Public Meeting Minutes

Monday, June 22nd, 2026
5:00 pm – 7:00 pm

In Attendance:

Organizers:

Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC):
- Cornell Evans, Jr., H-GAC Project Manager
- Steven Johnston, H-GAC Principal Planner

In-Person Attendees:

Joe Garcia (Soil Water Conservation District
Sam Hill (Texas A&M Forest Service)
Will Merrell (HDR, Inc.)
Tiernan Pytlak (Bayou Preservation Association)

Virtual Attendees:

Fatima Wajahat (Harris County Precinct 4)
Marcelo Rodriguez (Harris County Precinct 4)
Justin Bower (H-GAC C&E Director)
Evelyn Merz (Sims Bayou Coalition)
Forrest Hartmann (City of Houston)
Stephen Polnaszek (Super Neighborhood 38, Neighborhoods to Trails SW)
Joe Wilson
Robert Snoza (Harris County Flood Control District)
Hanadi Rifai (University of Houston)

Meeting Notes:

Welcome and Introductions

- Cornell Evans, Jr. (H-GAC) commenced the hybrid meeting at 5:00 pm by welcoming the attendees. Mr. Evans and Steven Johnston (H-GAC) introduced themselves and the participants in the room, then called roll for virtual attendees.

Project Background

- Mr. Evans provided an overview of the Brays and Sims Bayou watershed.
    - The Brays and Sims Bayou watershed is located primarily within Harris County, with a small portion of the western side touching Fort Bend County. Major cities include Houston, South Houston, Bellaire, West University

Place, and Southside Place with roadways such as I-45 and I-69 running through the watershed. The watershed is heavily developed, with the exception of a small percentage of forest, wetland and pasture land cover types mostly found in Sims Bayou.

- Assessments of surface water in the Brays and Sims Bayou watershed indicate impairments for contact recreation use due to bacteria levels in exceedance of the state water quality standard. There are also concerns for aquatic life and general use due to high nutrient levels and depressed oxygen.
- Sources of fecal indicator bacteria include point sources such as improperly treated wastewater discharge, and nonpoint sources including overflow from on-site sewage facilities and illicit sewage, waste from pets and livestock, and waste from wildlife and invasive species.

Bacteria Source Model Revisions

- Previously shared with stakeholders at the April 15th, 2026 meeting, Mr. Evans reviewed and led discussion on the results of the Spatially Explicit Load Enrichment Calculation Tool (SELECT) assessments used to estimate the potential daily load from various sources. Mr. Evans also led discussion on the best way to revise these results.
  - Wastewater Treatment Facilities
    - Model results show the highest loading potential in the Middle Brays Above Tidal and Middle Sims Above Tidal subwatersheds.
    - Loading is only estimated within the riparian buffer as all outfalls are located in these areas.
    - Due to the low (5.3%) reported bacteria exceedance of facilities in the watershed over 5 years and based on previous WPPs with a similar exceedance rate, it was recommended by Mr. Evans that adding a failure rate to the estimation would not significantly change the current model. Mr. Evans will instead work with stakeholders to ensure that facilities are still addressed narratively as a major focus for the WPP management measures.
  - On-Site Sewage Facilities
    - Model results show the highest loading potential in the Headwaters of Brays Bayou Above Tidal and Sims Bayou Above Tidal subwatersheds.

    - Mr. Evans inquired if the estimated failure rates for on-site sewage facilities should be adjusted.

        - Stakeholders agreed that applying different failure rates based on whether a system is permitted vs non-registered would be best. Will Merrell (HDR, Inc.) stated that an increase to 20% is sufficient for permitted, however non-registered systems should be higher. Evelyn Merz (Sims Bayou Coalition) agreed with this method. It was pointed out that nearby watershed Halls Bayou has studies where the failure rates for systems were approximately 50%.
    - Dog Waste
        - Highest relative loads occur in the Headwaters and Middle Brays Bayou Above Tidal subwatersheds.
        - H-GAC presented various suggestions for revising the dog waste methods. Some stakeholders suggested keeping the AVMA assumed rate of dogs per household rate of 1.5 to take into account the number of roaming stray dogs not included in these estimates, while other stakeholders wanted to utilize a new method that H-GAC developed in order to bring dog waste estimates as low as possible for the Brays and Sims Bayou watersheds.
        - As a compromise, Mr. Evans suggested using a rate of 1.0 dogs per household, previously recommended by other workgroup members in early June, as a compromise. Stakeholders agreed.
    - Livestock Waste
        - Highest relative loads occur in the Headwaters and Middle Sims Bayou Above Tidal subwatersheds
        - It was determined at the last meeting by stakeholders that the distribution of livestock was supported as accurate at least for Sims Bayou
        - Mr. Evans met with Brian Koch (Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board) in early June to discuss various revision strategies. He proposed a revised method that applies additional natural land cover categories (i.e. woody wetlands and emergent herbaceous wetlands) to calculations using original percentage of use. He suggested not to limit natural land cover categories cause livestock can have a presence in any of them.
        - Mr. Evans presented this suggestion to stakeholders and will showcase the revised estimates stakeholders at the next meeting.
    - Deer Waste
        - Original modeling results show the highest loading potential in the Headwaters of Brays and Sims Bayou Above Tidal subwatersheds
        - Based on communication with Kelly Norrid (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department) in early June, there is not enough sustainable habitat for deer

        - Ultimately, the TPWD has determined that the methods that H-GAC uses for calculating deer for urban watersheds. The numbers, rates, and formulas provided for deer calculations are for ideal deer habitat, permitting, etc. Mr. Norrid determined that the method is more accurate for counties such as Brazoria County or the Chocolate Bayou watershed. Justin Bower (H-GAC) stated H-GAC should meet with TPWD to determine if they have an alternate method for urban watersheds to assist with the modeling process.
        - Estimated impacts from this source are negligible and were not recommended to be adjusted further. As this source along with "Other Wildlife" will not be directly addressed through implementation, estimated loads from these sources can be converted into equivalent units of sources prioritized in the WPP such as pet waste, for example. Mr. Evans will discuss this idea with the stakeholders in upcoming meetings.
    - Feral Hogs
        - Model results show the highest loading potential in the Middle Brays Bayou Above Tidal and Headwaters of Sims Bayou Above Tidal subwatersheds.
        - Mr. Evans shared with the stakeholders that Mr. Norrid previously stated there are not enough bottomlands for feral hogs to travel through or have a primary source of food in these watersheds. However, Robert Snoza (HCFCD) stated that they have a presence in Sims Bayou. Ms. Merz stated that last year she saw a few crossing a road. Mr. Bower also that he's seen signs of feral hogs. Based on these comments from meeting attendees, Mr. Evans stated that he will keep the original fecal indicator bacteria loading estimates.
    - Wildlife Other Than Deer
        - While there are no data on other wildlife species that can be used in a spatial analysis, recent studies on bacteria source tracking in tributaries to the Galveston Bay Estuary indicate large concentrations of bacteria from wildlife species in surface water. To account for this, all previously assessed sources are considered only 80% of the total load and an additional 20% is considered wildlife impact.
        - As with other WPP development projects facilitated by H-GAC, the value of the estimate calculated for 2022 will be applied consistently in projected five year intervals to represent a slight decline in wildlife populations as development increases.
        - During previous discussions, Mr. Norrid did not object to 20% as a general number for urban watersheds such as these as it is a low percentage. Stakeholders in this meeting agreed with using 20% as

well. Sam Hill (Texas A&M Forest Service) and Mr. Merrell agreed that Willow Waterhole Bayou has a high presence of waterfowl/avian wildlife. Mr. Johnston suggested looking at DNA methods from past studies and incorporate those methods here. Mr. Evans will meet internally with H-GAC staff in the future to gain more information and determine if these methods can be used.

- Mr. Evans reminded the partnership about sources that could contribute to instream loads that were not accounted for in the SELECT analysis due to insufficient or incompatible data. These include birds and sanitary sewer overflows (SSOs). Mr. Evans pointed out that while the impacts of these sources were not estimated, they can still be included as priorities in the WPP.
- At the previous meeting, stakeholders presented some additional ideas to consider as "other sources" such as naturally occurring sources (bio accumulation) and other indicators besides E coli and Enterococci.
- Ms. Merz inquired about obtaining sufficient data for SSOs. Mr. Bower answered that SSOs are hard to capture because they are not adding to a load at a continuous rate. They will most likely come out as a small average within the SELECT model due to the nature of their occurrence. He highlighted how data is acquired from the TCEQ Sanitary Sewer database. Mr. Johnston highlighted how the City of Houston has a 2 billion dollar consent decree to address SSOs, so there are efforts already in place.
- Mr. Evans pointed out that addressing SSOs, and by extension failing infrastructure, will be a focus for the WPP as requested by stakeholders from the previous meeting. Targeted monitoring, previously defined by Mr. Evans as a project that focuses on collecting fecal indicator bacteria samples from discharging outfall pipes along a specific waterbody, will play a role in remediating infrastructure as it helps local jurisdictions more accurately pinpoint where these point sources are located. H-GAC has plans to conduct targeted monitoring in the Sims Bayou watershed later this year.

Implementation Strategies

- Mr. Evans explained how the results of the model analysis will guide the development of implementation strategies in the WPP. At the next meeting, stakeholders will decide on a milestone date for completing implementation, and discuss the best ways to reduce pollution in the watershed. This may involve reallocating load reduction burdens from sources that are not directly controlled (e.g. wildlife) by over-reducing sources that can be addressed with targeted implementation (e.g. pet waste).

Next Steps and Discussion

- Mr. Evans plans to meet with workgroup members in July and August to discuss

implementation strategies. The next stakeholder meeting is tentatively scheduled for September. At the next stakeholder meeting, H-GAC will guide discussion on potential implementation strategies corresponding to sources of concern.

- Before the meeting adjourned, Mr. Evans posed a discussion question for the audience. H-GAC's Clean Rivers Program staff is collecting data on the tidal portions of Brays Bayou and Sims Bayou to determine if there is recreation they've either observed or heard about on these waterways. Stakeholders gave various accounts of recreation including kayaking, wading, fishing, and a series of waterside parks along Brays Bayou Tidal and Sims Bayou Tidal where they drain into the Houston Ship Channel. H-GAC will inform TCEQ of these accounts as these segments are currently only designated as Navigational/Industrial waterways.

- Mr. Evans shared two outreach and education opportunities with attendees:
    - FIFA World Cup Houston Sustainability Committee Volunteer Opportunities, which include bayou cleanups, can be accessed here: https://luma.com/environmentalsustainability
    - H-GAC Water Quality Educational Exhibit Summer Trainings: H-GAC is looking to host trainings this summer in the Brays Bayou and Sims Bayou watersheds focusing on H-GAC Water Quality Educational Exhibits that are available for community loan-out. The Educational Exhibits discuss Pet Waste, Fats Oils and Grease, Turning Your Yard Into A Sponge, and Litter Reduction Through Proper Waste Disposal. An official announcement will be sent soon with the confirmed dates and locations. If you have any questions you may contact Kendall Guidroz at Kendall.Guidroz@h-gac.com or 713-993-2469.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:52 pm.

For more information, visit https://www.h-gac.com/watershed-based-plans/brays-sims-bayou, or contact project staff:

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