

San Bernard Watershed Protection Plan

Public Participation Plan

DRAFT

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Public participation opportunities are related to the development of a watershed protection plan for the San Bernard Watershed located in Austin, Colorado, For Bend, Wharton and Brazoria Counties, Texas. This participation plan has been developed by the Houston-Galveston Area Council in cooperation with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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1. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE

The Public Participation and Outreach Plan is required as Task 2.1 under TCEQ Grant #582-9-910456 for the San Bernard Watershed Protection Plan. The purpose of this Public Participation Plan (PPP) is to facilitate involvement of watershed jurisdictions, agencies, organizations, and the general public in the development of the Watershed Protection Plan (WPP). The PPP is designed to involve all entities with the authority, ability and desire to carry out the development and implementation of the WPP.

B. BACKGROUND

The San Bernard Watershed drains approximately 900 square miles, the river flows southeast to form the boundary between Austin and Colorado counties, then flows between Wharton and Fort Bend County and through Brazoria County before flowing into the Gulf of Mexico. The San Bernard River comprises two stream segments as defined by TCEQ. Stream segment 1302 is the San Bernard River above-tidal, which flows from the city of New Ulm in Austin County to a point 2.0 mi upstream of State Highway 35 in Brazoria County. Stream segment 1301 is San Bernard River tidal, which flows from 2.0 mi upstream of State Highway 35 in Brazoria County to the confluence with the Intracoastal Waterway in Brazoria County. There are concerns about dissolved oxygen levels and nutrients, and the river is listed as impaired for bacteria on the 303d list.

The San Bernard River has had problems with sediment buildup for most of the last century. The mouth of the San Bernard River has migrated about two miles to the southwest since the 1929 construction of the Diversion Channel and the 1940's construction of the Gulf Intercoastal Water Way (GIWW), and became silted in at the Gulf of Mexico due to sand accretion from the delta formed by the Diversion Channel. Accretion has accelerated over the last ten years due to a number of factors, including flooding on the Brazos River. In 2008, Hurricane Rita finally closed off the mouth of the river. In March 2009 the Corps of Engineers dredged the mouth of the river to reconnect it to the Gulf of Mexico; however this is not a permanent solution.

In the upper portions of the watershed, the river has had minimal flow for most of the year over the past 20 years, however there used to be a more significant flow. A number of factors have contributed to the lack of flow, including recent drought, creation of retention ponds, more impervious surfaces, and because of increased vegetation and tree cover along the river banks.

Land Uses in the watershed are primarily rural and agricultural, with scattered areas of urbanization that are increasing in size as development continues in the watershed. These various issues need to be addressed together in order to adequately protect the water resources of this watershed.

C. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the San Bernard Watershed Protection Plan is to identify causes and sources of water quality impairment and bring water quality standards into compliance with state criteria. These issues can be addressed on a voluntary basis now since water quality is below levels where a TMDL would be required by the state. Planning for additional growth in the watershed will help maintain water quality.

D. TIMEFRAME

Development of the San Bernard Watershed Plan will be a 2 year process. Major milestones include:

- Watershed Characterization Phase 1: Data Inventory 10/31/09
- Draft and Final Sampling Plan 10/31/09
- Draft QAPP 12/1/09
- Watershed Characterization Phase 2: Data Collection and Analysis 12/15/10
- Watershed maps identifying causes and sources of water quality problems 3/15/10
- Watershed Characterization Phase 3: Identification of Causes and Sources of Pollution and Estimation of Pollutant Loads 6/15/10
- Draft WPP 6/15/11
- Final WPP 7/15/11

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION LEAD AGENCY ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. STAKEHOLDER FACILITATION

Stakeholder meetings will be facilitated by H-GAC. H-GAC will set and distribute meeting agendas prior to each meeting with adequate time for members to add items if necessary. Draft agendas will be made during the previous meeting. Agendas will be reviewed prior to the start of stakeholder meeting and agreed upon before the start of the meeting.

Stakeholder Group members are expected to participate fully in group deliberations. Members will identify and present insights, suggestions, and concerns from a community, environmental, or public interest perspective. Group members are expected to work constructively and collaboratively with other members toward reaching consensus.

B. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The H-GAC will primarily be responsible for data collection and analysis on this project.

C. WPP WRITING

H-GAC will be the entity responsible for writing and submitting the WPP and coordinating approval with TCEQ.

D. MEETING DEADLINES/PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Facilitation and Agenda Setting

Stakeholder meetings will be facilitated by H-GAC. H-GAC will set and distribute meeting agendas prior to each meeting with adequate time for members to add items if necessary. Draft agendas will be made during the previous meeting. Agendas will be reviewed prior to the start of stakeholder meeting and agreed upon before the start of the meeting.

Meeting dates and times and location

To be determined by group at first meeting. Stakeholder group meetings will be held approximately every other month, with work groups meeting on an as needed basis, and public meetings being held during non-stakeholder meeting months.

Meeting Notes

Meeting summaries will be recorded and sent to members and participants within one week of the meeting. Notes will contain action items and tasks to be completed for the next meeting. Notes will be recorded and distributed by H-GAC.

3. PROJECT PARTNERS

A. PROJECT PARTNERS

H-GAC will work with TCEQ in the preparation of the Watershed Protection Plan. A number of cities and school districts are located in the watershed. There are also a number of state and local agencies that operate within the watershed.

B. PARTNERS LIST

Counties:

Austin
Brazoria
Colorado
Fort Bend
Wharton

Cities:

Eagle Lake
Wallis
East Bernard
Kendleton
Needville
Wharton
West Columbia
Sweeny
Brazoria
Jones Creek

Wild Peach Village

School Districts:

Belleville
Sealey
Columbus
Rice Consolidated
Kendleton
Needville
Brazos
Lamar Consolidated
Damon
Sweeny
Columbia-Brazoria
Brazosport
Boling
East Bernard
Wharton
El Campo

C. PARTNERS COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL

Project communication will be facilitated by H-GAC using several different formats. Communication will be used to solicit input and to distribute information regarding the Watershed Protection Plan.

H-GAC will maintain an email distribution list for the San Bernard watershed for the purpose of sending meeting notices, surveys, training announcements, and reminders to people who live and work in the watershed. This email list contains email addresses for all elected officials, state, county and city contacts and participants who have attended public meeting, and those who have asked to be added to the email list. An email distribution list will also be created for the stakeholder group to send out meeting agendas, notes, and items for review.

A mailing list has also been created for local public officials, state officials, and local businesses. A separate mailing list will be created for the stakeholder group to notify members about upcoming meeting agendas, follow up will be through email.

The public will also be notified about project updates through press releases, newspaper articles, newsletters, the project website, and word of mouth. Draft copies of project deliverables will be available for download on the project website. Throughout the two year process, opportunities will be given for the public to provide input and feedback regarding the Watershed Protection Plan.

The public participation process will actively seek out the involvement of stakeholders and the public, let them choose how extensively to be involved, include their contributions, and will demonstrate the stakeholder and public input. Public meetings will be the main outlet for public engagement in the process, generally these meetings will be in an open house format, allowing participants to stay for a short period of time to share their feedback or to stay for the duration of the open house and have more extensive interaction with project staff.

4. WPP STAKEHOLDER GROUP

A. STAKEHOLDER GROUP STRUCTURE

Stakeholder Group members are expected to participate fully in group deliberations. Members will identify and present insights, suggestions, and concerns from a community, environmental, or public interest perspective. Group members are expected to work constructively and collaboratively with other members toward reaching consensus.

Ground Rules:

1. Honor time limits – start on time, end on time, follow agenda
2. Allow everyone to speak in turn
3. Refrain from personal attacks
4. Stay on topic
5. Maintain confidentiality

SUBCOMMITTEES

In order to carry out its responsibilities, the Stakeholder Group has discretion to form standing and ad hoc work groups to carry out specific assignments from the group. Stakeholder Group members will serve on a work group and represent that work group at Stakeholder meetings to bring forth information and recommendations.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Stakeholder group members will assist with:

- Site visits, photos, sample site descriptions
- Advertising the plan
- Provide/gather information on issues and concerns of the watershed
- Have knowledge of existing programs or plans to consider or integrate
- Technical assistance in developing and implementing the plan
- Responsible for implementation and communication to other affected parties
- Provide review and comments on plan as it is written.

B. POTENTIAL AGENCIES INVOLVED AS STAKEHOLDERS

Agencies Involved:

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Texas Parks and Wildlife

U.S. Fish and Wildlife

National Marine Fisheries

United States Army Corps of Engineers

Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB)

Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD)

Extension Agents – Ag and Natural Resources

District Conservationists

US Department of Agriculture (USDA) – RC&D

General Land Office

C. POTENTIAL CITIZENS INVOLVED AS STAKEHOLDERS

Friends of the River - San Bernard is a very active citizen group involved in the watershed. The group is currently organized into committees based on their interests and professional affiliations. H-GAC will continue to look for other interested citizen organizations to work with the Stakeholder Group.

D. MEMBERSHIP SELECTION

Membership in the stakeholder will be on a voluntary basis. During the first round of public meetings, participants will be asked to fill out a survey and indicate interest in serving on the stakeholder group for the duration of the two year project. Members will be selected based on a variety of interests, geographic distribution and ability to commit to the two year project.

MEMBER REPLACEMENTS/ADDITIONS/ALTERNATES

Members should maintain attendance at meeting, if members are unable to attend they may send an alternate who will have voting privileges if prior notification is received of the substitution. Absent members may also submit input to the facilitator or another member for consideration at a meeting.

E. GOALS DEVELOPMENT

Stakeholder group members will assist with the goals and visioning of the project, and will identify and prioritize programs and practices to achieve these goals. The stakeholders are ultimately responsible for the implementation of projects to achieve these goals.

F. DECISION MAKING

The groups will make decisions based on consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, decisions will be made based on a majority vote. For formal recommendations, a two thirds vote will be required.

POWERS

A chairperson will be selected for the stakeholder group.

PROCESS

Stakeholder meetings will be facilitated by H-GAC. H-GAC will set and distribute meeting agendas prior to each meeting with adequate time for members to add items if necessary. Draft agendas will be made during the previous meeting. Agendas will be reviewed prior to the start of stakeholder meeting and agreed upon before the start of the meeting.

G. MEETINGS

FREQUENCY

To be determined by group at first meeting. Stakeholder group meetings will be held approximately every other month, with work groups meeting on an as needed basis, and public meetings being held during non-stakeholder meeting months.

QUORUM

A quorum (51%) will be required to conduct business and hold a meeting.

MATERIALS DISTRIBUTION

Meeting summaries will be recorded and sent to members and participants within one week of the meeting. Notes will contain action items and tasks to be completed for the next meeting. Notes will be recorded and distributed by H-GAC.

H. SELECTION OF THE LEAD ORGANIZATION FOR IMPLEMENTATION/UPDATE OF THE WPP

Selection of the lead organization for implementation and update of the WPP will occur after the subcommittee has been convened.

5. PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

A. ADVERTISING

The H-GAC will advertise the project through press releases, direct mailing, emails, phone calls, the website, and through community newsletters. Efforts will be made to gather public support, diverse public participation, and community input for this project through several different outreach efforts. In order to accomplish this, the project will be advertised throughout the watershed and input will be gathered from stakeholders which will influence the outcome of the Watershed Protection Plan.

B. MEDIA RELATIONS

PRESS KIT

H-GAC has produced a watershed brochure titled "San Bernard Watershed" has been updated and will be used to educate stakeholders about the impacts of individual activities on water quality and how to reduce those impacts. The watershed brochure gives an overview of the area economy and resources, historic water quality, Best Management Practices, and water monitoring results.

NEWS RELEASES

H-GAC creates and submits news releases to numerous media outlets, including 5 local newspapers and approximately 50 additional local and regional newspapers, magazines, radio programs and TV stations. Press releases will be used throughout the Watershed Protection Plan process. Press releases will be used to advertise public involvement opportunities and during major milestones of the project. Additional public information articles will be developed and submitted to key outlets to announce completion of the watershed plan and to encourage stakeholder involvement in the implementation process.

MEDIA DATABASE

Press releases for the San Bernard Watershed Protection Plan will be distributed to:

Alvin Sun / Alvin Advertiser	Fort Bend Mirror
Banner Press Newspaper	The Brazosport Facts
The Bulletin of Brazoria County	Greatwood / New Territory / Pecan Grove
The Bellville Times	Richmond/Rosenberg Herald-Coaster
Eagle Lake Headlight	Las Noticias de Fort Bend
Colorado County Citizen	The Pearland Journal
Houston/Fort Bend Lifestyle & Homes	Fort Bend Star
Fort Bend Herald	Brazoria County News
Sealy News	Katy Times
El Campo Leader-News	The Brazosport Facts
Coastal Broadcasting	Pearland Reporter
Fort Bend Spotlight	La Vida News/The Ebony Voice
Gulf Coast Tribune	KULP Radio
Wallis News-Review	Radio Station KULM-FM
The Weimar Mercury	

NEWSLETTERS

Watershed updates will be written for the “Coordinated Watershed Protection in Southeast and South Central Texas” newsletter, which is prepared and disseminated by the TSSWCB. The newsletter is distributed monthly/bimonthly by mail and email and is available on the TSSWCB, Texas Watershed Steward websites. These updates will also provide information to a broader regional audience about activities, approaches and progress in the Watershed and serve as an important component of partnerships with similar groups in the state.

C. EDUCATION

PROACTIVE OUTREACH/RESPONSE

Texas Stream Team

Texas Stream Team is a network of trained volunteers and supporting partners working together to collect information about the natural resources of Texas to ensure the information is available to all citizens. Volunteers are trained to collect quality-assured information that can be used to make environmentally sound decisions. The Stream Team is administered through a partnership of Texas State University, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Volunteers

complete three phases of training and are certified at various levels depending on their environmental monitoring activities depending on their environmental goals and concerns.

Clean Waters Initiative Program

The Clean Waters Initiative (CWI) program offers workshops that will help local governments, landowners, and citizens develop strategies to reduce pollution in area waterways. Workshops will focus on a variety of issues such as leaking septic tanks and pollution from urban development and agriculture, or broader issues of watershed protection, planning, and stormwater permitting. H-GAC makes individual presentations and can tailor workshops to the needs of specific areas.

Watershed Signage

Road signs can be developed as a way to notify residents and visitors that they are entering the watershed and encourage them to take action and protect water quality in the area. These can be posted on major roads and highways and when crossing a tributary of the San Bernard.

Texas Watershed Stewards

Texas Watershed Stewards (TSW) is a science-based watershed education program designed to help citizens identify and take action to address local water quality impairments. The focus of the groups is public participation in local watershed management. The program is open to all watershed residents, including homeowners, business owners, agricultural producers, decision makers, community leaders, and all other citizens. The program has been implemented through the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and The Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB). The Stakeholder Group will receive the training through presentations and discussions at the meetings. The goal will be to engage as many citizens as possible in the implementation process.

PROTOCOL FOR INQUIRIES, MISINFORMATION, DESIGNATED SPOKESPERSONS

Inquiries for information regarding the project will be directed to the stakeholder group chairperson or H-GAC staff as the designated spokespersons. Inquiries and corrections will be handled in a timely manner.

D. INTERNET

WEB SITE

The San Bernard Watershed Website will be updated and maintained by H-GAC. The website contains information about the watershed, press releases, upcoming meeting announcements, and information presented at previous meetings. Draft copies of deliverables can also be viewed by downloading them from the website. The URL is www.h-gac.com/go/sanbernard .