

GALVESTON BAY ESTUARY PROGRAM (GBEP)

Galveston Bay Council (GBC) Meeting Minutes – April 16, 2025

Attendees:

Galveston Bay Council Chair: Bob Stokes (Galveston Bay Foundation)

Galveston Bay Council Vice-Chair: Vance Darr (Industry - Kuraray America, Inc.)

Estuary Program Staff Lead: Lisa Marshall (GBEP)

The April 16, 2025, quarterly GBC meeting was held in a hybrid format with an in-person meeting at the Harris-Galveston Subsidence District and virtually on Microsoft Teams from 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Members Present: Scott Alford, Susan Bandy, Raven Blakeway, Shane Bonnot, Jeff DallaRosa (v), Jonathan Holley, Brian Koch, Kristin Lambrecht (v), Mike Lee, Julie Masters, Kelly Mills* (v), Ana Partin (v), Laura Picariello (v), Hanadi Rafai (v), Ben Regner (v), Todd Running, Lindsey Savage, Caimee Schoenbaechler, Linda Shead (v), Shane Simpson (v), Philip Smith, Dean Southward, Charrish Stevens (v), Bob Stokes, Kari Sutton, Matthew Tilimon, Huy Vu (v), Kirk Wiles (v), Katie Wilson

(v=Member present online; not counted in the quorum)

Members Not Present/Delegates: Winfred Colbert*, Glenn Clingenpeel*, Vance Darr, Elizabeth Fazio Hale, Juan Flores, Albert Gonzales*, Michael Lange, Helen Paige, Dianna Ramirez*, Rusty Senac, Maria Valdez, Tracy Woody

(*=Member designated a proxy)

Proxies Present (GBC member absent/designated proxy): Winfred Colbert/Bob Stokes, Glenn Clingenpeel/Heather Finn, Albert Gonzales/Jon Powell, Kelly Mills/Gene Muller, Dianna Ramirez/Kristen Naz

Current Vacancies: None

Other Attendees: Emily Billin, Elizabeth Carlson, Chloe Dannenfelser, Michael Roberts, David Villarreal, Liz Virgl, Cindy Wilems

Additional GBEP Staff Present: Matthew Abernathy, Jenelle Estrada, Zoe Gapayao, Lindsey Lippert, Christian Rines

Call to Order and Confirm Quorum

Bob Stokes brought the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m.

Introductions

Mr. Stokes began by having the GBC members introduce themselves. Introductions began with in-person attendees, followed by members attending virtually.

Mr. Stokes reminded the GBC that virtual attendance is not included in the quorum, but that a quorum was met for this meeting.

Action Item: Approval of January 15, 2025 Meeting Minutes

Mr. Stokes called for approval of the January 15, 2025, meeting minutes. Brian Koch motioned for the approval and Todd Running seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously with no opposition or abstentions.

Report of the Program

Lisa Marshall began the report of the program by updating the GBC that half of the GBC member's terms were approved on March 13, 2025, during TCEQ Commissioners' Agenda. Ms. Marshall also relayed thanks on behalf of the commissioners and the GBEP staff for their time and service to the GBC.

Ms. Marshall provided a brief update from the National Estuary Program directors' meeting in March. Section 320 funding should be safe and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding, formerly known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, is safe for now and that projects should move forward as planned.

Next, Ms. Marshall asked the GBC for their thoughts on a GBC member dinner to be held the evening prior to the State of the Bay symposium. Mr. Stokes suggested that it is planned to have an optional dinner and that it is meant as a social event and that each member is responsible for their own meal. Linda Shead suggested that it be at an external site from the conference location, as that might help create a more social environment.

Lastly, Ms. Marshall provided an overview of the IIJA priorities that were established by the Budget and Priorities Subcommittee at the meeting on April 2, 2025. The presentation is available on the [GBEP website](#).

Report of the Chair

Mr. Stokes provided a funding update for the report of the chair. During the last legislative session, Mr. Stokes and other GBC members, along with staff from the Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program (CBBEP) supported a legislative rider which provided additional funding to both GBEP and CBBEP during the 2024-2025 biennium. While preparing to support another legislative rider for the 2026-2027 biennium, GBEP staff and the GBC were made aware that the additional funding was already included in the budget, adding \$700,000.00 to GBEP's and CBBEP's budgets for each of the biennium years and that an additional rider was not needed. Ms. Marshall thanked Mr. Stokes and GBF, along with CBBEP staff, for their help in securing this additional funding.

Presentation: *Creating a Legacy of Sustainability for Houston 2026* - Elizabeth Carlson, Tricon Energy and Chair, World Cup Sustainability Subcommittee

Elizabeth Carlson provided an introduction and background into the sustainability actions connected to the World Cup. Houston is one of 16 host cities for the 2026 World Cup and will host seven games between June 11-July 19, 2026. One part of being a host city is having a sustainability plan, and the hope is that Houston's efforts in sustainability are something that can continue long after the World Cup. Ms. Carlson provided information on the different aspects of the sustainability plan along with upcoming activities and ways to get involved.

Mr. Stokes asked how Ms. Carlson got involved. Ms. Carlson responded that her employer was working on sustainability activities with local schools and when the World Cup was announced, they thought that it would be a great way to showcase sustainable practices. When it was brought up that a sustainability plan was needed, she helped to spearhead the plan.

Ms. Carlson's presentation is available on the [GBEP website](#).

Presentation: *SPLASh Project Update* - Chloe Dannenfesler, American Bird Conservancy

Chloe Dannenfesler provided an update on the Stopping Plastic and Litter Along Shorelines (SPLASh) project currently funded by GBEP through IJJA. Ms. Dannenfesler provided background on the program, which is jointly administered by the American Bird Conservancy and the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory and partners with Black Cat GIS, who is one of the founding partners in the organization. SPLASh works to create a cleaner environment for people, birds, and other wildlife in the Houston-Galveston region and is working with Houston Parks & Recreation Department to engage students within Texas Education Association Region 4, Houston communities, and the Houston-Galveston region. Through community outreach, educational programming, and trash clean-up events focused in the City of Houston, the project's goal is to foster a sense of stewardship and community pride in City of Houston residents and decrease the amount of trash and plastic pollution in Houston waterways which in turn will decrease the amount of pollution in the greater Galveston Bay watershed.

Mr. Stokes asked if they are seeing behavior changes documented in the knowledge assessments being conducted by SPLASh. Ms. Dannenfesler stated that they are noticing an increase in knowledge among the students after their engagement. Matthew Abernathy commented that the sign contest also shows the passion and effectiveness of the programs through the messages in the artwork. Mr. Stokes then asked what Ms. Dannenfesler's favorite bird was to see during cleanups. She replied that she likes seeing roseate spoonbills because everyone thinks they are flamingoes.

Ms. Dannenfesler's presentation is available on the [GBEP website](#).

Break

Presentation: *Bay to Schools Project Update* - Cindy Wilems, Galveston Bay Foundation

Cindy Wilems presented on Galveston Bay Foundation's (GBF) Bay to Schools program. Her presentation included history on GBF's education programs and department, highlighting how far it has come in the past 30 years. Ms. Wilems elaborated on the importance of bringing quality programming into the classroom, because while it might be more ideal to get classes outdoors to experience Galveston Bay, the reality is that it is not always possible. Along with classroom engagement, this project also includes teacher professional development and, through a partnership with the University of Houston-Clear Lake, peer engagement through presentations and publications.

Julie Masters will be contacting Ms. Wilems soon for Dickinson Independent School District statistics for her Keep Texas Beautiful reporting. Kari Sutton asked if they have any schools that try to have them come for an entire month or extended length of time. Ms. Wilems replied that there are several schools they will visit for an entire week, engaging with a different grade each day. Other schools have also begun participating in field programs, so GBF staff are engaging with students twice a year. Teachers will also ask for programming to supplement lesson plans. Ms. Marshall thanked the GBC for funding the Bay to Schools and SPLASh programs. Mr. Stokes also thanked GBEP for supporting the projects, and thanked Ms. Wilems for her hard work in growing GBF's education programs. Ms. Wilems also announced that GBF is receiving a TCEQ Environmental Excellence Award on June 10 in Austin.

Ms. Wilems's presentation is available on the [GBEP website](#).

Presentation: *Subcommittee Updates* - Monitoring and Research, Jenelle Estrada and Public Participation and Education, Zoe Gapayao

Jenelle Estrada provided updates to the GBC on recently completed, current, and future projects funded by the Monitoring and Research Subcommittee. Scott Alford asked how long the living shorelines had been monitored for this project. Ms. Estrada replied that monitoring was done over a two-year period, but samples were not taken every month. Julie Masters asked what the goal was with the tire rubber project. Ms. Estrada replied the project is working to provide a better understanding of how tire wear particles impact the environment in this area. Ms. Masters then asked if this study had been done elsewhere and Ms. Estrada stated that a similar study was done in the Pacific Northwest, but it was done after a fish kill, and this study is being done to identify the presence and potential impacts in the Galveston Bay environment. Ms. Shead commented that she was surprised that tire rubber is just now an issue of concern, as she recalled an article from decades ago showing that the chromium from tires were inhibiting plant germination along roadways. Ms. Estrada replied that that is something that was possibly evaluated when looking into the current tire rubber projects, bringing the idea full circle.

Action Item: Vote on Support Letter

Mr. Stokes advised the GBC that a request for a support letter was received from Dr. Quigg and Dr. Hala from TAMUG. The project builds on previous research conducted by Dr. Hala. The project, titled “Life in the PFAS lane: the impact of per/poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) on coastal communities in Texas.” The objective is to create a community risk assessment by sampling oyster and shrimp in estuaries in Texas and correlate that with community consumption of these species and creating a risk assessment for consumption. Due to the timing of the request, and that the project is had not been approved and funded by the GBC, it was determined to bring this to a vote. Ms. Shead suggested that the letter should be edited for clarity and Mr. Stokes replied that edits can be made if needed.

Motion	Second	Abstain
Julie Masters	Brian Koch	Matt Tilimon, Scott Alford, Philip Smith, Todd Running, Kari Sutton, Mike Lee, Kristen Naz, Raven Blakeway, Lindsey Savage, Huy Vu, Charrish Stevens, Laura Picariello, Gene Muller, Kelly Mills, Kirk Wiles, Ben Regner, Ana Partin

After the vote on the support letter, Zoe Gapayao provided updates on recently completed, current, and future projects funded by the Public Participation and Education Subcommittee.

Copies of both presentations are available on the [GBEP website](#).

GBC Members Roundtable: News and Announcements

Julie Masters (Keep Dickinson Beautiful): There is a piece of property on FM 517 in Dickinson, across from Paul Hopkins Park, which is for sale and Ms. Masters was wondering who she could speak with about the potential for a land trust acquiring the land. Mr. Stokes said he would speak with her outside of the meeting to discuss it further.

Matt Tilimon (USCG): The local USCG sector change of command took place on April 17, 2025, with Capt. Donohue retiring and Capt. Rodriguez taking command.

Jon Powell (Low-income Communities): The GBC meeting was an eye-opening experience, and he is interested in getting more information on the efforts of the GBC out to his community and others.

Philip Smith (USFWS): Scott Williams is retiring from the USFWS as of April 18, 2025. Mr. Stokes wished Mr. Williams the best in his retirement.

Brian Koch (TSSWCB): Tuesday, April 29, 2025, will be the Soil Health Field Day. Texas Community Watershed Partners are leading the field day, and it will serve as the field component to the two previous soil health classroom workshops. The field day will begin at Sylvan Rodriguez Park and proceed to two additional sites. This is a good opportunity to see projects in action and how they help improve soil health, water quality, and nutrient cycling.

Todd Running (H-GAC): April 29, 2025, is the Clean Rivers Program Basins Steering committee meeting from 10:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. at the H-GAC offices or online.

May 1, 2025, is the Natural Resources Advisory Committee meeting, from 1:30–3:30 p.m.

May 1, 2025, there will be a wastewater infrastructure funding workshop for small and rural communities from 2:00–4:00 p.m. at the AgriLife Extension office in Angleton. This meeting is part of the Vulnerable Communities project, which is funded through GBEP.

June 3, 2025, is the Bacteria Implementation Group biannual meeting, from 2:00–4:00 p.m.

H-GAC also has an internship opening for the Clean Rivers Program and Targeted Bacteria Monitoring project for college students in STEM fields.

Kari Sutton (Port Houston): Port Houston is working to engage and educate students about the maritime industry and the types of positions available.

Port Houston offers free boat tours on their vessel, the *Sam Houston*. In 2024, 17,882 people took the boat tour.

Raven Blakeway (USACE): The USACE is losing a lot of staff both at the national level and at local offices.

The Coastal Texas update does not have federal appropriations for the project, but both the TX GLO and the Gulf Coast Protection District have funding and the USACE is supporting the non-federal partners for ecosystem restoration features.

There will be additional updates at the next meeting for public comment periods for upcoming projects. If they occur prior to the next meeting, Ms. Blakeway will share an email with the GBC.

Bob Stokes (GBF): GBF will be hosting a native plant sale at Walter Hall Park from 10:00 a.m.–2:00 p.m. on May 2, 2025.

Heather Firm (TRA): In partnership with the USFWS and TPWD, TRA is studying populations of alligator snapping turtle, chicken turtle, and four species of freshwater mussel. TRA just received a long-term monitoring study through the Texas Comptroller's program to look at propagating mussel species and possibly certain fish species.

Region 3 flood planning meeting is June 3, 2025, in the Dallas area, and is also available virtually.

TRA partnered with TAMUG and TWRI to apply to Trash Free Texas for funding to monitor microplastics in the Trinity River from Dallas to Galveston Bay.

Kristin Naz (TXGLO): Adopt-a-Beach is April 26, 2025.

The CEPPRA funding deadline is May 1, 2025, and the CMP funding deadline is June 3, 2025.

Laura Picariello (Texas Sea Grant): Texas Sea Grant now has offices in Galveston again.

Last month, a coastal master naturalist training was held for Chambers and Galveston area members on coastal resilience.

Sea Grant, TNC, and Pier 6 collaborated on a 10-acre restoration reef near San Leon.

TNC is in the process of planning oyster restoration workshops and engagement and more details will be shared as soon as they are available.

Sea Grant has restarted supporting the Dolphin Challenge for the National Ocean Science Bowl.

Kelly Mills (TCEQ): TCEQ's Environmental Trade Fair is June 3-4, 2025, in San Antonio. The Texas Environmental Excellence Awards ceremony will be held in Austin on June 10, 2025.

Nicole Hall (TCEQ): TCEQ's Nonpoint Source 319 grant RFP will open on May 1, 2025, and close on June 27, 2025. This is EPA grant funding for nonpoint source projects.

Public Comment: N/A

Other Business: N/A

Adjourn: The meeting was adjourned at 11:52 a.m.

Upcoming Galveston Bay Council Meeting Dates: July 16, 2025, October 15, 2025, January 21, 2026, and April 15, 2026. 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.