



# STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH REPORT

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East Fork San Jacinto River  
Watershed Protection Plan

August 2024



EAST FORK SAN JACINTO RIVER  
WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP



Houston-Galveston  
Area Council



# Stakeholder Outreach Report

## for the East Fork San Jacinto River Watershed Protection Plan

August 2024

This document was prepared by the Houston-Galveston Area Council for the stakeholders of the East Fork San Jacinto River Watershed Partnership and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. This project is funded by a Clean Water Act Section 319(h) grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.



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## I. Introduction

East Fork San Jacinto River flows south from its headwaters in Walker County to a confluence with Lake Houston and is one of the primary tributaries of the San Jacinto River. The East Fork San Jacinto River watershed is composed of the drainage area of East Fork San Jacinto River, a classified segment as defined by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), as well as three unclassified segment tributaries, and a network of natural and manmade drainage channels. This watershed area spans approximately 410 square miles and includes portions of Walker, Montgomery, San Jacinto, Liberty, and Harris counties. This area and its waterways represent an essential part of supporting local communities and economies, recreation, and a diverse ecology.

Water quality issues – primarily high levels of fecal waste – are prevalent throughout the East Fork San Jacinto River watershed and are of particular concern as flows from East Fork San Jacinto River contribute to the Lake Houston reservoir. Elevated levels of fecal waste in area waterways can be a result of both human activity and natural influences. Harmful pathogens associated with fecal waste can impact public health. Other issues identified by stakeholders during preliminary conversations and as part of similar local efforts include sediment loading (from development), changes in flow velocity and volume, illegal dumping, trash, and bank erosion. Encroaching development from nearby urban areas has created further challenges for local stakeholders as they seek to address the impacts of these and other pollutant sources.

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) conducted a series of stakeholder outreach efforts to engage local stakeholders, empower their ability to make informed decisions about their community's water quality, and facilitate their active participation in developing a watershed protection plan (WPP) for the East Fork of the San Jacinto River. The ultimate goal of the stakeholder outreach efforts was to submit an approved WPP that reflected local decisions, met Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requirements, and focused on the goal of bringing water quality into compliance with state water quality standards.

Efforts were guided by a TCEQ approved Public Participation Plan<sup>1</sup> (PPP), and included:

- forming the East Fork San Jacinto River Watershed Partnership (Partnership) (Section 2);
- developing and implementing communication with stakeholders (Section 3);
- facilitating the Partnership through the development of the WPP (Section 4);
- representing the Partnership at public meetings (Section 5);
- conducting a series of education and outreach events (Section 6); and
- coordinating with the West Fork and Lake Creek WPP (Section 7).

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<sup>1</sup> The PPP is available for review on the project website at: [www.eastforkpartnership.weebly.com](http://www.eastforkpartnership.weebly.com)

The outcomes of these efforts are reflected in the draft WPP<sup>2</sup> developed, reviewed, and approved by the Partnership. Updating and implementing the WPP will rely on a continuity of these efforts and the perpetuation of an engaged stakeholder base. Additional information on stakeholder contact was provided to TCEQ in quarterly progress reports throughout the project.



**Figure 1.** Wildflowers in the East Fork San Jacinto River watershed

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<sup>2</sup> The draft WPP is available for review on the project website at: [www.eastforkpartnership.weebly.com](http://www.eastforkpartnership.weebly.com)

## II. Subtask 5.2: Forming the East Fork San Jacinto River Watershed Partnership

The basis of a successful WPP development process is structured participation from a diverse set of local stakeholders and technical experts. While the outreach elements engaged a wider public audience, and specific partners contributed to the project in a variety of ways, the core of the stakeholder involvement for the project was focused on the formation and facilitation of the Partnership.

The Partnership is the association of local stakeholders convened by H-GAC and TCEQ to develop the WPP and generally promote the aims of the project. The Partnership is composed of three components: the Steering Committee (leadership), the Work Groups (topic specialists), and the general stakeholder body (general stakeholders), convened by facilitators H-GAC and TCEQ. The focus of the Partnership is local stakeholders, but some representatives from state or regional agencies who had resources or specialized insight were included.

### Assembling the Partnership

To develop the Partnership, H-GAC used the following methods to introduce stakeholders to the project, and to generate interest in the Steering Committee before and between the first set of meetings:

- **Formal mailings** – Prior to the first meeting of the Partnership, H-GAC sent a formal mailing to all elected officials, local governments, key partners, and identified community groups in the area.
- **One-on-one meetings** – H-GAC met one-on-one with key partners and other interested parties in the watershed to talk through related efforts, identify local concerns, and generate interest in participation.
- **Email announcements** – H-GAC developed an email list of known local stakeholders and sent multiple emails prior to the initiation of public meetings.
- **Representation at public events** – H-GAC announced the project and invited participation at a series of public meetings or events at which H-GAC gave direct presentations or had booth presences, including: H-GAC's Natural Resources Advisory Committee, Regional Flood Management Committee, and Basin Steering Committee, the Bacteria Implementation Group (BIG) meetings, the Galveston Bay Estuary Program's Water and Sediment Quality Subcommittee, and through speaking engagements and outreach at local events in the region. H-GAC was also present at many other regional meetings but did not make formal presentations.
- **Press releases and interviews with local media** – H-GAC issued a press release prior to the initial Partnership meeting.

- **Partner communications outlets** – H-GAC worked to coordinate announcement and publicity of the project with partner agencies including Houston-based Citizens Environmental Coalition and others.
- **Survey** – At the first public meeting, as the Partnership was forming, H-GAC conducted a stakeholder survey to determine various stakeholder preferences concerning contact, meeting times and locations, and other elements to improve outreach.

## Steering Committee and Work Groups

The Partnership designated a leadership team to provide continuity throughout the project and be ultimately responsible for votes of approval at project milestones. The Steering Committee members agreed to represent not just their specific organization, but the category of organizations they represented. H-GAC worked with TCEQ to identify the necessary interests in the watershed (e.g., agriculture, local government) to ensure the project team took every opportunity to attract representatives from those groups. To ensure the Partnership had adequate interest, H-GAC made a series of one-on-one contacts to discuss potential members and request nominations from the Partnership between the first and second meetings.

### Steering Committee

The Steering Committee (**Table 1**) was formed at the second project meeting, based on nominations made between the first and second meeting, and nominations from the floor. The mix of interests in the Committee were robust and sufficient to represent the watershed.

**Table 1.** East Fork San Jacinto River Watershed Partnership steering committee members

Committee Member	Member Organization	Interest Represented
Ashley Morgan-Olvera	Sam Houston State University	Academia
Brian Koch	Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board	Agriculture
Kevin Muraira	Bayou Land Conservancy	Community/Environmental Organizations
Kelly Norrid	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department	Community/Environmental Organizations
Cassidy Ince	TAMU Forest Service	Forestry
Jamie Shakar	City of Houston	Local Government
Andrew Isbell	Walker County	Local Government

### Work Groups

The WPP covers a diverse geographic area, and a broad range of land uses, interests, and water quality issues. The Partnership created small, topic-focused

Work Groups that met to provide more detailed feedback and recommendations to Partnership meetings. The Work Groups were open to all interested parties, but participants were encouraged to be regular meeting attendants. The extent of Work Groups was determined by the Stakeholders after the first meetings. Work Groups were formed for:

- Human Sources and Pet Waste; and
- Agriculture, Wildlife, and Invasive Species.

Work Group sessions were well intended and productive throughout the project. Recommendations or guidance from the Work Groups was brought to the next Partnership meeting for consideration by the broader group and Steering Committee.



**Figure 2.** Winters Bayou

### III. Subtask 5.3: Communicating with Stakeholders

The cornerstone of the WPP process is beginning and maintaining active, two-way communication with stakeholders, the watershed community, and key partners. H-GAC's approach to communicating with stakeholders was part of a targeted outreach plan which sought to engage a diverse group of stakeholders, secure their commitment to the ongoing process, maintain their interest throughout the process, disseminate information to the public to increase understanding of the project, and coordinate with other efforts in adjacent fields (forestry, flood mitigation, conservation, etc.).

#### Communication Elements

The guiding principles for the communication strategy was that outreach should be multifaceted, targeted to specific interests as appropriate, consistent in message, accessible, and timely. To meet these goals and principles H-GAC utilized all appropriate communication mechanisms to reach stakeholders and provide ongoing and transparent communication about project progress and needs. These communication means included:

- **Distribution list** – H-GAC maintained a stakeholder list of meeting attendees, key partners identified in prior communications, technical resources, and news media. The list was updated after each meeting or other events as warranted.
- **Email** – the primary means of disseminating meeting information, announcements, requests for comment, etc., was email directly to the stakeholders, unless they requested otherwise. Meeting notifications were sent 30 days in advance of the meeting to the greatest degree practicable.
- **One-on-one calls** – The depth of activity and number of partners in the watershed called for routine check-in conversations with partners. H-GAC made one-on-one calls as needed to get additional information from stakeholders, and coordinate with partners on adjacent efforts.
- **Website** – H-GAC maintained a project website<sup>3</sup> to host general project information, meeting announcements, primary project documents, and contact information. The site was updated on at least a quarterly basis, or more frequently as events warranted.
- **Press releases** – prior to the first public meeting of the Partnership, H-GAC released a TCEQ approved press release to local media relevant to the watershed.
- **Partner communications networks** – to expand the project's reach, H-GAC sought to work with partners to promote our projects or shared efforts through their existing communication networks. This resulted in an effective "force multiplier" for our messages, as demonstrated by good attendance at public events.

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<sup>3</sup> Project website is found at [www.eastforkpartnership.weebly.com](http://www.eastforkpartnership.weebly.com)

## Communication Results

The result of the comprehensive outreach strategy outlined in the PPP and implemented during the project was generally successful. Attendance at meetings, and appreciable presence at local events generated additional participants.



**Figure 3.** Stakeholders attending a workshop

## IV. Subtask 5.4: Facilitating Stakeholders in Watershed Protection Plan Development

The primary purpose of the outreach and engagement activities described in the prior sections is the development of an EPA 9-Element WPP. While H-GAC, TCEQ, and partners sought to integrate and coordinate the effort with adjacent work (flood mitigation, conservation, etc.) as appropriate, the focus of the Partnership's meetings, technical analyses were to guide stakeholders through the process of identifying causes and sources of pollution in the watershed and developing effective voluntary measures to bring the waterways into compliance with applicable water quality standards.

### Partnership Meetings

The Partnership held seven (6) full Partnership meetings between December 2022 and October 2023. Additionally, two (2) sets of Work Group meetings were held to inform decisions by the Partnership in subsequent discussions. The primary pattern of discussion at the Partnership meetings was to introduce a subject (e.g., characterizing sources of fecal contamination) at one meeting where discussion would begin; next, discuss that topic in more depth in Work Group meetings; and finally, bring recommendations back to the next Partnership meeting for further discussion and approval. This process worked well in the East Fork San Jacinto River WPP project, and there was relatively efficient progress by the stakeholders, without multiple rounds of Work Groups needed for most topics. All meetings started with a brief project review for new participants and ended with a chance for partners to announce their own related events or efforts. The meetings and their topics are described in **Table 2**.

To ensure accessibility, H-GAC disseminated a survey about meeting times to find the best fit for scheduling Partnership and Work Group meetings. While in-person options were offered for the first and last meetings, all meetings maintained a virtual option as dictated by stakeholder preference.

Meetings were generally structured to enhance interaction, often starting and ending with an informal discussion period where conversation and mingling was encouraged. These more informal sessions were highly valuable in facilitating discussion and coordination between partners.

**Table 2.** East Fork San Jacinto River Watershed Partnership and work group meetings

Date	Meeting Type	Topics
Dec. 12, 2022	Partnership (hybrid; in-person option at Montgomery County Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension (AgriLife Extension) Office)	Project introduction, water quality data review, and invitation to nominate Steering Committee
Feb. 15, 2023	Partnership (virtual)	Steering Committee formation, water quality analysis, pollution source model review and discussion, and invitation to join Work Groups
Apr. 27 & May 2, 2023	Work Groups (virtual) • Human Sources & Pet Waste • Agriculture, Wildlife & Invasives	Discussion and revision of modeling results
May 17, 2023	Partnership (virtual)	Discussion of workgroup suggested model revisions and brief introduction of water quality improvement strategies
Jun. 30, 2023	Work Groups (virtual) • Combined Human Sources & Pet Waste, and Agriculture, Wildlife & Invasives	Further discussion and revision of modeling results
Jul. 12, 2023	Partnership (virtual)	Further discussion of workgroup suggested model revisions and continued discussion of implementation strategy selection guided by source-specific bacteria reduction targets
Aug. 30, 2023	Partnership (virtual)	Final discussion of updated model results, further discussion of bacteria reduction targets' effect on implementation strategy selection
Oct. 19, 2023	Partnership (hybrid; in-person option at Montgomery County AgriLife Extension Office)	Selection of implementation strategies to include in the WPP and discussion of details related to each strategy such as responsible parties and milestones

### Other Partner Meetings

In addition to the formal meetings with the Partnership and Work Groups, H-GAC and TCEQ facilitated a number of meetings with key partners, both before and during the primary period of public engagement. Some were designed to keep stakeholders up to date, others were to coordinate with key partners on related efforts. More information about the extent of these meetings was provided to TCEQ in quarterly reports.

## Facilitation Results

The Partnership worked effectively and efficiently through the WPP development process, providing continuous and meaningful feedback. The Steering Committee voted to approve project progress at key milestones (water quality data results, modeling results, list of recommended solutions, and WPP draft approval). More than sufficient information was provided by the Partnership to shape and complete the East Fork San Jacinto River WPP. The project enjoyed a highly engaged, diverse stakeholder group that was focused specifically on engaging related and adjacent efforts. To that end, the draft WPP includes substantial information regarding future coordination with forestry, flood mitigation, conservation, and recreational efforts.



Figure 4. Meeting slide

## V. Subtask 5.5: Attending Public Meetings

The specific development of the WPP was focused on the formal Partnership meetings and targeted meetings with partners. However, the WPP project also included significant priority for general public engagement to raise general awareness among the public (or knowledge for specific topics), support related partner efforts, and attract additional participation for the project. In addition to outreach and education events specifically held by H-GAC and its partners, project staff attended and contributed to a variety of local events, meetings, festivals, and other gatherings. The list of public meetings in **Table 3** is not exhaustive but represents public engagements other than East Fork San Jacinto River Watershed Partnership meetings, in which H-GAC had a speaking role, booth, or participated in a way other than passive presence. In addition to these events, the project was represented at a variety of regional events and meetings as part of more general promotion of H-GAC programs and efforts or in areas outside the sphere of the watershed.

**Table 3.** Public meetings attended by project staff

Event	Date	H-GAC Activity
Galveston Bay Estuary Program Water and Sediment Quality Subcommittee Meeting	Quarterly in March, June, September and December throughout project period	Project staff attended to represent this and other watershed projects in and around the Lower Galveston Bay watershed.
H-GAC Basin Steering Committee	Bi-annual (spring and fall) throughout project period	Project staff attended to represent this and other watershed projects in the Clean Rivers Program area.
H-GAC Natural Resources Advisory Committee	Quarterly in February, May, August and November throughout project period	Project staff gave a brief update on the East Fork San Jacinto River WPP project progress and invited feedback from local decision-makers.
H-GAC Regional Flood Management Council Meeting	Quarterly in January, April, July and October throughout project period	Project staff attended and discussed flood mitigation measures for whole region, including project watershed area
Houston Area Bacteria Implementation Group	Bi-annual (spring and fall) throughout project period	Project staff attended to represent this and other watershed projects in the BIG area.
H-GAC Clean Waters Initiative Workshop	2/14/2022	Project staff attended to represent this and other watershed projects in the region; learned about Texas Water Development Board loan and grant opportunities for wastewater projects that could be of interest to East Fork stakeholders

Event	Date	H-GAC Activity
H-GAC Clean Waters Initiative Workshop	4/28/2022	Project staff attended and shared information on H-GAC watershed-based plan viewer which allows stakeholders to find information on WPP projects throughout the region
Houston Canoe Club Meeting	5/11/2022	Project staff attended and presented and discussed watershed projects
Texas Watershed Coordinators Roundtable	5/24/2022	Project staff attended and discussed watershed projects throughout the state
H-GAC Clean Waters Initiative Workshop	6/16/2022	Project staff attended and shared information on H-GAC education and outreach activities and materials as well as highlighting regional volunteer efforts and hosting a panel discussion
H-GAC Parks and Natural Areas Roundtable	7/11/2022	Project staff attended to present and discuss regional watershed projects
Bayou Preservation Association Symposium	9/28-29/2022	Project staff attended the symposium.
AgriLife Lecture Series: Sustainable Blue-Green Infrastructure and the Urban Landscape	10/7/2022	Project staff attended the lecture series.
Galveston Bay Council Meeting	10/19/2022	Project staff attended to represent this and other watershed projects in the region.
Clean Waters Initiative Workshop	10/21/2022	Project staff attended and shared information on Clean Rivers Program monitoring procedures used to collect data for the project and performed interactive, live demonstrations
Galveston Bay Council Meeting	7/19/2023	Project staff attended and discussed efficacy of <i>E. coli</i> as water quality indicators and presented updates on watershed projects
Galveston Bay Council Meeting	10/18/2023	Project staff attended and presented updates on this and other watershed projects.

## Public Outreach Results

Project staff had a wealth of speaking opportunities with partners and other community organizations throughout the project and gave regular updates at our own regional meetings and related boards and organizations. Not fully detailed above are the additional public meetings (Boards, etc.) that H-GAC attended in a passive role. H-GAC intends to focus on additional public outreach following the writing of this report to support the approval of the draft WPP and foster early implementation and public outreach.

## VI. Subtask 5.6: Education and Outreach Events

In addition to H-GAC speaking engagements and presence at local events, H-GAC hosted, or cohosted with partner agencies, a series of education and outreach events specifically targeted at watershed needs. The events are detailed in **Table 4**.

**Table 4.** Education and outreach events hosted by H-GAC and partners

Event	Date	H-GAC Activity
Texas Watershed Stewards Workshop	4/4/2023	H-GAC and AgriLife staff worked to bring this training to a site near the watershed (Conroe). This event also drew attendance from stakeholders from the West Fork San Jacinto River and Lake Creek watersheds.
Texas Watershed Stewards Workshop	6/11/2024	H-GAC and AgriLife staff worked to bring this training to a site in the watershed (Cleveland).



**Figure 5.** Texas Watershed Stewards workshop materials

## VII. Subtask 5.7: West Fork and Lake Creek Watershed Protection Plan Coordination

Due to successes with facilitating an active stakeholder base in the nearby West Fork San Jacinto River and Lake Creek watersheds to develop their own WPP in 2018, H-GAC worked to coordinate complimentary efforts between the East Fork San Jacinto River WPP and the former project. In addition to representing and advocating for both projects at local meetings and events (see **Table 3** and **Table 4**), H-GAC specifically worked to identify and pursue funding for implementation priorities identified by both projects. On April 29 and 30, 2024, a series of stakeholder coordination meetings were held for the West Lake Houston basin to discuss implementation measures in the West Fork San Jacinto River and Lake Creek WPP as well as the Spring Creek WPP and Cypress Creek WPP. As a result of these meetings, H-GAC was informed of a grant opportunity through the Texas A&M Forest Service to fund forestry related implementation of WPPs. H-GAC submitted a proposal and was selected for \$50,000 of funding to enhance urban forestry in the Lake Houston watershed area to the benefit of multiple area WPPs.

Another result of the late April West Lake Houston basin meetings included the ability to share newly updated on-site sewage facility educational materials and homeowner wastewater assistance resource information to stakeholders throughout the Lake Houston watershed area.

Finally, H-GAC continues to promote the importance of volunteer monitoring through coordinating the Texas Stream Team (TST) program throughout the 13-county region. While no TST trainings have been scheduled in the East Fork San Jacinto River watershed as of this report, trainings were held on the following dates at the West Lake Houston basin locations indicated below:

- 9/9/2022 – The Woodlands, TX
- 6/28/2024 – Conroe, TX
- 8/20/2024 – Jessie Jones Park in Harris County (Precinct 3)

## VIII. Summary

The East Fork San Jacinto River WPP project implemented a robust series of public participation processes, ranging from formal Partnership meetings to informal conversations. The end result of this ongoing set of efforts was an active and engaged stakeholder group and firm connections with adjacent efforts by key partners. These efforts form a foundation for future implementation.

Subsequent to this report, H-GAC will continue to engage the project stakeholders and general public as needed to support the implementation of the approved WPP and coordinate with other local efforts.



Figure 6. East Fork San Jacinto River