

MEETING SUMMARY
NATURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
August 6, 2009

The August 6th meeting of the Natural Resources Advisory Committee was held in the Houston-Galveston Area Council Conference Room A at 3555 Timmons Lane, Houston, Texas. The meeting began at 1:32 PM. Vice Chairman Mike Talbott presided and upon his departure Glenda Callaway presided.

NRAC voting members present (17):

Bill Bandiga	Jim Joyce	Linda Shead
Jeff Brennan	Jim Kachtick	Brian Shmaefsky
Glenda Callaway	B.Z. Karachiwala	Adam Smith
James Dannenbaum	Carole Lamont	Mike Talbott
Lori Gernhardt	Sarah Metzger	Pudge Willcox
Andrew Isbell	Ellis Pickett	

NRAC voting members not present (17):

Jamie Brewster	Reed Eichelberger	Tom Northrup
Kathy Burris	Aston Hinds	John O'Connell
Patrick Buzbee	David Hubenak	Orval Rhoads
Del Canon	Andy Icken	Ronald Schultz
Dennis Caputo	Brett Kolaja	Kerry Whelan
Leroy Dettling	Jack Miller	

Del Canon delegated Cathy McCoy. Aston Hinds delegated Nicole Hausler. Tom Northrup delegated Angela Martinez. Delegated representatives can vote on Committee business; non delegated representatives count toward quorum but cannot vote.

Current Vacancies:

Environmental Groups (1)

NRAC advisory member(1):

Helen Drummond, Galveston Bay Estuary Program

H-GAC Staff Present (8):

Jeff Taebel, Carl Masterson, Rachel Powers, Erin Livingston, Ayo Jibowu, Amy Boyers, Cheryl Mergo, Andrea Tantillo

Others Present:

Jerry Mohn (WGIPOA), Kay Willcox (Chambers County citizen), Charlotte Wells (Galveston Bay Keeper), Page Williams (Sierra Club/Gulf Restoration Network), Sharron Stewart (Galveston Bay Foundation), Michael Bloom (PBS&J), Carole Allen (Sea Turtle Restoration), Gina Donovan (Houston Audubon), Jim Winn (Houston Audubon), Len Waterworth (Dannenbaum Engineering), Jeff Woodman (Houston Audubon), Cynthia Brum (GBEP), Julie Mintzer (GBF), Ed Matuszak (URS), Arianne Robinson (City of Sugar Land), Kathryn Hale (Houston Audubon)

Certify Quorum

Carl Masterson confirmed a quorum via roll call.

Open Public Hearing on 2009 Water Quality Management Plan

Vice Chairman Mike Talbott opened the Public Hearing.

Ayo Jibowu provided an overview of the 2009 Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) update. Previously, H-GAC's focus has been on wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) and districts within the thirteen-county region based on their location, such as those in a particular watershed. For the 2009 WQMP permits and districts were selected based on the effective date of the first permit. This was done to address the fact that deterioration comes with age of the system. During the review 58 permits were examined with results as follows:

- 10 plants will hit 75% of their permitted flow limit by 2035
- 23 will hit 90% of their permitted flow limit by 2035
- 21 will have capacity beyond 2035
- 4 could not be assessed due to insufficient data

Although the region is characterized by the predominance of small plants and an aging wastewater infrastructure, the region does have some large WWTPs, many of which are getting to the point where they will need to be expanded.

Another focus of H-GAC's WQMP is onsite sanitary sewage facilities (OSSFs). Currently, location data is not available for all OSSFs, but as this information is gathered it will be put into GIS to aid in future analyses and modeling. H-GAC is also looking to improve enforcement of OSSF permits and maintenance.

In general, the WQMP Update recommends activities for 2010. H-GAC will be working with cities in coastal zones on stormwater issues and will be working to complete the Westfield Estates/Halls Bayou, and Bastrop Bayou Watershed Protection Plans.

H-GAC requests that the NRAC approve the 2009 WQMP Update and recommend approval by H-GAC's Board of Directors.

Q: What percent of the population is served by WWTFs as opposed to OSSFs?

A: That is something we are still trying to determine.

Q: In the plan it states that "H-GAC will discontinue estimating wastewater treatment plant expansion based on population forecasts." Will H-GAC instead be making estimates using another method?

A: This will be the last time we ask for approval of the WQMP Update as far as needs assessments go as there has been a change in direction from TCEQ. Although it will not be required, we will be looking at the aging systems. So the work is not stopping, it is just being done differently.

Q: How does this work in the TCEQ system?

A: For years we have been required to do a needs assessment based on population growth. For a long time it was a major part of the water quality management planning efforts. Now it is taking a much lower priority in that we will be looking at the age of structures in addition to the population growth trying to determine which watersheds will need attention quickly. It is a more reasonable and logical approach than what was done in the past.

Q: Will service area still be considered?

A: Yes, that is still one of the more important elements.

Q: Are plants generally government owned or privately owned? Governmental entities can fund the upgrades, but how can private utilities do this?

A: Most WWTPs are owned by either cities or utility districts. The privately owned systems are typically small and commercial.

Comment: The small, privately owned facilities are those that generally have the violations, but the problem is they don't have the funding, nor is there a source of funding, for upgrades and repairs.

Q: Does the total lack of data in Chambers County and Walker County indicate they don't have any problems?

A: There were just no plants chosen in those counties for this study.

Q: Will this affect our ability to obtain funding?

A: No.

Comment: The major reason OSSFs fail is due to improper maintenance more than improper installation. Two years ago the TCEQ rewrote the rules taking out the requirement that OSSFs be tested by a third party each year. It seems like we are going in two separate directions. On one

hand we want improved water quality and greater accountability for onsite wastewater, but on the other hand we are changing the laws so that there is no accountability.

Comment: You might want to take a look at the wastewater treatment plants in Chambers County. There are two constructed wastewater treatment wetlands in operation with more under construction and one in the planning stage. It would be interesting to monitor how these systems compare with the conventional wastewater treatment plants as they follow the same stringent requirements. In rural areas, where land is available, it is much more efficient and economical to operate a wastewater treatment wetland as opposed to a conventional plant.

At this point the public hearing was continued until the end of the NRAC meeting at which time action will be taken. No additional comments were received by the end of the meeting and on a motion by Jim Joyce and a second by Lori Gernhardt the 2009 Water Quality Management Plan update was approved to send to the H-GAC Board.

Approve Meeting Report

On a motion by Linda Shead and a second by Sarah Metzger, the May 7, 2009, meeting notes were approved by the Committee.

Membership

Carl Masterson reported that Commissioner Dettling was appointed by the H-GAC Board to represent Wharton County. Carl also reported that a nominating committee needs to be formed as officers will need to be elected at the November meeting. He suggested using the policy subcommittee as the nominating committee, minus the current chair, vice chair, and those who are not voting members of the NRAC. This would leave Pat Buzbee, Glenda Callaway, Jim Dannenbaum, Andrew Isbell, Carole Lamont, Ellis Pickett, Brian Shmaefsky, and Kerry Whelan as the nominating committee. Anyone interested in becoming chair or vice chair, or with a suggestion for chair or vice chair, was asked to email Carl. The list would be compiled and given to the nominating committee.

Subcommittees

Linda Shead reported on the Parks and Natural Areas Subcommittee. Applications for this year's Best Practices Awards were available for members to take and distribute and is also available online. Entries are due September 1, 2009, at 5:00 PM. The committee has also been working to fine-tune its action plan.

Topics of the Day

Ike Dike

Jerry Mohn, with the West Galveston Island Property Owners Association, discussed the Ike Dike concept. The concept was developed by Dr. Bill Merrell of Texas A&M-Galveston and is

designed to stop the storm surge, not the rain or the wind. The Ike Dike would extend Galveston's seawall from San Luis Pass to High Island and would include large floodgates, similar to those in Holland, at San Luis Pass and the mouth of Galveston Bay. The Ike Dike will provide comprehensive, regional protection from storm surge to people, property, and ecosystems. It would also reduce vulnerability and encourage new business in the region.

Q: What are the expected annual maintenance costs?

A: I don't have that information yet. It will likely be significant.

Q: Do you know what the maintenance costs are for the floodgates in Holland?

A: No.

Comment: They spend between \$1.5 and \$2.5 billion per year.

Q: What alternatives have been evaluated?

A: There was a study 10 years ago that looked into several options. Right now this is just a concept and it has not been finalized. The Ike Dike is a flagship of a concept that is a surge suppression project to do three things: protect people, businesses and the environment.

Q: Are they also looking at the concept of the breakwater 300 yards out?

A: That would probably be the best system that would ever work, but I don't think it would fly. There would be too many objections. A breakwater would break the energy of the waves coming in. The Ike Dike concept is designed to protect from storm surge.

Q: Are they looking at both?

A: No.

Q: Is there a way we can get a copy of the Corps of Engineers study that has been done on how this will affect the coast?

A: You can get the study from the Corps by just contacting them.

Q: You mentioned that a 75 foot deep channel would be dug up to Houston. Are you looking at that deep a channel to be protected?

A: That was a possibility that was mentioned, but the studies haven't started yet. We don't yet know the impacts to surge and saltwater intrusion at various depths if something like this was done.

Q: Are there any real field tests of any of this technology that has shown it to be effective?

A: Yes, in Holland. They have had storm surge after storm surge and it has been very effective.

Q: I thought much of the damage from Ike came from the receding storm surge.

A: If there had been a seawall along Bolivar Peninsula it would have broken the storm surge and prevented the backplash from the Bay side.

Q: What will be the impact to the current beach front property owners if this wall is built? Will it impact their quality of life? Will there be private property issues with that?

A: We haven't looked into that yet. There have been concerns mentioned about losing the view for the properties on the west end of Galveston, but the sand socks that they have already had down there were about 15 feet in height.

Q: Is the plan to use federal money to complete this project?

A: Yes.

Comment: There are some scholarships available right now from Texas Floodplain Managers Association to send people to England to the Thames barrier floodgates. You may want to look into that.

Q: The \$32 billion in damages, where does that number come from?

A: It includes the lost economic benefits from the two weeks without electricity and it includes the physical damage.

Q: If you are thinking about extending the dike all the way to the Brazos River, won't you then have to put a floodgate across the mouth of the old Brazos River channel and the Brazos River to protect the infrastructure of the petrochemical industry in Freeport?

A: We haven't gone that far on these studies, but I'm sure that will be considered.

Comment: I find it disingenuous that the maximum, ultimate cost of Ike was presented and then a very low-balled number was given for construction of the Ike Dike.

Comment: I don't like that you are here representing the homeowners when many homeowners have not heard anything about this proposal.

Sierra Club provided extensive comments, read by Linda Shead, describing the many natural resources and habitats of the coastal region and factors that should be taken into consideration when developing the plan to protect people, property and natural areas from a hurricane.

Carole Allen, the Gulf Office Director of Sea Turtle Restoration Project, also gave a statement. Since 1982 there has been an active group working to save the Kemp's ridley sea turtle. In just the last 2-3 years they have begun to see nesting on the upper Texas Coast and they are hopeful that the turtle will not become extinct. They are concerned about the impact of any kind of construction to the beach ecosystem and dune habitat.

Comment: I am concerned about the pushing of the Ike Dike concept when we don't have a lot of answers yet. I am worried that we are not looking at alternatives. Residents of the affected areas have not weighed in on the concept. I would like to see this process go slower and thoughtfully include stakeholders.

Comment: We have to think about this dike and what it will do to accelerate the erosion of the coast.

Q: Where do we go from here? How do we make sure that information gets into the process?

A: I would suggest that if anyone comes upon anything they feel the group should be informed of, or has some ideas of topics they would like H-GAC to look in to and bring to the NRAC, they can pass it along to H-GAC staff. We can look at this topic again at our next meeting if there is still significant interest.

Comment: I certainly find it of interest and would like to get a report of the planning that has gone on in the Governor's Committee. (This will be a topic at the next meeting)

Hurricane Ike

Ellis Picket presented on the damages caused by hurricanes along the region's coast. He had many slides of aerial photos before and after hurricanes with a focus on Hurricane Ike. Photos showed roadways completely washed away, properties wiped clean except for the pilings, and the tremendous erosion of the beaches leaving some properties in the middle of the Gulf.

Environmental Program Highlights

Due to time constraints, environmental program highlights will be sent to NRAC members after the meeting.

Roundtable Discussion

- A request was made by Jim Dannenbaum for H-GAC staff to look at the lack of Water Development Funds and its impact on this region. Also of interest is education to increase public understanding of delayed projects.
- Ellis Pickett reminded those present of two constitutional amendments on the ballot for the November elections that are likely of interest.
 - Constitutional right to access and use Texas public beaches
 - Changing the University of Houston to a Tier-One school

Next Meeting Date

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is Thursday, November 5, 2009, at 1:30 PM.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:37 PM.