



BIG Project Area Discussion

September 21, 2010

Background

The BIG met for the first time in July of 2008 to develop a plan to reduce bacterial loading to waterways within four TMDL Project Areas: Buffalo and Whiteoak Bayous watershed, Clear Creek Watershed, Houston Metropolitan Area, and Lake Houston Watershed. TCEQ information sheets were provided for each project that included maps of the project areas.

Over the following year, the BIG occasionally discussed the inclusion of various waterways that were not included in the TCEQ TMDL project areas. In August of 2009, Carl Masterson made a presentation that identified several areas in the region that were not in the TMDL project areas but were occasionally discussed or included in maps. The following watersheds were identified as being outside of the TMDL project areas but sometimes included in maps or discussions prior to August 2009: Armand Bayou, Vince Bayou, Carpenters Bayou, Lake Creek, East Fork of the San Jacinto River, and Luce and Tarkington Bayous. Attendees discussed possible ramifications for wastewater treatment facility permit holders outside of the project area and questions regarding the legality of including in the plan areas that were outside the TMDL project areas. TCEQ indicated that, in order to achieve water quality goals, it is not uncommon for an I-Plan to prescribe control actions for a segment that is not on the 303(d) list or has not yet undergone a TMDL. The group asked to include the additional watersheds in maps, but to represent them differently.

In April of 2010, the BIG reviewed several maps that would be included in the I-Plan. As part of that review, Rachel Powers pointed out two maps that showed the difference between the original TMDL project areas and the proposed BIG project area. The proposed BIG project area includes all of the San Jacinto River Basin except waterways upstream of the Lake Conroe Dam. The proposed BIG project area also includes the Clear Creek & Clear Lake watersheds and all areas between them and the San Jacinto River Basin. Lake Creek, Tarkington Bayou, the Ship Channel, Carpenters Bayou, and Armand Bayou were identified as waterways that were outside the original TMDL project area boundaries but which had been included in maps and discussions because of impairment or proximity to impaired water bodies. Rachel asked the group if the proposed BIG project area was what they wanted or if there were any objections. No objections were expressed.

In July 2010, the members of the BIG's Wastewater Treatment Facilities Workgroup suggested that the BIG project area should be reconsidered. Stakeholders indicated that not all possible stakeholders, particularly those with permits for wastewater treatment facilities, had been adequately involved in developing the plan. At its meeting in August, the Workgroup continued the discussion and agreed to make a recommendation to the BIG to reconsider the BIG project area.

Considerations related to TMDL project area and BIG project area

TMDL Project Area (shown in blue on map)

- Some stakeholders outside of the TMDL areas, notably the City of Baytown and the East Harris County Manufacturers Association (EHCMA), may not have been adequately engaged in the planning process. For this reason, the project area should not expand beyond the original TMDL project areas.
- There are no questions of legality in applying implementation plans to areas inside the TMDL project areas.
- If the project area is limited, communities may be subject to fewer requirements and less liability.
- It would cost less to implement activities in only the TMDL project areas.

BIG Project Area (includes blue and green areas on map)

- Additional impaired waterways will receive a TMDL and require development of an I-Plan. If we apply the BIG I-Plan to these waterways, then additional implementation plans will not be required.
- The BIG project area may be more protective of the Lake Houston drinking water source.
- The BIG project area may be more protective of the Galveston Bay oyster waters, which are impaired for bacteria.
- Determinations regarding permitting based on inclusion in the BIG project area may be simpler.
- Stakeholders may find it easier to determine and report activities that occurred within the BIG project area.

Alternatives

While there are many possibilities regarding the geographic scope of the BIG, the following is a list of three possibilities for discussion purposes.

- The original TMDL project areas in place in 2008.
- The BIG Project Area, as considered at the April 2010 BIG meeting.
- Wastewater treatment facilities within the BIG project area but outside TMDL project areas can choose to participate in the I-Plan or will be brought into the I-Plan when a TMDL is completed for their segment of concern. For all other activities that are not tied to wastewater treatment facility permits, the BIG project area will apply.