

BACTERIA IMPLEMENTATION GROUP
Animal & Agriculture Workgroups
Tuesday, January 6, 2009
1:00 PM to 2:30 PM

Individuals Present:

Helen Lane (Houston Audubon Society); Brian Koch (TSSWCB); Winston Denton (TPWD-Dickinson); Nancy Sullins (AECOM); Kirk Fleener (TCEQ); Mike Heimer (Montgomery County); Rodney Adams (TCEQ); James Walls (HCPID); Erskine Gittens (TCEQ)

H-GAC Staff Present:

Rachel Powers; Carl Masterson; Erin Anderson

Discussion:

Rachel began by explaining that the italicized portions of the handout had been added as a result of the previous meeting's discussion and that the goal for the current meeting was to finalize the list of sources and implementation activities (IAs). Additionally, those present would begin to prioritize the IAs.

How is chicken waste management handled in this region?

Through the TSSWCB with water quality management plans for dry litter operations. Wet litter operations must be permitted through the TCEQ. Only small-scale operations in the region. We could probably get information on these operations by contacting the Texas Department of State Health Services division that is in charge of inspecting the birds on an annual basis. Urban Harvest might also be a good source of information on chicken operations. Backyard operations don't get educational materials on how to care for chickens or the waste. Most operations, including backyard operations, compost the waste, which kills the bacteria because of the high temperatures.

Cross-fencing can be used for cattle and horses, but not for pigs, rabbits or chickens.

For cattle, horses, sheep, and goats, bacteria levels will be different, but management practices will be the same. Riparian areas are not a large source of bacteria from grazing livestock, typically not enough traffic in those areas that they have to be fenced off. The wildlife impact is probably going to be the biggest source of a problem in the riparian areas.

Possibilities for reducing feral hog numbers:

- Trapping – sometimes up to 25 or 30 will be caught in one trap
- Shooting
- Selling meat – hogs must be trapped and taken alive to a receiving station, there is one in New Waverly
- Hunting

- Land management techniques – the Extension office holds feral hog field days where education is provided to landowners
- Sterilization

There is evidence that feral hogs contribute at least a measurable amount of bacteria and in some areas they are a significant source of bacteria. During the summer months, hogs can be found cooling off in the water. We don't have an accurate count of hog populations, but the Texas Animal Damage Control out of San Antonio is working to get accurate numbers. Research indicates that each hog releases approximately 4.5 billion E.coli every day.

Feral dogs and cats:

People perpetuate the problem by putting out food for these animals. Education is needed to reduce these issues.

Do we have an accurate deer count?

The TPWD district office in La Grange might have an accurate count.

Unregulated animal shelters

Harris County would like to have regulatory authority over them, which would serve multiple purposes, one of which is related to bacteria in the water

General

General implementation activities from this group include increasing participation in voluntary programs and education. The large-scale operations are already doing what they can, it is the smaller operations and residential areas that are the biggest source of problems. Farm Bureau and TDA would be good sources of education information.

Maybe we need to try to prevent birds from nesting on buildings in urban areas or install retention ponds in strategic locations.

Prioritization:

- We need to do BST in order to prioritize. If we don't know where the bacteria is coming from then we are wasting time and money. We need to go after the biggest sources.
- Reduce feral hogs, especially in riparian areas
- Swallows and bats nesting under bridges
- Livestock show – education, would be easy and cost-effective
- Livestock not at shows
- Chickens
- Increasing participation in existing programs

Possible criteria for prioritization:

- Cost to implement the activity
- Political acceptability
- Largest load contributor
- If there is an existing program
- How many could be reached regarding the implementation activity
- Activities that would likely remove a segment from the impaired list
- How many live in the watershed
- Proximity to downtown

Items individuals are looking in to:

- Numbers of feral hogs
- Numbers of deer
- Information on ornamental ponds – Are they unregulated?

Next meeting:

Wednesday, April 8, 2009, 10:00 AM to 11:30 AM, H-GAC offices, Conference Room B