

Cotton Bayou Watershed Public Meeting

Monday, June 18th, 2025
4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.

In Attendance:

Organizers:

Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC)

Cornell Evans, Jr., Presenter, H-GAC Project Manager

Rachel Windham, H-GAC Project Staff

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)

Nicole Reed, TCEQ Project Manager

Attendees:

Natalie Lopez, City of Mont Belvieu

Sam Hill, Texas A&M Forest Service

Stephen Johnston, H-GAC

Meeting Notes:

Welcome and Introductions

- Cornell Evans (H-GAC) commenced the meeting at 4:00 p.m. by welcoming the attendees. He then invited attendees to introduce themselves.

Project Overview and TMDL Addendum

- Mr. Evans provided an overview of the original Cotton Bayou Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and facilitated by H-GAC:
 - Levels of the fecal indicator bacteria *Enterococcus* in exceedance of the state water quality standard observed in Cotton Bayou originally did not support contact recreation use as described in the 2022 Integrated Report of Surface Water Quality produced by TCEQ. H-GAC prepared the original TMDL to address the *Enterococci* impairment in the watershed.
 - The Commission adopted this TMDL on May 22, 2024. EPA approved it on July 26, 2024, at which time it became an update to the state's Water Quality Management Plan.
 - Collecting data over time in the watershed determined that the Above Tidal portion of the watershed was impaired for *E. coli*, at which time TCEQ asked H-GAC to prepare an Addendum TMDL for the Above Tidal assessment unit (AU) due to its impairment documented from the 2024 Texas Integrated Report.
 - Nicole Reed (TCEQ) provided a brief overview of the TCEQ Addendum process and explained that they are identified when a new 303(d) List is made available by TCEQ. They have expedited timelines and go through a more informal review and approval process when compared to an original TMDL.
 - Mr. Evans then gave a brief overview of the new TMDL addendum before explaining what types of potential sources of bacteria contamination there are. They include wastewater discharge, failing onsite sewage facilities, domestic and wildlife animal waste, and waste from invasive species such as feral hogs.
 - Mr. Evans defined what a TMDL is: the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive in a single day without exceeding water quality standards. He then proceeded to explain how this amount is calculated and the process for each component.

- Stakeholders further inquired about the TMDL calculation process in regard to what the difference was between the geometric mean and TMDL values. Ms. Rachel Windham (H-GAC) answered by explaining that the geometric mean value was a single sample criterion based on seven years of sampling data whereas the value for the TMDL was the “budget” or total allowable bacteria load for the AU.

Implementation Plan Updates

- Mr. Evans provided an update on the submitted I-Plan and stated that it is set to be approved by TCEQ Commission on July 9th, 2025. He then gave an overview of the components of an I-Plan including:
 - Strategies - actionable items to address bacteria reduction for specific management measures associated with specific priority areas and responsible parties.
 - Milestones - measurable goals to reflect progress of strategies.
 - Schedule – guide for which milestones should be accomplished in the next five years and at what point.
- Mr. Evans described the adaptive management methodology of I-Plans which allows for stakeholders to periodically assess plan measures for efficiency and effectiveness. He then also explained the usual management measures for which strategies, milestones, schedules, and load reductions are included in I-Plans.
- At the June 2024 meeting, it was determined that the management measures listed below were to be prioritized in the following order in the draft I-Plan for Cotton Bayou:
 - 1) Reducing stormwater sources such as pet wastes and illegal dumping
 - 2) Promoting safe OSSF use and maintenance
 - 3) Supporting land management initiatives
 - 4) Promoting feral hog management
 - 5) Maintaining and improving WWTF and collection system function
- Mr. Evans reviewed specific actions suggested for each management measure and stated that he would like to go back to those actions and prioritize them based on stakeholder feedback during the Discussion portion of the presentation.

Next Steps

- Prioritize implementation strategies based on stakeholder feedback
- Begin funding discussions with stakeholders
- Build stakeholder list

Discussion

- Discussions following the presentation focused on next steps and what's already being done within the watershed. Natalie Lopez (City of Mont Belvieu) shared that the City is implementing efforts such as annexing a subdivision nearby and have those residential properties convert their OSSFs to city facilities (currently in the redesign phase). They also have another project in which they're expanding a WWTF. H-GAC previously confirmed at the June 2024 meeting with TCEQ that best management practices such as these can be included in future status reports to reflect the proactive efforts of the City in supporting the I-Plan.
- Stakeholders and H-GAC staff then shared ideas for distributing educational materials and raising awareness. Mr. Johnston inquired whether the City of Mont Belvieu has any ordinance for pet waste stations at apartment complexes. Ms. Lopez responded by stating that she is not aware of any ordinances, however if there are ordinances that H-GAC has seen that have been effective, it would be good to send them their way. Mr. Johnston stated that would be a good idea, especially if the language has already been written to make it easy to adopt if the City is interested.
- Sam Hill (Texas A&M Forest Service) proposed that a combined riparian buffer workshop and feral hog management workshop be held within the watershed and offered the contact information of Jay Long, who typically gives presentations on the topic.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

For more information about the meeting or the project, please contact:

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