

GALVESTON BAY ESTUARY PROGRAM (GBEP)

DRAFT - Galveston Bay Council (GBC) Meeting Minutes – July 20, 2022

Attendees:

Galveston Bay Council Chair: Glenn Clingenpeel (Trinity River Authority)

Galveston Bay Council Vice-Chair: Albert Gonzales (Low Income Communities)

Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP) Staff Lead: Lisa Marshall (GBEP)

Due to issues with COVID-19, the July 20, 2022 quarterly GBC meeting was held in a hybrid format with in-person at the Harris-Galveston Subsidence District and virtually on Microsoft Teams from 9:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Members Present: Scott Alford, Andrea Catanzaro, Glenn Clingenpeel (In-person), Winfred Colbert, Jeff DallaRosa, Vance Darr, Elizabeth Fazio Hale, Albert Gonzales, Lori Hamilton, Cruz Hinojosa, Jonathan Holley, Brian Koch, Audrey Kuklenz, Kristin Lambrect, Mike Lee, Garry McMahan, Helen Paige, Lisa Rickards, Todd Running, Caimee Schoenbaechler, Ronnie Schultz, Rusty Senac, Linda Shead, Charrish Stevens, Sue Theiss, Matthew Tilimon, Maria Valdez, Kirk Wiles, Tracey Woody

Members Not Present/Delegates: Nancy Parra, Anna Partin, Pamela Plotkin, Melissa Porter, Taylor Rieck, Hanadi Rifai, Shane Simpson, Sharron Stewart, Bob Stokes*, Scott Williams

(*=Member designated a proxy)

Proxies Present (GBC member absent/designated proxy): Bob Stokes/Mikayla Panariello; Melissa Porter/Christina Solis

Current Vacancies: Small Local Governments

Other Attendees: Shane Bonnot, Emma Clarkson, Jill Csekitz, Kelley Kowal, Quinn McColly, Tim Siegmund, David Villarreal

Additional GBEP Staff Present: Matthew Abernathy, Lindsey Lippert, Christian Rines

Call to Order: Introduction of Members and Delegates

Glenn Clingenpeel brought the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. Mr. Clingenpeel reminded all attendees that there is a virtual option and that members are attending online and in-person. Mr. Clingenpeel also asked that for votes or motions, virtual attendees please turn on their cameras and when making a motion or second to state their name, to remain in compliance with the Open Meetings Act.

Action Item: Approval of November 3, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Clingenpeel opened the meeting with approval of the minutes. A previous vote was done at the April 2022 meeting, but there was not a quorum at that time. Lisa Marshall commented on amendments to the minutes that Mr. Clingenpeel attended in person and that Earl Lott is not a member of the GBC. Rusty Senac moved to approve the minutes as amended by Ms. Marshall and a second was made by Brian Koch. The motion was passed unanimously.

Action Item: Approval of April 20, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Clingenpeel then moved to the approval of the April 20, 2022 minutes. Ms. Marshall provided a clarification on the comments by Lori Hamilton in the minutes. The comments are to be changed to “surface water quality standards hearing is set for May 2. Proposed changes include revisions to clarify the prohibition of discharges of preproduction plastics, site specific changes, and revisions to toxic material.” The statement was added as a revision to Ms. Hamilton’s comment. Mr. Senac motioned for approval of the minutes and a second was made by Ronnie Schultz. The motion passed unanimously.

Report of the Program

Ms. Marshall started with the announcement of two vacancies on the GBC, from the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) and the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD), have been filled by Todd Running and Jonathan Holley respectively. Brian Koch read the biography of Mr. Running to the GBC and Linda Shead read the biography of Mr. Holley.

Ms. Marshall announced that the next State of the Bay Symposium is tentatively planned for January 2024. It was also announced to the GBC that GBEP will be receiving funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and that planning and funding priorities will be established through a subcommittee meeting. The award amount is approximately \$909,800 per year over the next five years and that we have been told that for at least the first two years there will not be a match requirement.

Ms. Marshall announced that interviews are currently being conducted for the Information Specialist (PPE Coordinator) position. The job posting for the Monitoring and Research Coordinator has posted and the posting for the Technical and Quality Program Coordinator should be posted soon.

Report of the Chair

Mr. Clingenpeel addressed the GBC to discuss how meetings will be held moving forward; whether they would be in-person meetings or to maintain a hybrid format. Mr. Clingenpeel stated that he would prefer in-person meetings and that the in-person dynamic worked better in this situation and that the benefits of doing the meetings in-person outweigh the disadvantages of not offering a virtual program.

Mr. Senac stated that he feels the same way, that in-person meetings are preferred, but that if hybrid meetings need to be held, he understands that as well.

Mr. Koch shared the same sentiment and stated that he feels that there is a lot of conversation missed in a virtual platform and that the personal connection has large benefits to project planning and the personal aspect as well.

Albert Gonzales stated that he just returned from a convention with over 12,000 delegates and guests and that being in-person is preferred. It was also stated that those that wish to can still wear masks.

Ms. Shead agreed that there is no comparing the benefits of in-person meetings to virtual. Ms. Shead also addressed the importance of public safety as well as the flexibility that virtual meetings allow in situations where attending in-person is not feasible.

Caimee Schoenbaechler commented on her preference for the engagement that is established with in-person meetings. Ms. Schoenbaechler also stated she would have attended in-person, but was recently exposed to COVID, so she was appreciative of the virtual option. Ms. Schoenbaechler did acknowledge that proxies have been established for situations like hers and that had a virtual option not been available, a proxy would have been sent.

Mr. Running agreed that he preferred the benefits of in-person meetings but that the flexibility of virtual meetings is also beneficial. Mr. Running noted that due to other, last minute virtual meetings he was unable to attend the GBC meeting in person, but the virtual option allowed him to attend. Mr. Clingenpeel commented that in his suggestion for in-person meetings he also factored in that the GBC meetings only occur quarterly and that is a minimal demand on members' time.

Michael Lee stated that he was in the same situation as Ms. Schoenbaechler, having recently been exposed to COVID and the virtual option allowed him to attend. Mr. Lee also stated that had the virtual option not been available, he would have sent a proxy as that is the reason they were established.

No one else provided any comment and Mr. Clingenpeel stated that the default attendance for the October meeting will be in person but that if situations changed, virtual options would be evaluated.

Presentation: *Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA)* – Jill Csekitz, Technical Specialist, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), GOMA Water Resources Team Co-chair

Ms. Csekitz presented the GBC with information on GOMA and her goal was to provide an overview and to engage the GBC members in potential ways to get involved. GOMA is a regional network of stakeholders initiated in 2004 by the governors of all five gulf states whose goal is to enhance the ecologic and economic health of the entire gulf coast.

Ms. Csekitz provided details on the structure of GOMA, its membership organization, and the programming that it undertakes. Ms. Csekitz noted that the new governor appointed chair-elect is Toby Baker, the Executive Director of TCEQ. Additionally, information was provided on the guiding document, the Governor's Action Plan, and how this serves as a blueprint for the work that GOMA does. It was also noted that the

work done by GOMA is intended to be a resource across the region, where work or data done in one state can be referenced and applicable in other parts of the region.

Lastly, Ms. Czekitz provided information on the Gulf Star program, which provides funding to projects and programs that are done and help achieve the work of GOMA.

*Caimee Schoenbaechler asked for more information on the events GOMA offers. Ms. Czekitz provided information on the GOMA All Hands Meeting, which will be in Texas in 2023. Each of the teams also has their own meetings and it was suggested to look at the GOMA website and look into joining a team and participating in their meetings. Lastly, Ms. Czekitz referenced the Gulf of Mexico Conference (GOMCON) which is a larger meeting that combines the GOMA All Hands meeting, Gulf Summit, and Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill and Ecosystems Science (GoMOSES) Conference event which happens again in 2024.

*Mr. Senac applauded the mention of tourism and economic health and asked if tourism was a direct action of the Governor's Action Plan. Ms. Czekitz stated that while tourism is not directly mentioned, there are several tourism members on the Business Advisory Council and there have been meetings and conversations to weigh how science is translated to the public and how that can impact tourism.

Presentation: *Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) Habitat Incentive Programs for Private Landowners* - Tim Siegmund, Private Lands Program Leader, TPWD

Tim Siegmund's role is to work with private landowners to help support the management of private lands for the benefit of wildlife and ecosystems in Texas. Mr. Siegmund informed the GBC that TPWD has staff throughout the state who can provide information to landowners on how to better manage their land. For dedicated landowners, TPWD also has programs to help mitigate some of the costs involved with management projects. Two of these programs were presented to the GBC.

The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is a competitive program where landowners can apply for reimbursement funds to manage their land for rare, threatened, and endangered species. Since 2005, roughly five million dollars in state and federal cost share assistance has been matched with about six million dollars of their own money to impact almost 250,000 acres of habitat enhancement throughout the state. The preproposal deadline is February 2023 for non-governmental organizations to apply for funding.

Mr. Siegmund described Pastures for Upland Birds as a program that works to kill non-native grasses and restoring the area with native grasses. This program helps to showcase the ecological principles and benefits of native grasslands and prairies to ecosystem services. For more information, Mr. Siegmund referenced a program video on YouTube for more information. [Grassland Restoration for Upland Birds](#) Recipients of these awards are provided with the resources and technical guidance to facilitate the removal of the non-native grasses and restoration of the native species.

Mr. Siegmund also highlighted the South Texas Natives project in Kingsville that has expanded to all eco-regions of the state and now includes a Gulf Coast seed venture that contains a collection of locally collected native seeds for the appropriate regions.

*Mr. Koch asked if grazing management is addressed with landowners. Mr. Siegmund confirmed that he works with a variety of partners throughout the state to provide resources to ensure appropriate grazing management.

*Ms. Schoenbaechler inquired about the participation of landowners in the coastal zone. Mr. Siegmund responded that areas east of U.S. 59 there are not many participants, but areas west of Houston, especially in the western edges of the Katy Prairie there is much more interest due to new landowners interested in doing habitat improvements.

*Albert Gonzales asked about public access to these projects. Mr. Siegmund stated that while some landowners will allow access to the properties, it is not written into the program agreement to allow access.

*Mr. Senac asked about a range and average in the size of projects in the LIP program. The range varied from 15 acres to 4000 acres in the current funding period, but over a five-year period, 16,000 acres of brush treatment and nine stream miles of riparian restoration encompass the largest project. The funding for projects typically ranges from \$15,000-25,000.

*Mr. Clingenpeel asked about restoration related to freshwater mussels and freshwater inflows. Mr. Siegmund referenced several projects that specifically addressed the reduction of sediment load into water bodies to help improve habitat and water quality for these species.

Presentation: *The Connected Coast: Environmental Flows for Bay and Estuarine Health* – Quinn McColly, PhD, Conservation Finance Director, Texas Water Trade

Mr. McColly provided an update on Texas Water Trade and what they do. He provided information on how Texas Water Trade helps to secure water for agricultural, economic, and natural needs. Mr. McColly stated that while they cannot buy enough water to affect the salinity of the entire bay, they work to provide enough freshwater inflows to provide refugia for species to help the appropriate salinity rebound more quickly as needed.

Mr. McColly also highlighted projects specifically related to the Galveston Bay region. This included a unique program that combines game camera arrays and artificial intelligence to show the prevalence of wildlife use (avian) in areas and how it correlates with the amount of water in areas.

*Ms. Schoenbaechler asked about his perspective on the largest obstacles to scaling up voluntary strategies for water resources. Dr. McColly stated that the tools that are most adaptable are the ones that will help the most in this situation. Due to technical issues, some of the response was inaudible. Ms. Schoenbaechler stated she would follow up with him after the meeting.

Presentations will be uploaded and available on the GBEP [website](#).

Subcommittee Updates

Ms. Marshall provided the update that all subcommittees met in June to establish priorities for the 2024 fiscal year.

Water and Sediment Quality (WSQ)

Christian Rines, WSQ Coordinator provided the updates for both WSQ and Monitoring and Research Subcommittees.

Subcommittee Priorities for Fiscal Year 2024

- Supporting Management Measures and Watershed-Based Plans
- Soil Health and Green Infrastructure
- Targeted/Direct Monitoring

Monitoring and Research (M&R)

Subcommittee Priorities for Fiscal Year 2024

- Contaminants in Aquatic Organisms, Sediments, and Water
- Effects of Increased Frequency of Flood Tides and Erosion on Species Populations
- Effects of Tropicalization and Episodic Weather Events on Organisms and Ecosystems in Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico
- Impacts of Coastal Spine Structures on Species Movements

*Mr. Clingenpeel asked if the first priority would include per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances contaminants related to the Deer Park fires. Ms. Rines responded that at this time these are general priorities and projects have not been established. Mr. Clingenpeel then asked if any research had been done related to that issue and Ms. Marshall responded that some general research had been done to PFAS but not specifically related to the Deer Park incident.

Natural Resource Uses (NRU)

Lindsey Lippert, NRU Coordinator, provided the priorities update for the NRU Subcommittee.

Subcommittee Priorities for Fiscal Year 2024

- Habitat Acquisition
- Enhancement of Existing or Ongoing Restoration/Conservation Efforts
- Benefit to Native Fish and Wildlife
- Brings Funding, Work Leverage, Multiple Goal Benefit to the Subcommittee
- Project Urgency
- *Special Merit Project (Expansion of GBEP Implementation Tracking Viewer: Adding Spatial Components to Project Tracking (Alternative to the Habitat Conservation Blueprint))*

Public Participation and Education (PPE)

Matthew Abernathy, Education and Outreach Coordinator, provided the priority updates for the PPE Subcommittee.

Subcommittee Priorities for Fiscal Year 2024

- Lack of funding or difficulty for securing funding for existing programs. Look for established programs looking to expand an outreach component or revamp an existing portion of the program. Funding for programs to go into the classrooms to provide educational workshops.
- Career information on natural resources, environmental education, and outreach for community college programs. How to connect (Roadmap) to STEM careers and resources to support them.
- Collecting a list of stewardship and volunteer resources in the region (young adult, adult audiences, afterschool programs).
- Addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion.

For subcommittee meeting dates, times, and more information, visit the GBEP [website](#).

GBC Members Roundtable: News and Announcements

Jonathan Holley (HCFCD): HCFCD is about halfway through the 2018 bond program and all programs have been started.

Rusty Senac (Nature Tourism): Thanked Ms. Hale for her donation of transportation for the April GBC Meeting. He also asked if the Coastal Water Authority (CWA) Luce Bayou interbasin water transfer is operational. Mr. Clingenpeel said he was not aware of it moving water at this time. There was brief discussion about the water releases from basins to supplement Houston water.

Brian Koch (Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board): RFP for \$319 grant should be announced in August for implementing and developing watershed plans or coastal agriculture non-point source pollution. Encouraged the GBC to work on their own gardens as there might be limited agricultural resources due to drought this year.

Glenn Clingenpeel (Trinity River Authority): Endangered Species Listings for the Trinity River Basin could have a final decision as soon as August. Freshwater mussels including the Texas fawnsfoot, Louisiana pigtoe, and the Texas heelsplitter, along with the Alligator Snapping Turtle are all candidates for federal listing. In relation to PFAS, regulations are expected moving forward.

Lori Hamilton (TCEO): On behalf of the Water Quality Planning Division.

Regarding the TMDL Program, the Middle Neches TMDL will be going to agenda for adoption in October. The Sandy and Wolf Creeks I-Plan and Caney Creek I-Plan will be going to agenda to be released for public comment in November.

Regarding the NPS Program, the 2022 Texas NPS Management Program was approved by the Commission on December 15, 2021. Final approval by the EPA is pending. On June 1, 2022, TCEQ posted its Request for Grant Applications (RFGA) for nonpoint source projects under the Clean Water Act Section 319(h) Grant Program. The solicitation closed on July 15, 2022. Visit the Nonpoint Source Program Grants Web page for information on this grant program, applicants and activities eligible for funding, and other supporting information.

Regarding the Integrated Report of Surface Water Quality, EPA approved the Texas 2022 Section 303(d) list on July 7, 2022. The 2022 Texas Integrated Report of Surface Water Quality, including the 2022 Texas 303(d) list, can be found on our website.

Regarding Water Quality Standards, the 2022 revision of the Texas Surface Water Quality Standards is currently in progress and scheduled to go to agenda for adoption in September 2022. The project timeline including stakeholder's workgroup meetings, proposal agenda, public comment period, and public hearing are posted on the Surface Water Quality Standard Advisory Group webpage.

Regarding the Clean Rivers Program, the calendar of Steering Committee Meeting dates may be accessed from the statewide Coordinated Monitoring Schedule. Meetings occur throughout the year and help to establish monitoring priorities.

Elizabeth Fazio Hale (Gulf Coast Authority): The legislative session is in spring 2024 and as a legislative created group, the GBC is prevented from lobbying. If GBC members are going to be a resource or if they we need items to be put to the legislature, prefilng needs to be done early to ensure that information has enough lead time to end up on the calendar.

*Mr.Clingenpeel asked that potential legislative topics be added to the agenda for the October GBC Meeting.

*Mr. Senac asked if there was a particular date when you can start the prefilng and Ms. Fazio Hale stated that prefilng can begin in late November or early December, but that it is more important to get the draft in progress soon. She highlighted how much of a resource the GBC is and that the legislature may not be aware of all of the work that is being done by the GBC and the estuary program.

*Albert Gonzales expressed interest in assisting Ms. Fazio Hale with getting information about the GBC out to the legislators.

Ms. Fazio Hale also inquired about an update from the Gulf Coast Protection District to be provided to the GBC.

Linda Shead (Shead Conservation Solutions): Commented that virtual opportunities allow the public greater access to GBC meetings.

Reminded September 28 - 29 is the Bayou Preservation Association Symposium, with the subject being *The Cost of Doing Nothing*.

Scott Alford (Natural Resource Conservation Service): Thanked the presenters.

Caimee Schoenbaechler (Texas Water Development Board): August 23 the Natural Resource Committee hearing will consider the creation of the Gulf Coast Protection district and coastal protection structures.

TWDB is hiring a Coastal Modeler position.

Todd Running (H-GAC): Natural Resource Advisory Committee meeting on August 4 to approve the Water Quality Management Plan Update for 604(b).

August 23 is the Cotton Bayou Total Maximum Daily Load public meeting from 2 - 4 p.m.

There will be two Clean Waters Initiative workshops in the coming months. In September, the meeting will be on stormwater and the date is TBD. The October meeting will be a Clean Rivers Program monitoring demonstration.

Public Comment: None

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 11:57 a.m.

Upcoming GBC Meeting Dates: October 19, 2022, January 18, 2023, April 19, 2023, and July 19, 2023. Meetings are held on the third Wednesday of the quarter from 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. If there are known conflicts, GBC members are welcome to propose alternate dates to the GBC.