

Cotton Bayou Watershed Public Meeting

Thursday, July 27th, 2023
4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.

In Attendance:

Organizers:

Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC)

Kendall Guidroz, H-GAC Project Staff

Rachel Windham, Presenter, H-GAC Project Manager

Steven Johnston, H-GAC Project Staff

Attendees:

Donnie Ballard, resident

Francisco Carrillo, City of Mont Belvieu

Heather Ballard, resident

Patti Long, resident

Royce Keller, City of Mont Belvieu

Meeting Notes:

Welcome and Introductions

- Rachel Windham (H-GAC) commenced the meeting at 4:30 p.m. by welcoming the attendees. She then invited attendees to introduce themselves.

Project Overview and Updates

- Ms. Windham provided an overview of the Cotton Bayou 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 currently do not support recreation use as described in the 2022 Integrated Report of Surface Water Quality produced by TCEQ. This project aims to address this impairment by identifying sources of bacteria pollution in the watershed and improving water quality by implementing bacteria source reduction strategies.
 - Potential sources of bacteria contamination include wastewater discharge, failing onsite sewage facilities, domestic and wildlife animal waste, and waste from invasive species such as feral hogs.
 - Ms. Windham explained that a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or “budget” for bacteria pollution has been calculated for Segment 0801C of Cotton Bayou that will guide the estimation of source reductions needed to achieve compliance. Strategies to achieve these reductions will be included in an Implementation Plan (I-Plan).
- Stakeholders expressed concern over contaminants detected in their drinking water. While the current project does not pertain to drinking water, H-GAC staff were able to provide contact information for TCEQ Region 12 to investigate the matter further.

Implementation Plan Strategies

- Ms. Windham provided an overview of the components of an I-Plan including:
 - Strategies - actionable items to address bacteria reduction for a 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

- Estimated Load Reductions - estimate of how much the bacteria load will be reduced by implementing the strategies of each management measure converted to an annual load value
- Ms. Windham also explained the usual management measures for which strategies, milestones, schedules, and load reductions are included in I-Plans
- Ms. Windham described the adaptive management methodology of I-Plans which allows for stakeholders to periodically assess plan measures for efficiency and effectiveness
- Based on the results of the bacteria source survey shared at the March meeting and results of an analysis of potential bacteria sources, the management measures listed below will 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) Supporting land management initiatives
 - 3) Promoting feral hog management
 - 4) Promoting safe OSSF use and maintenance
 - 5) Maintaining and improving WWTF and collection system function
 - On reviewing these priorities and the associated data, representatives from Mont Belvieu suggested that “promoting safe OSSF use and maintenance” should be moved to the second priority in light of rapid development limiting agricultural land and wildlife/invasive species habitat.
- While reviewing specific actions suggested for each management measure, stakeholders reinforced their support of the I-Plan effort but noted that the ability to obtain funding will limit implementation.
 - H-GAC will follow up with Mont Belvieu to keep them informed of funding opportunities such as annual Clean Water Act Section 320 state funding offered through the Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP) subcommittees and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency administered by GBEP.
- Reiterating their support for the I-Plan project, stakeholders expressed concern that further regulation could impede their ability to keep up with the water needs of their rapidly developing community.
 - H-GAC clarified that implementation of the I-Plan is voluntary and that there are no control measures being suggested for the plan.

Next Steps

- The next focus for the project will be to incorporate stakeholder feedback into the draft I-Plan. A public meeting to review the TMDL for Cotton Bayou will be held on November 14, 2023.

Discussion

- No further discussions were held.

Meeting Adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

For more information about the meeting or the project, please contact Rachel Windham with the information below:

Phone: 713-993-2497

Email: rachel.windham@h-gac.com



This project is funded by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and is facilitated locally by the Houston-Galveston Area Council