



STAKEHOLDER OUTREACH REPORT

for the Clear Creek
Watershed Protection Plan

August 2024



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This document was prepared by the Houston-Galveston Area Council for the stakeholders of the Clear Creek 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

Clear Creek drains portions of Fort Bend, Brazoria, Galveston, and Harris Counties as it flows east toward its eventual confluence with Clear Lake. The creek connects many local communities across a diverse landscape of remnant undeveloped areas and the developed land uses that constitute most of its watershed. Approximately 172 square miles of land area drain into 412 linear miles of stream network within the Clear Creek watershed, including two primary segments, 1101 (Clear Creek Tidal) and 1102 (Clear Creek Above Tidal). This area and its waterways represent an essential part of supporting local communities and economies, recreation, fisheries, and a diverse ecology. Additionally, the waterway is a primary focus for flood mitigation efforts for over 450,000 residents that call its watershed home.

Water quality issues – primarily high levels of fecal waste – are prevalent throughout the Clear Creek watershed. 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. The threat to human health is of particular concern in this densely developed watershed and popular recreation area. In addition to water quality issues related to fecal waste, Clear Creek and its tributaries face other water quality concerns like low levels of dissolved oxygen, which can endanger aquatic life, and excess nutrients (nitrogen and phosphorus compounds) which can exacerbate low dissolved oxygen levels. Other challenges noted by area stakeholders include increased sedimentation and trash, and flooding.

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 Clear Creek. 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.

These efforts were guided by a Public Participation Plan¹ (PPP) developed by H-GAC and approved by TCEQ, and included:

- forming the Clear Creek 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); and
- conducting a series of education and outreach events (Section 6).

¹ The PPP is available for review on the project website at: www.clearcreekpartnership.weebly.com

The outcomes of these efforts are reflected in the draft WPP² 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. Wildlife in the Clear Creek watershed

² The draft WPP is available for review on the project website at: www.clearcreekpartnership.weebly.com

II. Subtask 5.2: Forming the Clear Creek 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.

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. Clear Creek Watershed Partnership steering committee members

Committee Member	Member Organization	Interest Represented
Robert Snoza	Harris County Flood Control District	Local Government
Shannon Miftari	Gulf Coast Authority	Local Government
Tom Douglas	Bayou Preservation Association	Community/Environmental Organizations
Brian Koch	Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board	Agriculture
Kelli Ondracek	City of Houston	Local Government
Jildardo Arias/ Samantha Haritos	City of Friendswood	Local Government
Heather Trachtenberg	ABHR	Districts
Cassidy Ince	Texas A&M Forest Service	State Government/Forestry
Charlotte Cisneros/ Natasha Zarnstorff	Galveston Bay Foundation	Community/Environmental Organizations
Grant Moss	Bayou Preservation Association	Community/Environmental Organizations
Brady Mora	Resident	Residents
Linda Kuhn	Resident	Residents
Jenny Oakley	University of Houston—Clear Lake	Academia

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. Clear Creek

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 website³ 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.

³ Project website is found at www.clearcreekpartnership.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 March 2022 and January 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 Clear Creek 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, all meetings maintained a virtual option. 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. Clear Creek Watershed Partnership and work group meetings

Date	Meeting Type	Topics
March 3, 2022 (afternoon)	Partnership	Project introduction, water quality data review, and invitation to nominate Steering Committee
March 3, 2022 (evening)	Partnership	Project introduction, water quality data review, and invitation to nominate Steering Committee
April 27, 2022	Partnership	Steering Committee formation, water quality analysis discussion
July 15, 2022	Partnership	Discussion of modeling, project update
September 21, 2022	Work Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Sources & Pet Waste • Agriculture, Wildlife & Invasives 	Review of water quality modeling and preliminary discussions of solutions.
September 28, 2022	Partnership	Discussion of Work Group recommendations, further discussion of bacteria modeling
December 15, 2022	Partnership	Preliminary approval of modeling results, beginning of solutions discussion.
January 18, 2023	Work Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Sources & Pet Waste • Agriculture, Wildlife & Invasives 	Continued discussion on solutions.
January 25, 2023	Partnership	Approval of preliminary set of solutions, discussion of next steps and logistics.

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 Clear Creek 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 Clear Creek 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
Bayou Preservation Association's Stream Corridor Restoration Committee	Multiple throughout project period	Attended this meeting of regional stream corridor restoration priorities representing this and other urban watersheds. Serving on Committee.
Clear Creek Master Plan consultant team meeting	Multiple starting in 2023	Discussed League City master plan effort along Clear Creek, made recommendations to enhance water quality.
Galveston Bay Coalition of Watersheds	Multiple throughout project period	Project staff attended to represent this and other watershed projects in the Galveston County/lower Galveston Bay area.
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 the Lower Galveston Bay watershed. H-GAC successfully received a preliminary priority for Clear Creek match funding in FY 23/24 at the 9/8/2022 meeting.
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 Board Water Resources Committee	Monthly throughout project period	Attended these meetings of Board decision-makers representing this and other regional watersheds in discussions about potential flood mitigation or water resource projects that may impact the watershed, including a recently completed study for lower Clear Creek.
H-GAC Natural Resources Advisory Committee	Quarterly in February, May, August and November throughout project period	Project staff gave a brief update on the Clear Creek project progress and invited feedback from local decision-makers.

Event	Date	H-GAC Activity
H-GAC Regional Flood Management Council Meeting	Quarterly in January, April, July and October throughout project period	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.
Houston Area Conservation Moonshot	Multiple throughout 2021	Project staff attended to represent this and other watershed projects with conservation elements as part of a broader conservation planning project.
Houston Tree Strategy Implementation Group	Monthly throughout 2021	Project staff attended these meetings of a regional effort to increase tree canopy in conjunction with City of Houston, Harris County, et al, representing this and other project watersheds.
Texas A&M Forest Service Corporate Sustainability Project	Multiple throughout project period	Attended these meetings of a model effort to develop corporate funding mechanisms for riparian restoration in priority watersheds, representing this and other watershed projects. Planning for several projects in priority watersheds and exploring opportunities in Clear Creek.
Texas Forests and Drinking Water Partnership	Multiple throughout project period	Project staff attended as a Committee member to this group integrating forestry practices with water quality and supply decision-makers. Staff coordinated a state/regional forum in Nacogdoches on 9/13/2022, and represented this and other watershed projects for our region.
NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee; Urban Committee	4/2/2021	Attended this meeting for statewide discussion of urban NRCS priorities representing this and other watersheds.
Texas Coastal Resiliency Master Plan meeting (GLO)	4/19/2021	Attended this meeting for coordination of water quality and other resilience topics as part of the GLO's CRMP; representing this and other coastal watersheds.
Texas Watershed Coordinator Roundtable	4/22/2021	Attended the Roundtable representing this and other watersheds.
Texas Coastal Prairie Initiative (Katy Prairie Conservancy)	6/1/2021	Attended this meeting of a regional coastal prairie initiative representing this and other coastal watersheds.
Headwaters to Baywaters Initiative	6/4/2021	Attended this regional riparian restoration group meeting to represent urban watersheds and present on conservation goals for water quality and other benefits.
Texas Coastal Resiliency Master Plan meeting (GLO)	6/10/2021	Served on this committee representing coastal watersheds for the GLO CRMP.
USACE Metro Houston Watershed project meeting	7/20/2021	Attended this flood mitigation project meeting representing this and other flood-prone

Event	Date	H-GAC Activity
		watersheds, discussing multiple benefit solutions (including water quality benefits).
Conservation Flood Management Group	8/27/2021	Attended on behalf of this and other priority watersheds to discuss funding and potential green infrastructure solutions that highlight water quality and flood mitigation benefits.
NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee; Urban Committee	9/7/2021	Attended this meeting for statewide discussion of urban NRCS priorities representing this and other watersheds.
Galveston Bay Foundation	9/15/2021	Met with GBF staff and other NGOs to talk about conservation work ongoing or planned in this and adjacent watersheds in coordination with this project and our Regional Conservation Initiative.
USACE Metro Houston Watershed project meeting	9/24/2021	Attended this flood mitigation project meeting representing this and other flood-prone watersheds, discussing multiple benefit solutions (including water quality benefits).
Houston Nature Now project meeting	9/29/2021	Discussed the project in relation to broader biodiversity conversation.
Conservation Flood Management Group	10/22/2021	Attended on behalf of this and other priority watersheds to discuss funding and potential green infrastructure solutions that highlight water quality and flood mitigation benefits.
Galveston County Pop-Up Meeting	11/17/2022	Projects staff represented this and other water quality efforts in Galveston County at this H-GAC listening session with local leaders.
Texas Coastal Prairie Conference	10/28/2022	Project staff represented this and other water quality efforts at this Clear Lake conference for conservation practitioners. Staff presented on conservation opportunities for this and other watersheds during the proceedings.
Bacteria Source Tracking meeting	12/19/2022	Met with various entities pursuing model bacteria source tracking work in the watershed.
Galveston Bay Council Meeting	7/19/2023	Discussed efficacy of <i>E. coli</i> as water quality indicators and presented updates on watershed projects
H-GAC Clean Waters Initiative Workshop	8/16/2023	Discussed stormwater management measures for whole region, including project watershed area

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.



Figure 5. Educational event in the Clear Creek watershed

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
Rivers, Lakes, Bays 'N Bayous Trash Bash	3/26/2022	H-GAC coordinated and hosted Trash Bash event sites near the watershed in Armand Bayou Nature Center and Dickinson, TX.
Texas Watershed Stewards	4/5/2022	H-GAC and AgriLife staff worked to bring this training to the watershed (Pearland). The training was successful with 42 attendees, including H-GAC project staff.
H-GAC Parks and Natural Areas Subcommittee Site Visit	5/26/2022	H-GAC staff and the City of League City hosted a Parks and Natural Areas Roundtable (an H-GAC regional committee of parks and recreation professionals in the 13 counties) site visit for regional stakeholders at a park in the Clear Creek Watershed. Project staff gave a presentation on the watershed project to approximately 15 attendees.
Rivers, Lakes, Bays 'N Bayous Trash Bash	3/25/2023	H-GAC coordinated and hosted Trash Bash event sites near the watershed in Armand Bayou Nature Center and Dickinson, TX.
Texas Stream Team Training	8/11/2023	H-GAC organized and administered a Texas Stream Team volunteer monitoring training event in the watershed (Pearland).
H-GAC Clean Waters Initiative Workshop	12/1/2023	H-GAC organized a workshop at the Challenger 7 park focused on volunteer water quality monitoring featuring presentations from project staff about the WPP, a guest presentation from the Galveston Bay Foundation, and a Texas Stream Team demonstration.

VII. Summary

The Clear Creek 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. Clear Creek at sunset