

MEETING SUMMARY
NATURAL RESOURCES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
May 5, 2011

The May 5th 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 approximately 1:30 PM. Chairman Dennis Caputo presided.

NRAC voting members present (23):

Jeff Brennan	Nicole Hausler	Don Sarich
Kathy Burris	Steve Hupp	Michael Schaffer
Glenda Callaway	Andy Icken	Ronald Schultz
Dennis Caputo	Jim Joyce	Linda Shead
James Dannenbaum	Glenn Laird	Brian Shmaefsky
Leroy Detling	Carole Lamont	Lori Traweek
Ron Drachenberg	John O'Connell	Jin Ye
Ramesh Gunda	Robert Rayburn	

NRAC voting members not present (11):

Pat Buzbee	Ted Long	Orval Rhoads
Andrew Isbell	Cathy McCoy	Gerald Roberts
Jim Kachtick	Tom Northrup	Pudge Wilcox
Brett Kolaja	Ellis Pickett	

Michael Schaffer delegated Marilyn Christian. Delegated representatives can vote on Committee business; non-delegated representatives count toward quorum but cannot vote.

Current Vacancies:

Austin County.

NRAC advisory member (0)

H-GAC Staff Present (8):

Jeff Taebel, Rachel Powers, Justin Bower, Bill Hoffman, Kristi Corse, Todd Running, Aubin Phillips, Kelly Porter

Others Present:

Michael Turco (USGS), Marilyn Christian (HCPHES), Yvonne Forrest (City of Houston)

Welcome and Roll Call

Dennis Caputo welcomed those present and Justin Bower conducted the roll call.

Certify Quorum

Justin confirmed a quorum.

Approve Meeting Report

Brian Schmaefsky moved to accept the minutes with corrections, and Ramesh Gunda seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Membership

The Committee considered the nomination of Jin Ye to the vacant Galveston County representative slot. Dennis Caputo welcomed Jin and she gave a brief description of herself and her background. Glenda Callaway moved to recommend Jin Ye nomination to the H-GAC's Board of Directors, and Brian Schmaefsky seconded. Linda Shead asked whether she lived in Galveston County, and Jin indicated she did. The Committee voted unanimously to approve the recommendation.

Bylaws Revision

Justin Bower advised the Committee that the bylaws revisions were approved by the H-GAC Board. Linda Shead requested a copy of the bylaws as amended.

BIG Formal Approval

Rachel Powers presented the draft BIG Implementation Plan to the Committee and asked that they recommend it to the H-GAC Board for formal approval. Linda Shead made the motion, and Lori Traweek seconded it. Jeff Brennan asked what reaction we got from the public. Rachel indicated it was mostly positive, no strong opposition. Dennis Caputo asked what the trend for bacteria levels were. Rachel indicated that improvement is starting to be seen. Dennis also asked about the extent of feral hog contamination. H-GAC staff indicated that it is an appreciable consideration, especially in outlying areas. Jim Joyce asked whether any attempt was made to differentiate between human and animal sources. Rachel indicated that there was not a great deal of confidence in bacterial source tracking. Ramesh Gunda asked whether we coordinated with all of the cities, and whether we were approaching them prior to going public. Rachel answered yes on both counts. The motion passed unanimously.

Subcommittees

Parks & Natural Areas

Linda Shead gave the subcommittee report, indicating the subcommittee intended to meet 6 times a year, including two field meetings. The criteria for the parks awards will be amended to include health criteria.

Topics of the Day

The topic of the day was drinking water quality.

Houston Drinking Water Quality Rankings Analysis – *Justin Bower, H-GAC*

Justin gave a review of drinking water quality rankings for the City of Houston. Houston was ranked 6th worst for cities over 250,000 by the Environmental Working Group. Justin indicated that the ranking accurately reflected some aspects of Houston drinking water constituents, but pointed out issues with the methodology behind the rankings. Presence of substances was heavily relied upon, regardless of concentration, to create the rankings. Justin indicated knowledge of potential pollutants and testing technology will continue to evolve and affect the rankings. Questions were asked about the dilution process and concerns were raised by Committee members regarding differences drawn in the presentation between large and small cities, and pollutants detected.

City of Houston Drinking Water– *Yvonne Forrest, City of Houston*

Yvonne gave a brief review of the City of Houston's drinking water sources, treatment and distribution systems. The other cities in the EWG rankings were described as being hard to compare to Houston's system, based on differences in sources and system size. She emphasized that the TCEQ conducts independent monitoring, and that Houston has had a Superior rating for over ten years for their water system. In response to a comment indicating the City shut a contaminated well down only when it became a public concern, Yvonne indicated that the well was already in the process of being shut down. Justin asked Yvonne what their largest water quality issue going forward was. Yvonne responded that water age, the time of transport and residuals for water in the system, was a pressing concern because demand was well removed spatially from supply. Linda Shead asked what the City of Houston intended to do about a source water protection program. Yvonne indicated the City is supporting legislation to give them greater ability to protect source water, but does not own the land around the reservoir lakes. Linda suggested that land purchases were in order to meet these goals. Jim Dannenbaum commented on the ability of the East Plant to use blended water sources, and that land purchases would need to consider the Trinity basin as well, which may not be feasible. Yvonne indicated that the City monitors the reservoir levels, and they were all greater than 90% full at the time.

Houston Area Water Quality Issues – *Michael Turco, USGS*

Michael gave a brief description of the USGS's involvement in water quality research and the region's water use history. USGS and Houston worked together to understand natural contaminants in groundwater, including arsenic, radionuclides, etc. USGS has done research focused on the behavior and influences on water in aquifers and in source water reservoirs like Lake Houston and its tributaries. Their goal is to work toward real time estimation of pollutant concentrations for more predictive management. Justin asked Michael what the largest issue for Lake Houston was in the coming years. Michael responded that sedimentation was an issue. Michael also gave a brief description of emerging contaminants, including personal care products, endocrine disruptors, and others. Nicole Hausler asked how long it took from figuring out the risks of new contaminants to them being regulated. Michael indicated that the EPA was responsible, but that it was likely a time-intensive process. Michael was asked about the environmental flow standards, and he indicated that additional data needed to be collected.

Staff Presentations

Water Quality Management Plan – *Justin Bower*

Justin gave a brief description of the 604(b) Regional Water Quality Management Plan for FY 11. The project collects and analyzes data regarding wastewater infrastructure and other water quality issues. This year's efforts include an evaluation of regionalization, development of a regional QAPP for non-ambient monitoring, development of a regional BMP database, and residential home inspector training on septic systems.

Regional Recycling and Conservation Guide – *Erin Livingston*

Erin presented the latest version of the annual Guide, which contains information about recycling and hazardous waste facilities in the region, by county. She answered questions about local recycling locations and options.

San Bernard Watershed Protection Plan – *Aubin Phillips*

Aubin presented a report on the status of the San Bernard WPP. The WPP is nearing completion, and additional modeling is underway. Aubin also discussed the collection and investigation of OSSF (septic system) data in the region.

Gulf Coast Economic Development – Coastal Tourism Workshop – *Chuck Wemple*

Chuck announced a workshop dealing with ways to preserve and enhance coastal tourism, ecotourism and other related topics.

Roundtable Discussion

The following items were brought up by the members:

- 1) **Dennis Caputo** – Dennis invited the Committee Members to submit a topic of conversation for the next meeting.
- 2) **Steve Hupp** – Steve indicated BPA will have a summer intern doing watershed sampling looking primarily at bacterial contamination. The focus will be on pinpointing sources.
- 3) **Carole Lamont** – Carol indicated that there was a training event on 5/20/11 to address oil spill recovery.
- 4) **Linda Shead** – Linda indicated the release of a study looking at a tourism initiative in conjunction with Texas A&M, and a website, Chamberswildlife.com. The new Anahuac visitor center is also opening soon.

Next Meeting Date

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is Thursday, August 4, 2011, at 1:30 PM.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 PM.