursue conservation through a variety of mechanisms including PDRs, conservation easements, fee simple purchases, and other mechanisms. Partners will also work to ensure that the long-term management of these lands maximizes their conservation value.

The Galveston Bay Estuary Program will work with The Galveston Bay Foundation, through the existing CAP partnership, to conduct any transactions necessary for the conservation of targeted sites. The CAP Workgroup will also identify other conservation organizations to hold fee title or hold conservation easements for target sites. This watershed-based approach has worked successfully in recent efforts to conserve coastal habitats in the West Galveston Bay Watershed. The Galveston Bay Estuary Program and the GLO directly contributed funds toward the PDR for the Savannah Oaks Conservation Project, currently held by Ducks Unlimited. This partnership marked the first PDR completed through the GLO's Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Program. The East Bay Conservation Initiative will utilize similar conservation mechanisms.

Conservation Assistance Program Initiative Area Map

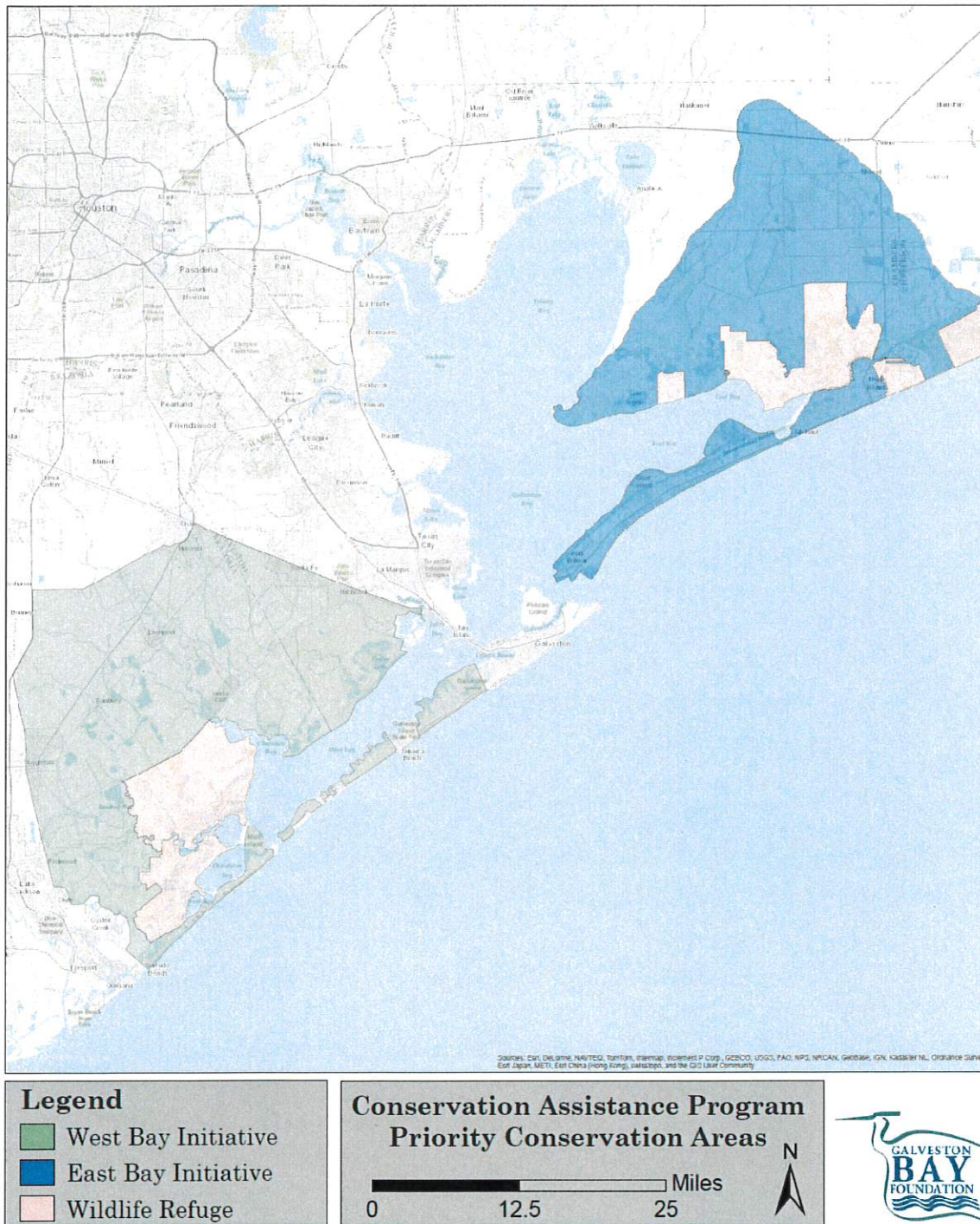


Figure 4: East and West Bay Conservation Initiatives

Project Development

Once a project met the basic CAP requirements and a project lead was identified, the CAP aided as necessary to put the project in a position to be a successful transaction. When GBF was the lead project manager, all landowner meetings, negotiations, site visits, correspondence, and project strategy was initiated and coordinated by GBF staff. Other project partners were utilized as necessary when a specific skill set or partnership brought value to the project. Likewise, if a partner organization was the lead for a project, GBF

was only involved when services or CAP resources were requested. GBF provided project development assistance in the form of acquisition strategies, general project mapping, landowner communications, and fundraising assistance.

Project Implementation

Executing the conservation strategy and completing the real estate transaction can be a complex and challenging task. The project manager is required to coordinate with the seller on a regular basis, communicate details of complex funding mechanisms, manage contractors providing due diligence activities, handle legal reviews, negotiate purchase agreements and sales contracts, and see the project through closing.

GBF provided experience and expertise in handling landowner relations, completing due diligence, and getting the acquisition funding to closing. If GBF was not the lead project manager for a transaction, assistance was provided by identifying appropriate conservation strategies and funding quality contractors to provide services like Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessments, property boundary surveys, appraisals, and legal title review.

Public Outreach and Education

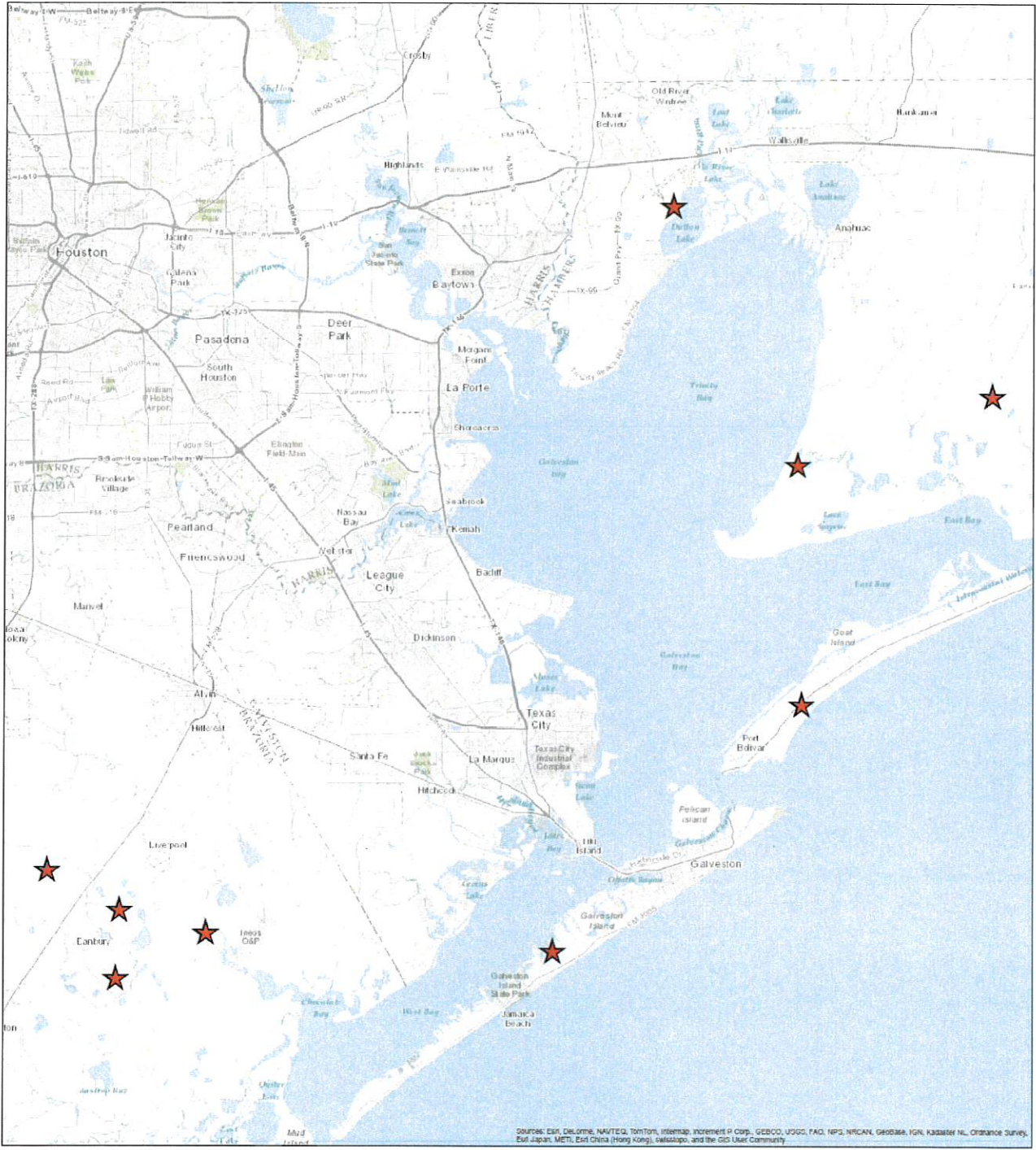
Both the East Bay and West Bay Conservation Initiatives focus land acquisition on areas where landowners are wary of government involvement and are largely cautious of land conservation efforts. Gaining the trust of local landowners and educating community leaders on the benefits of conservation easements and land conservation in their communities is critical to the success of any long-term land conservation program. GBF targeted stakeholders and presented information to large and small audiences in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Some presentations were in large auditoriums and others in a rural citizen's living room. This effort provided an opportunity to reach potential donors, environmentalists, farmers, ranchers, fisherman, hunters, kayakers, and other wildlife enthusiasts and teach them about land conservation tools and benefits.

Additionally, press releases (Appendix B) were submitted to local media outlets to highlight successful conservation efforts and promote the work of GBEP, GBF, and CAP partners.

RESULTS

The CAP successfully implemented or supported the completion of nine (9) acquisition projects within the Galveston Bay watershed. These projects displayed a high level of diversity in size, conservation method, habitat types, and property values. Both fee simple and conservation easement transactions were completed using a variety of state, federal, and private funding sources. CAP involvement varied from full identification, development, and implementation of conservation projects to simply providing funding to help defray unfunded costs associated with required due diligence.

Conservation Assistance Program Completed Projects



Legend

★ CAP Projects

Galveston Bay Foundation Project Map



Figure 5: CAP Completed Projects

Completed Projects

Of the nine projects competed, four were managed by GBF and five were managed by conservation partners. These competed transactions resulted in approximately 5,015 acres of perpetual land conservation within the Galveston Bay watershed. Details for competed projects are listed in the table below.

Project Name	Year Completed	Size (Acres)	Funding Source	Project Lead
Bolivar Flats (Johnson Tract)	2013	62	North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)	Houston Audubon Society
Bulanek Farms	2013	662	Texas Farm and Ranchlands Conservation Program	Texas Agricultural Land Trust
Coastal Heritage Preserve	2013	50	Coastal Wetlands Planning Protection and Restoration Act	Artist Boat
Anahuac NWR Addition	2014	1,227	Migratory Bird Conservation Fund	The Conservation Fund
Cotton Bayou	2014	31	Private Foundation	Galveston Bay Foundation
Lone Pine Farm	2014	1097	Texas Farm and Ranchlands Conservation Program	Galveston Bay Foundation
Gordy Marsh	2015	1,739	NAWCA	Galveston Bay Foundation
Coastal Heritage Preserve	2016	46	West Bay Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP)	Artist Boat
Chocolate Bayou	2016	102	West Bay CIAP	Galveston Bay Foundation

Table 1: Completed Projects

CAP Workgroup Meetings

A total of 18 CAP workgroup meetings were held from 2012 through 2017. Conservation partners that attended meetings included nonprofit land conservation organizations, state and federal natural resource agencies, and private entities. Participation in meetings varied based upon eligibility and status of land conservation projects and need for CAP assistance. A list of CAP workgroup meeting dates is included below.

Location	Date	Location	Date
Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	6/4/2012	Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	4/17/2015
Environmental Institute of Houston, UH Clear Lake	9/12/2012	Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	9/18/2015
Armand Bayou Nature Center	12/18/2012	Armand Bayou Nature Center	2/12/2016
Armand Bayou Nature Center	2/13/2013	Armand Bayou Nature Center	4/1/2016
Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	4/24/2013	Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	9/2/2016
Armand Bayou Nature Center	9/10/2013	USFWS Chenier Plain Visitor Center	10/6/2016
Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	3/7/2014	Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	2/24/2017
Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	9/12/2014	Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	5/12/2017
Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	1/16/2015	Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District	11/17/2017

Table 2: CAP Workgroup Meetings

Public Outreach Presentations

GBF conducted 14 public speaking engagements to diverse audiences throughout the region. These presentations focused on land conservation opportunities, conservation tools and methods, and economic incentives for land conservation. A list of presentations provided is below.

Audience	Location	Date
Chambers County Landowners	Wallisville, TX	7/31/2012
Brazoria County Landowners	Angleton, TX	4/16/2013
Houston Native Prairies Association of Texas	Houston, TX	2014
Clear Lake Sierra Club	El Lago, TX	4/16/2014
Chambers County Landowners	Anahuac, TX	6/27/2014
Houston Canoe Club	Houston, TX	3/11/2015
Mont Belview Lions Club	Mont Belvieu, TX	3/19/2015
Wetlands Economic Benefits Workshop	Houston, TX	4/23/2015
GBF Annual Membership Meeting	Houston, TX	8/4/2015
Texas Aquatic Plant Management Society Annual Meeting	Boerne, TX	10/14/2015
Native Plant Society of Texas Landowner Workshop	Sugarland, TX	2/20/2016
Native Plant Society of Texas	Houston, TX	7/21/2016
Anahuac Lions Club Meeting	Anahuac, TX	3/28/2017
Johnson Space Center Environmental Group (NASA)	Clear Lake, TX	6/14/2017

Table 3: Public Outreach Presentations

Conferences

GBF attended and participated in more than 25 educational conferences, workshops, other land conservation related events. Some were purely educational to help GBF staff promote permanent land conservation transactions, while others helped develop programs and funding sources to accelerate coastal land conservation throughout the Gulf coast region. A table of these activities is included below.

Date	Purpose of Events	Location
9/2011	Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation	Biloxi, MS
10/2011	Land Trust Alliance Rally	Milwaukee, WI
2/2012	Texas Land Trust Council Annual Conference	Austin, TX
9/2012	Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation	Bay St. Louis, MS
10/2012	Texas Land Trust Assembly	Bastrop, TX
10/2012	Land Trust Alliance Rally	Salt Lake City, UT
2/2013	Texas Land Trust Council Annual Conference	Austin, TX
9/2013	Land Trust Alliance Rally	New Orleans, LA
2/2014	Texas Land Trust Council Annual Conference	Austin, TX
5/2014	Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation	Mobile, AL
9/2014	Land Trust Alliance Rally	Providence, RI
3/2015	Texas Land Trust Council Annual Conference	Austin, TX
4/2015	Land Trust Advocacy Day	Austin, TX
10/2015	Land Trust Alliance Rally	Sacramento, CA
11/ 2015	Southern Plains and Prairies Conference	Houston, TX
3/2016	Texas Land Trust Council Annual Conference	Austin, TX
5/2016	Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation	Birmingham, AL
10/2016	Land Trust Alliance Rally	Minneapolis, MN
2/2017	Saving Family Lands Workshop	West Columbia, TX
2/2017	Land Trust Advocacy Day	Austin, TX
3/2017	Texas Land Trust Council Annual Conference	Austin, TX
10/2017	Land Trust Alliance Rally	Denver, CO
<i>*This is not a comprehensive list of training and events attended</i>		

Table 4: Conferences

Due Diligence Funding

15 projects received CAP funding to help finance due diligence costs associated with approved conservation projects. These funds helped organizations pay for surveys, appraisals, phase 1 environmental site assessments, legal title review, closing costs, and other necessary transactional actions. Some CAP contributions provided funding leverage and partnerships which helped projects become more competitive for acquisition funding. A list of projects that received due diligence funding is below.

Project Name	Lead Organization	Status	CAP Investment
Anahuac NWR Addition	Conservation Fund	Complete	\$8,000
Austin Bayou Woods	Galveston Bay Foundation	Inactive	\$10,000
Bolivar Flats (Johnson Tract)	Houston Audubon Society	Complete	\$4,800
Bolivar Flats (Retillion Rd)	Houston Audubon Society	In Progress	\$6,500
Bulanek Farms	Texas Agricultural Land Trust	Complete	\$12,000
Coastal Heritage Preserve (CWPPRA)	Artist Boat	Complete	\$18,212
Coastal Heritage Preserve (West Bay CIAP)	Artist Boat	Complete	\$2,500
Coastal Heritage Preserve (Anchor Bay)	Artist Boat	In Progress	\$34,500
Cotton Bayou	Galveston Bay Foundation	Complete	\$5,830
Chocolate Bayou	Galveston Bay Foundation	Complete	\$15,817
Follett's Island	Trust for Public Land	In Progress	\$11,350
Gordy Marsh (Phase 1)	Galveston Bay Foundation	Complete	\$11,233
Gordy Marsh (Phase 2)	Galveston Bay Foundation	In Progress	\$10,800
Lone Pine Farm	Galveston Bay Foundation	Complete	\$18,037
West Bay Corridor (Alattar Ranch)	Trust for Public Land	In Progress	\$6,500

Table 5: Funded Projects



Figure 6: Chocolate Bayou Conservation Project

SUMMARIES OF COMPLETED PROJECTS

Anahuac NWR Addition

This 1,227-acre land conservation project lies directly East of the Anahuac NWR access road, south of Whites Ranch Road (1485). The Conservation Fund will complete the acquisition, hold the property for approximately 6 months, then convey the property to USFWS to become part of Anahuac NWR. This tract is within Anahuac NWR expansion boundary and considered a top tier acquisition priority for USFWS. Acquisition would secure viewshed of access road to Refuge from Whites Ranch Road and protect access in perpetuity. The property lies entirely within the floodplain of Oyster Bayou.

The property is currently used for agriculture, including rice production. Soils within the property boundary are suitable to support coastal prairie, moist soil waterfowl management, or agricultural use. This tract is ideal for operational management of moist soil units. Water delivery systems are in place on this tract that will allow these units to function as freshwater strongholds even in times of drought. These managed wetlands are becoming increasingly more significant to offset the impacts of saltwater intrusion and drought.

After acquisition, the Refuge plans to extend its Coastal Prairie restoration efforts into this unit. This project adds to the less than 10% of the refuge that is currently identified as suitable for prairie restoration efforts. This property is identified as habitat for shorebirds, waterfowl, wading birds, and upland grassland birds. Habitats onsite purify water from surrounding agricultural lands before entering East Galveston Bay and provides abundant recreational opportunities for residents and tourists.

Bolivar Flats (Johnson Tract)

The Johnson Tract conservation project is a 62-acre addition to the existing Bolivar Flats Bird Sanctuary owned and managed by Houston Audubon Society. Situated on Bolivar Peninsula near the community of Port Bolivar in Galveston County, this property benefits wildlife utilizing East Galveston Bay. This project will target a NAWCA Small Grant and utilize private donations as match to fund the acquisition.

Every year hundreds of thousands of birds migrate to the Texas coast and find areas such as Bolivar Flats for refuge. Bolivar Flats provides a resting place and nesting habitat where forage is abundant and pressure on natural resources is low. Decomposing plant material derived from the salt marsh and delivered by the coastal currents feeds millions of small worms, shrimp and clams which live in the mud flats. Thousands of birds, small fish and crabs hunt the shallows for these invertebrates and small fish that venture into deeper water. People are encouraged to walk along established paths, roadways, and beaches to enjoy the birds and other wildlife that is protected here.

Bulanek Farms

The Bulanek Farms conservation project consists of 662 acres of land in two non-contiguous tracts near State Highway 35 within the rural community of Danbury in Brazoria County. The Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT) will purchase a conservation easement from the landowner and will bear responsibility for long-term easement enforcement and stewardship. This conservation project was awarded funding through Texas Farm and Ranchlands Program.

Both tracts are near Austin Bayou and nearby other completed, current, or proposed conservation projects within the Danbury Area. The two properties are almost entirely composed of farmed wetlands for rice production and one property contains a Ducks Unlimited-funded water impoundment for waterfowl management. These farmed wetlands are considered critical habitats for migratory shorebirds, wading birds, and waterfowl that migrate to or through the Texas Coast.

Conservation of this parcel will restrict the subdivision and development of this parcel for residential or industrial uses and will allow for continued farming for rice and row crops and restrict the subdivision and residential development these farming tracts. This activity is common within the area, resulting from a growing suburban population in Brazoria County.

Chocolate Bayou Conservation Project

Chocolate Bayou is one of the primary sources of freshwater for West Bay. Natural habitats found onsite include tidal marshes, freshwater wetlands, and coastal tallgrass prairie. Permanently protecting this tract of land will ensure that critical resources will remain for waterfowl, wading birds, and neotropical migrants as well as provide essential habitat for coastal fisheries including fish, crabs, and shrimp.

Identified by project partners in 2015, the Chocolate Bayou tract contains almost half a mile of frontage along the tidally influenced Chocolate Bayou. The property is located less than three miles from the Brazoria NWR and within an area rated as a high conservation priority by GBEP's CAP, which selects projects based on high quality habitat and importance to water quality for Galveston Bay.

On September 15, 2016, the West Bay Watershed Wetland and Habitat Protection project provided \$645,000 in CIAP funding to the GBF to purchase 102 acres on Chocolate Bayou in Brazoria County, Texas. GBF holds title to the property and will ensure long-term management.

Coastal Heritage Preserve (CWPPRA)

The Coastal Heritage Preserve (CHP) is the largest undeveloped, unfragmented tract of land on west Galveston Island. Acquiring parcels within the CHP project area contributes to ongoing efforts to maintain the physical and biological integrity of Galveston Island and the productivity of West Bay. The CHP is divided into four distinct tracts by roadways: the bay tract, the Marquette middle tract, the Marquette beach tract, and the Anchor Bay tract.

This phase of the larger land conservation effort focused on 50.53 acres along the west side of Settegast Road, adding to the successful acquisitions of adjacent and nearby tracts of land. This acquisition was funded by the Coastal Wetlands Planning, Protection, and Restoration Act.

Coastal Heritage Preserve (West Bay CIAP)

The Coastal Heritage Preserve (CHP) is the largest undeveloped, unfragmented tract of land on west Galveston Island. Acquiring parcels within the CHP project area contributes to ongoing efforts to maintain the physical and biological integrity of Galveston Island and the productivity of West Bay. The CHP is divided into four distinct tracts by roadways: the bay tract, the Marquette middle tract, the Marquette beach tract, and the Anchor Bay tract.

To date, approximately 600 acres of the 1,000-acre tract are permanently protected from development, including the entire 360 acres of the bay tract, and 240 acres of the middle tract (including the acreage purchased through the West Bay Watershed Wetland and Habitat Protection project). In total, approximately \$8 million has been leveraged to the conservation community.

On December 8, 2016, the West Bay Watershed Wetland and Habitat Protection project provided \$1,051,000 in CIAP funding to the Artist Boat to purchase 46.697 acres of the CHP middle tract in Galveston County. Artist Boat holds title to the property and will ensure long-term management.

Cotton Bayou

The Cotton Bayou conservation project focused on the acquisition of 31 acres of coastal forest and estuarine wetlands near the Trinity River Delta. The property is located near the town of Mont Belvieu in Chambers County. Access to this property is restricted, allowing for boat access or undeeded road access through a neighboring property owned by NRG. Acquisition funding was provided by a local charitable foundation.

Located adjacent to tidally influenced Cotton Bayou and Cotton Lake, the diverse habitats onsite provide refuge, forage, and nesting sites for resident and migratory wildlife. The drastic elevation change from sea level to more than 20 feet allows hardwood forests to grow directly adjacent to estuarine marsh. These coastal hardwood forest is considered critical habitat for neotropical migrants and have human anthropological remnants scattered throughout and nearby. The adjacent property displays similar attributes and conservation values and is an ongoing target for land conservation efforts.

Gordy Marsh (Phase 1)

The Gordy Marsh conservation project conserved 1,739 acres of high quality estuarine marsh, freshwater wetlands, and coastal prairie habitats along Lone Oak Bayou and Trinity Bay near the community of Smith Point in Chambers County. An attempt to purchase the larger parcel (~3,600 acres) of land in fee failed, but the project was resurrected when the landowner agreed to a discuss conservation easement purchase for a portion of the property. A successful NAWCA application provided \$375,000 for the purchase and over \$450,000 in private funds were raised as matching funds to complete the transaction.

This conservation easement protects the integrity critically imperiled coastal prairie and habitats critical to grassland bird species, neotropical migrants, waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and fisheries of Galveston Bay. Considered a phased project, Galveston Bay Foundation is working to conserve the remaining 1,900 acres of adjacent and similar habitats owned by the landowner.

Lone Pine Farm

Lone Pine Farm is located south of the rural community of Danbury in Brazoria County. The 1,097-acre project established a conservation easement to protect agricultural lands (rice), bottomland hardwood forest, and coastal grasslands along Austin Bayou, a tributary to West Galveston Bay. The property is directly adjacent to an existing conservation easement funded by GBEP and held by Ducks Unlimited.

The conservation easement allows the landowner to farm rotational rice and row crops on suitable soils while restricting the disturbance of forested and grassland areas. Acquisition funding in the amount of \$1,316,000 was provided by the Texas Farm and Ranchlands Conservation Program.

OBSTACLES

There are many things that can hinder progress of a land acquisition or cause one to fail completely. Most of these reasons are related to money in one way or another. The three components of a successful land conservation project that must be in place are a willing seller, a willing holder, and money to fund the transaction. All three of these components must be secured within a timeframe that is acceptable to the funder, buyer, and seller. During this grant, CAP projects experienced a breakdown in each of these critical components, which sometimes caused an acquisition to fail.

Examples include Hitchcock prairie, where acquisition and due diligence funding were in place, a project partner was prepared to hold a conservation easement or fee title to the property, but the landowner was not prepared to sell the property at a fair market value. The Bulanek Farms project fit well with an identified funding source, had a very willing seller, but the land did not fit any of the regional land trust's priorities and therefore did not have a holder. GBF located a statewide land trust partner to hold the conservation easement and helped them acquire funding and successfully conserve the property. The Bastrop Bayou project had a willing seller, the USFWS refuge system and GBF were prepared to accept fee ownership of the property, but acquisition funds were unavailable within the necessary timeframe to purchase the land. The conservation-

mindful landowner, the primary driver of the project, passed away and now there is a lot of uncertainty over the viability of this project.

The CAP has never had an issue developing quality projects for acquisition, but has experienced issues financing projects. An overall lack of acquisition funding for land conservation was one of the biggest challenge to overcome. Federal funding is highly competitive, targets very specific land attributes, and usually requires a significant non-federal match component. While GBF was able to line up acquisition projects that benefit Galveston Bay and meet CAP project selection criteria, securing the (often) millions of dollars to close the deals proved to be an obstacle.

Federal funding sources, such as NAWCA and CWPPRA, target wetlands and closely related habitats. These programs also have a limit of \$1 million per project and require anywhere from 25-200% in non-federal match to be competitive against a national or regional pool of applicants. Other habitats are much more difficult to secure funding, such as upland forests and coastal prairies, which have great benefit to our region. Without a dedicated, state-funded land conservation program Texas is at a significant disadvantage compared to other states. GBF did have some success attracting corporate and private foundation support as match for conservation projects, but those funds are generally unreliable.

Another obstacle that was experienced was lengthy timeframes for due diligence review and duplicative reviews from multiple agencies, putting stress on landowner relations and forcing multiple contract extensions. Governmental agencies provide the bulk of the funds for land acquisition and are justified in their efforts to ensure proper use of funding. However, GBF did experience issues navigating reviews of due diligence items and were even forced to reduce the appraised value and contracted sales price of one project because of an internal appraisal review. This put GBF in an incredibly difficult position over 1.5% of the purchase price. Fortunately, the project was eventually successful.

LESSONS LEARNED

Each land conservation project presents unique challenges that provides opportunity to learn and grow as conservation professional. During the grant period, these experiences have provided perspective and clarity on many aspects of a conservation acquisition. A couple salient points to share include flexible and extended length purchase options and transactions involving real estate brokers.

To the extent possible, draft sales contracts, purchase options, and similar real estate documents with enough flexibility to react to funding requirements and unexpected changes to project requirements. Also, allowing a lengthy term for due diligence, reviews, and fundraising will help set landowner expectations and provide an opportunity to surpass landowner expectations. It is important to communicate that a conservation acquisition is not a typical real estate transaction and will require patience and communication throughout the process.

Also, when possible, avoid transactions with real estate brokers and work directly with landowners. Real estate brokers and agents, by and large, do not understand land conservation funding processes and add little value to the transaction. They extract money from the transaction without providing a value or benefit to the landowner or land trust.

LIST OF CONSERVATION PROJECTS (Appendix A)

(Separate Attachment)

Completed Projects							
Gordy Marsh	1,740	Coastal wetland habitats with native coastal prairie uplands on Smith Point. Adjacent to Lone Oak Bayou and Trinity Bay.	Easement Purchase Complete. Phase 2 in progress.	NAWCA / Private	Easement Purchase	GBF	Matt Singer
Anahuac NWR Entrance and Coastal Prairie	1,350	Coastal prairie and agricultural lands near the entrance of Anahuac NWR in the Oyster Bayou watershed.	Completed	MBCC	Fee Simple Purchase	TCF , USFWS	Andy Jones / Julie Shackleford
Lone Pine Farm	1,096	Rice/Grain farm, improved pasture, and riparian corridor woodlands.	Completed	GLO TFRCLP	Easement Purchase	GBF	Matt Singer
Bulanek Farm, Danbury	662	2 separate tracts of rice/grain farm.	Completed	GLO TFRCLP	Easement Purchase	TALT	Matt Singer
Chocolate Bayou	102	Native Prairie, freshwater impoundment, 2,500 feet of shoreline along tidal Chocolate Bayou	Completed - restoration actions needed	West Bay CIAP	Fee Simple Purchase	GBF	Matt Singer
Bolivar Flats	60	Coastal prairie wetland complex on Bolivar peninsula adjacent to existing HAS Bolivar Flats Sanctuary.	Completed	NAWCA / Private	Fee Simple Purchase	Houston Audubon	Richard Gibbons
Coastal Heritage Preserve (Phase 2)	50	Coastal Prairie and Wetland Habitats on Galveston Island	Completed - Additional phases still in progress	CWPPRA	Fee	Artist Boat	Linda Shead / Karla Klay
Coastal Heritage Preserve	47	Coastal Prairie on Galveston Island	Completed - Additional phases still in progress	West Bay CIAP	Fee	Artist Boat	Linda Shead / Karla Klay
Cotton Bayou	30	30 acre tract within the Trinity River Delta region, adjacent to cotton bayou. Consists of coastal hardwood forest and estuarine marsh habitats.	Complete - potential for additional phases with nearby landowners	Private funds	Fee Simple Purchase	GBF	Matt Singer

Conservation Assistance Program									
Potential Project List								Update:	#####
Approximate Location	Approx. Acreage	Description	Status	Willing Seller?	Potential Funding Source?	Acquisition Type	Potential Partner to hold?	Contact	
Halls Bayou, near Santa Fe	1,200	Improved pasture with some Riparian corridor woodlands	no contact with landowner.					TPL / Mike Lange	
Liverpool Farms	3100	Rice, grain, coastal prairie, and riparian corridor	Original landowner was interested in conservation project. New landowner has not shown interest.		West Bay CIAP, GLO TFLCP		GBF, DU, TALT	Matt Singer	
Halls Bayou, south of Alvin	15,000	5,000 acres in rice, most in native coastal habitat	no contact with landowner.				DU-term CE on part	?	
Halls Bayou, south of Alvin	1,700	900 woodlands, 800 ag/pasture	no contact with landowner.		West Bay CIAP?		Refuge system?	Warren Pulich	
Austin Bayou Woods, East of Danbury	315	Bottomland Hardwoods along Bayou and native coastal prairie habitats.	On Hold. Landowner is currently not interested in moving forward with conservation easement. Landowner relations will continue and future conservation of this property is still likely.		West Bay CIAP	Easement Purchase	GBF	Matt Singer	
Harborside Bayshore, Galveston Island	20	Coastal wetlands, scrub/shrub habitat	ON hold, nothing new from Scenic Galveston		West Bay CIAP	Fee	Scenic Galveston	Lalise Mason	
Kohfeldt Marsh, Texas City	340	Salt Marsh and Disturbed Upland; High quality migratory bird and fisheries habitats	Liability issues with contamination.		West Bay CIAP	Fee	Scenic Galveston	Lalise Mason	
Spoonbill Bay	115	Coastal prairie and estuarine wetlands on West Galveston Island	No recent contact with landowner. Landowner was interested in conservation easement at one time.		West Bay CIAP	Fee	GBF	Matt Singer	
South Deer Island, W. Galveston Bay	40	50% undivided interest for sale. Colonial waterbird rookery, diamondback terrapin	No Recent Discussions with landowner. UHCL and Texas Audubon are interested in fee simple purchase.		West Bay CIAP?	Fee?	UHCL? Audubon?	Matt Singer	

Conservation Assistance Program										Update: #####
Project Investigations List										
Approximate Location	Approx. Acreage	Description	Status	Willing Seller?	Potential Funding Source?	Preferred Acquisition Type	Potential Partner to hold?	Contact / Champion		
Cotton Bayou (Phase 2)	30	30 acre tract within the Trinity River Delta region, adjacent to cotton bayou. Consists of coastal hardwood forest and estuarine marsh habitats.	No Progress on communication with landowner. Assumed willing seller, but lower profile project due to low risk of development.		NMBTA, NAWCA, Historical Commission Funds, In-kind land donation	Fee Simple	GBF	Matt Singer		
Danbury Rice Farm / Eagle Gully	150	Active Rice Farm adjacent to Lone Pine Farm	For sale, no contact has been initiated	Yes	West Bay CIAP, Others?	Fee Simple Purchase	GBF	Matt Singer		
Trinity River Forest	5,000	Managed timberland within the Trinity River watershed in Chambers and Liberty Counties.	For sale, initiated contact with landowner. Interested in a conservation exit.	Yes	Unknown	Fee Simple Purchase	Unknown	Matt Singer / Mike Lange		
San Luis Pass	610	Native coastal habitats on the west end of Galveston Island. Barrier island property with bay and beach frontage.	Contact has been made with seller. Need to investigate funding opportunities and potential for fee simple holder.	Yes	Unidentified	Fee	Galveston Parks Board / GBF	Matt Singer		
Oyster Bayou	450	Rice farm and approximately 1 mile along Oyster Bayou, near Anahuac NWR. Potential for fee simple acquisition	Applied for TFRLCP, denied due to lack of matching funds. Will apply for NRCS ACEP funding (50%) and TFRLCP funding (50%) in 2017.		TFRLCP, NRCS Farm and Ranch, BP Sources	Easement or Fee Purchase	GBF	Matt Singer		
Austin Bayou Farm	600	Rice farm and improved pasture, 3 miles of frontage along Austin Bayou with hardwood forest and freshwater marsh / wetlands.	Applied for TFRLCP, denied due to lack of matching funds. Will apply for NRCS ACEP funding (50%) and TFRLCP funding (50%) in 2017.		TFRLCP, NRCS ACEP	Easement Purchase	GBF	Matt Singer		
Hitchcock Prairie	3,200	Coastal prairie and estuarine marsh habitats adjacent to Green's Lake near Hitchcock.	Landowner is reluctant to commit to a conservation easement or fee simple acquisition			Fee Simple	TBD	None		
Bastrop Bayou	3,600	Coastal Prairie and freshwater wetland habitats along Bastrop Bayou. 4 miles of bayou frontage, adjacent to part of the Brazoria NWR	Landowner interest has faded. USFWS - Brazoria NWR conceptually agreed to accept fee title to this tract and facilitate submitting applications for federal funding.		Land and Water Conservation Fund / Migratory Bird Funds	Fee Simple / Partial CE	GBF / USFWS (Brazoria NWR)	Matt Singer		
Bay Harbor	40	Tidal flats, estuarine marsh, freshwater/brackish wetlands, and coastal prairie habitats	New ownership with conservation interest		Unknown	Easement bargain sale	GBF	Matt Singer		

NEWS ARTICLES (Appendix B)

(Separate Attachment)



2627 Avenue O
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PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT: KARLA KLAY
PHONE: (409) 770-0722

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DATE: DECEMBER 12, 2016

Accomplishment - The Sum of Small Steps

GALVESTON, TX December 12, 2016 – Will this matter a year from now? Or a decade? Or a century? You betcha! Artist Boat continues to work toward conserving Galveston Island's remaining open space for future generations.

With closing pen in hand, Artist Boat is pleased to announce that another 47 acres were purchased for inclusion in the Coastal Heritage Preserve. The partnerships to achieve this conservation purchase were extensive! The purchase price was funded by a \$1,051,000 grant to the Galveston Bay Estuary Program/Texas Commission on Environmental Quality from the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP) of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, administered by the Texas General Land Office, and via a third-party agreement between Artist Boat and the Galveston Bay Foundation. Administrative, due diligence, legal and transaction costs were funded by grants from Houston Endowment, Edward and Helen Oppenheimer Foundation, Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation, and the Galveston Bay Estuary Program/Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

The 47-acre parcel is part of the former Marquette development. The property is immediately adjacent to the Coastal Heritage Preserve. The purchase will build on conserving wetlands and important habitat critical to water quality that will sustain the health and resiliency of Galveston Island.

The Coastal Heritage Preserve is one of the largest un-fragmented, undeveloped properties of its kind remaining on Galveston Island. It is located roughly midway along the length of this 32-mile barrier island. The Coastal Heritage Preserve is also a critical piece of the West Bay Corridor Initiative, a multi-agency program to protect and restore critical habitats around Galveston's West Bay, a project of the Hurricane Ike Long Term Recovery Plan and identified in the West Galveston Island Greenprint for Growth.

This purchase will enhance Artist Boat's existing learning and environmental education programs while concurrently protecting the Island's disappearing open space.

The competition for funding is intense. Island property values are high. Nonetheless, Artist Boat continues to persevere in making critical, small but significant steps in accomplishing the goal of conserving Galveston's last remaining open spaces.

For more information contact: Executive Director Karla Klay at (409)-770-0722

Artist Boat is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting awareness and preservation of coastal margins and the marine environment through the disciplines of the sciences and the arts.



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Over 1,700 Acres of Coastal Habitat to be Protected in Chambers County, TX

Galveston Bay Foundation Purchases Conservation Easement to Safeguard Natural Habitat

Webster, TX – December 1, 2015 – More than 1,700 acres of coastal wetland and prairie habitat near Smith Point in Chambers County, TX will remain in its natural state due to conservation efforts led by the Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF). GBF has purchased a conservation easement on a property called Gordy Marsh from a local landowner.

A conservation easement is a voluntary agreement between a landowner and a land trust like GBF, where a landowner agrees to limit future development or any land use that may harm wildlife or water quality in exchange for compensation.

The acquisition was made possible with the financial support of several individuals and organizations. The latter includes The Knobloch Family Foundation, The Jamail Galveston Foundation, The Brown Foundation Inc. of Houston, The Trull Foundation and The Partnership for Gulf Coast Land Conservation. Additional support was provided by the Galveston Bay Estuary Program, bridge financing from The Conservation Fund and a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

“Permanently protecting this tract of land will ensure that critical resources will remain for migratory waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds as well as provide essential habitat for coastal fisheries including fish, crabs, shrimp and oysters,” said Bob Stokes, President of GBF.

“It feels good knowing that I am a part of conserving some of the best coastal habitat in the State of Texas,” said Cecil W. Parker Jr., landowner of Gordy Marsh. “I want to make sure my descendants are able to enjoy the beauty and serenity this land possesses.”

Approximately \$900,000 was raised to acquire the Gordy Marsh easement, which borders Trinity Bay. The easement is located within an area rated as a high conservation priority by the Chambers County Greenprint and the Galveston Bay Habitat Conservation Blueprint. Natural habitats found onsite include salt, brackish, and freshwater marshes and coastal tallgrass prairie.

Since its establishment in 1987, GBF has conserved more than 7,600 acres of coastal habitat through property acquisitions and conservation easements and is working to substantially increase acreage conserved in the coming years. Conserving land helps ensure clean air and drinking water, food security, scenic landscapes and views, recreational places, and habitat for the diversity of life on earth.

About Galveston Bay Foundation

The mission of the Galveston Bay Foundation is to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural resources of the Galveston Bay estuarine system and its tributaries for present users and for posterity. The Foundation was incorporated in 1987, and is a non-profit organization under Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. GBF is located at 17330 Highway 3 in Webster, Texas. For further information contact GBF at 281-332-3381 or visit the website at www.galvbay.org.

About Galveston Bay Estuary Program

The mission of the Galveston Bay Estuary Program is to preserve Galveston Bay for generations to come. As a non-regulatory program administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, it is charged with implementing The Galveston Bay Plan — a Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan for Galveston Bay.

About The Conservation Fund

At the Fund, we make conservation work for America. By creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense, we are redefining conservation to demonstrate its essential role in our future prosperity. Top-ranked for efficiency and effectiveness, we have worked in all 50 states to protect more than 7.5 million acres of land since 1985.

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Photos and Map of Gordy Marsh









GALVESTON BAY
FOUNDATION

CONTACT: Claire Everett
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ceverett@galvbay.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Galveston Bay Foundation Acquires Over 100 Acres
of Coastal Habitat in Brazoria County**

Land to be Preserved as Natural Habitat

Houston, TX – September 15, 2016 – Today, Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF) purchased more than 102 acres along Chocolate Bayou in Brazoria County, TX. The property will remain in an open and natural state forever due to GBF's conservation efforts. Natural habitats found onsite include tidal marshes, freshwater wetlands, and coastal tallgrass prairie. The acquisition was made possible with the financial support of the Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP), Texas General Land Office, US Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Permanently protecting this tract of land will ensure that critical resources will remain for waterfowl, wading birds, and neotropical migrants as well as provide essential habitat for coastal fisheries including fish, crabs, and shrimp," said Bob Stokes, President of GBF.

Approximately \$675,000 of Coastal Impact Assistance Program and GBEP funding was utilized to acquire the Chocolate Bayou tract, which contains almost half a mile of frontage along the tidally influenced Chocolate Bayou. The property is located less than three miles from the Brazoria NWR and within an area rated as a high conservation priority by GBEP's Conservation Assistance Program, which selects projects based on high quality habitat and importance to water quality for Galveston Bay. Chocolate Bayou is one of the primary sources of freshwater for West Galveston Bay.

Galveston Bay Foundation is an accredited land trust and has permanently protected more than 8,000 acres of coastal habitat within the Galveston Bay watershed. GBF protects land using traditional real estate acquisition methods and conservation easements, voluntary agreements with private landowners that restrict future land uses on their property. Conserving natural areas helps ensure clean air and water, food security, scenic landscapes and views, recreational opportunities, and habitat for local and migratory wildlife.

**This project was funded (in part) by a Financial Assistance Award from the U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Coastal Impact Assistance Program*

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About Galveston Bay Estuary Program

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Photo and Map of Property at Chocolate Bayou

