Salt Bayou Acquisition Project

Final Report

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Submitted to TCEQ May 2026
Contract No. 582-24-50138

Published by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, May 2026
AS-xxx

Prepared for:
Galveston Bay Estuary Program
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This project was funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
and the United States Environmental Protection Agency

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Suggested citation: Simpson, Suzanne. Galveston Bay Foundation. 2026. Salt Bayou Acquisition Final Report. Contract No. 58224-50138, Galveston Bay Estuary Program. Austin: Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (AS-xxx).

This project has been funded wholly or in part by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under grant number 4T-02F24301 to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). The contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views and policies of the EPA, nor does the EPA endorse trade names or recommend the use of commercial products mentioned in this document.

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Abbreviations

EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
GBEP	Galveston Bay Estuary Program
GBF	Galveston Bay Foundation
HC	Habitat Conservation (Action Plan)
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
IRS	Internal Revenue Service
MUD	Municipal Utility District
PSA	Purchase and Sales Agreement
SC	Species Conservation (Action Plan)
TCEQ	Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
UASFLA	Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition
USPAP	Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice

Executive Summary

Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF) partnered with conservation-minded Sellers to acquire 23 acres of historic coastal prairie habitat in San Leon, Texas, via bargain sale. The acquisition, completed in December 2024, is an opportunity for conservation of priority habitats, green infrastructure, and public access. By conducting habitat restoration and implementing access amenities, GBF is preparing to open the Salt Bayou Preserve for passive public recreation, such as hiking and nature observation. The City of San Leon lacks adequate access to public nature trails or preserves, creating a need for conservation interventions to uplift an underinvested community. This project represents the first acquisition that will be developed for public access, with the potential for future land transactions on adjacent properties to expand the Salt Bayou Preserve.

Introduction

GBF is a 501(c)3 nonprofit committed to preserving habitat vital to the health of the Galveston Bay watershed. As a nationally accredited land trust, GBF currently protects over 21,000 acres of land within the Galveston Bay watershed. GBF's conservation efforts focus on a wide range of habitats including freshwater and estuarine wetlands, tallgrass prairies, coastal forests and agricultural lands. From sand dunes, marshes, prairies, to the southern tip of the East Texas Pineywoods, Galveston Bay Foundation's preserves showcase the diversity of habitat types within the Galveston Bay watershed. Stewardship on our preserves is focused on improving local water quality, providing habitat for wildlife and fisheries, and restoring native plant communities. Techniques applied include invasive species removal, prescribed burning, strategic grazing, and mowing. Restoration efforts in the bay include implementing living shorelines and restoring oyster reefs to reduce erosion and support the complex bay ecosystem.

Project Significance and Background

The Salt Bayou Acquisition Project incorporates land conservation, public access, and green infrastructure to uplift the underinvested community of San Leon. According to the National Recreation and Park Association, "play deserts" are communities that lack walkable spaces for physical activity and active play. San Leon's only advertised public park, La Salle Park, consists of a three-acre baseball field. There are no public nature trails or preserves in San Leon and limited access to recreational areas, classifying it as a play desert. Play desert communities tend to have fewer connections to the outdoors, lower rates of youth exercise, and higher risks for obesity. This is consistent with a history of underinvestment in San Leon, leading to below average life expectancy and above average unemployment. Creating a public green space with a walking trail and interpretive signage will help connect residents to the nature found in their backyard and increase community access to the outdoors. To facilitate public access to the Salt

Bayou Preserve, GBF installed preserve signage, completed a small parking area, and created a natural surface walking trail.

Coastal prairies are among the most endangered ecosystems in the world, with less than 2% of the historical ecosystems remaining intact. Coastal prairies provide important grassland habitat for birds like the Dickcissel, Loggerhead Shrike, and Meadowlark. Additionally, native grasslands soak up floodwater and act as green infrastructure to filter pollutants and toxins out of the water column. The Acquisition Tract represents a historic coastal prairie that has degraded due to invasive species and woody vegetation encroachment. To promote the recovery of native coastal prairie, GBF undertook invasive species control efforts to reduce woody encroachment and reintroduced disturbance regimes that nourish grasslands.

The Acquisition Tract is located northeast of Salt Bayou and south of the San Leon Municipal Utility District (MUD) Wastewater Treatment Plant. While the initial project focus is on land acquisition and habitat restoration, there is local interest in incorporating green infrastructure like tertiary treatment wetlands for the San Leon MUD, similar to Cattail Marsh[1] in Beaumont, TX.

GBF worked with the Sellers of the Acquisition Tract to negotiate a Ceiling Price for the fee simple purchase. After the appraisal confirmed that the Fair Market Value was higher than the Ceiling Price, a bargain sale transaction was facilitated. GBF completed the acquisition of the 23 acres on December 20, 2024. GBF now owns the Acquisition Tract and is the perpetual land steward.

After the acquisition was completed, GBF undertook habitat restoration efforts to reduce invasive species and promote the native coastal prairie ecosystem. Mowing and herbicide application were the primary methods for reducing non-native and undesirable woody species. Future habitat management plans may include the reintroduction of prescribed fire to promote a diverse native grassland species composition.

Basic public access amenities were incorporated into the habitat restoration plan, including a pervious gravel parking area, preserve signage, and mowed natural surface trail.

[1] https://www.beaumontcvb.com/things-to-do/cattail-marsh/

Methods

Purchase and Sales Agreement

A Purchase and Sales Agreement (PSA) between GBF and the Sellers (collectively, the parties) of the Acquisition Tract was executed on June 8, 2024. The PSA established a Ceiling Price of $300,000 for the 23.00-acre Acquisition Tract, comprised of Lots 2R, 3R, and 4R. The parties acknowledged that the Ceiling Price may be less than the Fair Market Value of the Acquisition Tract, in which case the transaction would qualify as a Bargain Sale.

Survey

Electronic copies of the Category 1A Land Title survey for the Acquisition Tract were provided to the TCEQ Project Manager on June 25, 2024. A re-plat was required and recorded in the Official Public Records of Galveston County, TX on Mar. 14, 2024. The re-plat named the Acquisition Tract as three parcels: Lot 2R, Lot 3R, and Lot 4R. The Acquisition Tract was surveyed to be 23.0 acres.

Phase I Environmental Site Assessment

An electronic copy of the Phase I Environmental Site Assessment was provided to the TCEQ Project Manager Aug. 7, 2024.

Appraisal

In December 2024, Lewis and Seely Appraisals, Inc. submitted an appraisal of “23.0 acres Lots 1R, 2R, 3R and 4R, Galveston Bay Foundation Salt Bayou RPLT” in conformity with the *Uniform Appraisal Standards for Federal Land Acquisition (UASFLA), 2016* and the *Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP).* The appraisal established the Market Value as seen in Table 1. An electronic copy of the appraisal was provided to the TCEQ Project Manager on Dec. 12, 2024.

Table 1. Market Values of Acquisition Tract.

Parcel Name	Amount
Larger Parcel 1	$430,000.00
Larger Parcel 2	$200,000.00
Larger Parcel 3	$550,000.00

Title Commitment

An electronic copy of the Commitment for Title Insurance Policy (Form T-7) was provided to the TCEQ Project Manager on Aug. 14, 2024. An electronic copy of the

Owner's Policy of Title Insurance was provided to the TCEQ Project Manager on Jan. 31, 2025.

Recorded Deed, Deed Restriction, and Statement of Federal Interest

The General Warranty Deed with the Deed Restriction and Statement of Federal Interest for the Acquisition Tract was filed on Dec. 23, 2024. An electronic copy of the recorded General Warranty Deed was provided to the TCEQ Project Manager on Dec. 30, 2024.

Form 8283

The Sellers elected to submit Form 8283[2] for Noncash Charitable Contributions to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). GBF executed the Sellers' Form 8283 on June 3, 2025.

Habitat Restoration

Habitat Restoration efforts focused on invasive species removal, removal of encroaching woody vegetation, and public access development (see Figures 1 and 2 of Appendix A). An electronic copy of the subcontractor agreement for invasive species removal was provided to the TCEQ Project Manager on June 11, 2025. A map of the final area for invasive species treatments was provided to the TCEQ Project Manager on Dec. 12, 2025.

Results and Observations

The project achieved its goal to purchase fee simple title to, conserve in perpetuity, and enhance approximately 25 acres of coastal habitats in San Leon, Texas.

The following prairie restoration activities were supported by this grant: mowing, mulching, trash removal, herbicide application, and hand removal of invasive plant species. These activities occurred on the entire 23-acre property. As a result of the restoration efforts, a suite of grassland-obligate species were observed in Spring 2026. The wet meadow, which was formerly overtaken by Chinese tallow, produced robust populations sedges, rushes, beaksedges, and spikerushes (Figure 3). Upland and transitional prairie plants benefited from the mulching and targeted herbicide application. Native grasses observed include sugarcane plumegrass, switchgrass, eastern gamagrass, and Indiangrass (Figure 4). Native forbs include plains coreopsis, Texas coneflower, prairie blazing star, and southern sneezeweed (Figure 5).

To support public access development, GBF installed a 12"x42" sign as well as a small, permeable parking area at the preserve entrance (Figure 6). The parking area is

[2] https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs/about-form-8283

approximately 0.15 acres and designed with crushed concrete to allow for stability without compromising water percolation. To discourage dumping, GBF installed 800 linear feet of four-strand barbed wire fencing along the eastern boundary with 26th St.. GBF stewardship staff designed a natural surface trail that will be maintained by mowing. The trail will facilitate passive public recreation including hiking and nature observation.

Amount of Project Funding and Amount Spent

The project was awarded $390,000 from TCEQ, funded through the EPA allocation of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). The budget in Table 2 reflects the Budget Revision Request approved on Oct. 22, 2025.

Table 2. Budget Allocation and Expenditures.

Budget Category	Amount	Spent
Project Administration	$26,944.00	$26,401.29
Land Acquisition	$300,000.00	$300,600.57
Habitat Restoration and Public Access	$63,056.00	$62,998.14
Total Costs	**$390,000.00**	**$390,000.00**

Acreage Achieved

The project achieved the permanent conservation of 23.0 acres as well as 23.0 acres of restored coastal prairie habitat.

Galveston Bay Plan Priority Area Actions Addressed

The project implements the following *Galveston Bay Plan, 2nd Edition* actions

<u>Plan Priority 1: Ensure Safe Human and Aquatic Life Use</u>

- Habitat Conservation (HC)-1: Land Acquisition
  - The project acquired land that preserves habitat vital to the Galveston Bay watershed.
- HC-2: Habitat Restoration
  - The project restored habitat form and function where they had been lost or degraded.
- Species Conservation (SC)-1: Native Species Management
  - The project sustained and restored native species populations.
- SC-2: Invasive Species Management
  - The project reduced invasive species.

Stakeholder Identified Priorities Addressed

The project implements the following GBEP stakeholder-identified priorities:

Plan Priority 1: Ensure Safe Human and Aquatic Life Use

- The project supported watershed health and water reuse and conservation.
- The project supported the implementation of watershed-based plans.
- The project supported climate resilience.

Plan Priority 2: Protect and Sustain Living Resources

- The project benefited native species via habitat conservation and habitat restoration and enhancement

Plan Priority 3: Engage Communities

- The project implemented partnerships with underrepresented communities.

Discussion

The Salt Bayou Acquisition project successfully conserved 23.0 acres of habitat from subdivision, development, and other incompatible land uses. This success was facilitated by the Sellers' willingness to accept a Ceiling Price that was significantly below Fair Market Value. Qualified non-cash charitable contributions may relieve tax burdens for the donor and help increase the pace of land conservation by reducing the cash value for which the land trust must provide.

Habitat management practices will continue at Salt Bayou Preserve to maintain the recovering prairie ecosystem. The property has been added to GBF's mowing schedule as well as the monitoring calendar. Continued treatment of invasive species may be required to further suppress populations. To facilitate public access, GBF will conduct regular maintenance of the natural surface trail and other infrastructure on the property. The preserve will be featured on GBF's website as a public nature area, and future plans may include designing virtual maps or guided trail tours.

Appendix A. Figures

Figure 1. Salt Bayou aerial imagery from 2024.

Figure 2. Salt Bayou aerial imagery from 2025. Note removal of invasive species and encroaching woody vegetation as well as addition of parking lot along 25th St.

Figure 3. The wet meadows at Salt Bayou contain species of wetland-obligate plants.

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