

Clean Rivers Program - Roles

1. Houston-Galveston Area Council

As the lead assessment agency for the San Jacinto River Basin and the Trinity-San Jacinto, San Jacinto-Brazos, and Brazos-Colorado coastal basins, H-GAC is overseeing all aspects of the Clean Rivers process in these basins. This includes:

- serving as liaison to the TCEQ throughout the process;
- participating in statewide Clean Rivers Program task forces;
- handling all administrative tasks, including work plan development, budget preparation, and progress reporting;
- completing various Clean Rivers Program project tasks;
- managing all subcontracts associated with the project;
- supporting the work of H-GAC's Clean Rivers Program Steering Committee and smaller working groups which are created as needed;
- maintaining a Basin Advisory Network of interested groups and individuals and other key contacts across the region (including some 60 individuals who served on the Basin Advisory Groups which HGAC created early in the program to help gather local input in the individual basins and assist in setting initial work priorities);
- handling all public outreach and involvement activities, including fulfilling H-GAC's responsibilities as a Texas Watch Partner in support of volunteer citizen water quality monitors in the basins;
- maintaining regular contacts with staff of other lead assessment agencies (most notably the Trinity River Authority, Brazos River Authority, and Lower Colorado River Authority in the H-GAC region) and other key environmental programs, such as the Galveston Bay Estuary Program and the Texas Coastal Management Program; and
- arranging all meetings, workshops, and other Clean Rivers Program special events.

H-GAC Clean Rivers Program staff also update H-GAC's Board of Directors and Natural Resources Advisory Committee (NRAC) regularly on Clean Rivers Program progress and results. Board approval, based on NRAC recommendations, is required for major actions such as entry into contracts with TCEQ, approval of subcontracts, and submission of final reports.

2. Clean Rivers Program Steering Committee

H-GAC's Steering Committee includes representatives of local government, state and federal agencies, and key interest groups, as well as several members of H-GAC's Natural Resources Advisory Committee to improve regional coordination. Jim Adams, General Manager of the San Jacinto River Authority and an NRAC member, continues to chair the Steering Committee as he has done since the Clean Rivers Program began. The Steering Committee normally meets at H-GAC's offices in Houston at least quarterly, although this varies based on the timing of project milestones and administrative needs.

H-GAC's Clean Rivers Program Steering Committee fulfills two key roles. It serves as the primary forum for discussion of various water quality issues raised through the assessment process. The committee also advises staff on all administrative matters related to the Clean Rivers Program, including work plan and budget development, monitoring of progress toward project milestones, and review of the draft and final basin reports and other work items. Most importantly, the Steering Committee is the mechanism for bringing together all the key agencies and basin interests whose involvement and coordination is critical to the Clean Rivers process. The Steering Committee also:

- sets area-wide priorities based on its deliberations of water quality issues, which then translate into work plan and budget priorities;
- provides a regional perspective and local expertise and experience to the assessment process;
- serves as a resource to project staff, who consult individual committee members on particular issues, to obtain water quality data and background information, and to identify appropriate contact persons within agencies and organizations;
- communicates the concerns and priorities of the groups each member represents, solicits input from within those groups, and helps to disseminate information from the Clean Rivers Program back to these groups, and
- provides another opportunity for public input into the Clean Rivers process by setting aside time for public comments and questions at all committee meetings.

3. Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)

The Texas Clean Rivers Act identified the Texas Water Commission as the lead state agency to oversee implementation of the Clean Rivers Program. The TCEQ handles all statewide administrative functions for the program, including contracts, budget, fee collection, rules and guidance development, project management for each basin, and statewide coordination and support. The TCEQ also convenes statewide task forces and working groups as needed to address specific program issues.

In the area of nonpoint source pollution, the TCEQ must coordinate its assessment efforts with the Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board, which is the lead state agency on agricultural and silvicultural nonpoint source management. Communication also has been maintained with the Texas Water Conservation Association (a group in which river authorities are closely involved), the Texas Municipal League, and other major interest groups, as well as the U.S. Geological Survey and other state and federal resource agencies.

One of the TCEQ's most important functions under the Act is to take all the basin assessment reports that it receives on October 1st of even-numbered years and rapidly compile them into a statewide summary report by December 1st for submission to members of the Texas Legislature. This timetable was designed to place a new statewide Clean Rivers report in the hands of legislators as they prepare for the upcoming biennial legislative session in January. (The TCEQ also is leading the assessments of the Rio Grande Basin and the Nueces coastal basins. The Clean Rivers Act provided for this where no river authority or other regional entity was available to conduct the mandated basin assessment.)

The TCEQ project manager for H-GAC's four basins is a member of the Steering Committee, and staff from TCEQ's Region 12 office in Houston also are active in H-GAC's Clean Rivers Program activities.

4. Other Participants

One of the primary objectives of the Clean Rivers Program is to expand public involvement in water quality studies, policymaking, and long-term protection efforts.

Area residents play a key oversight role throughout the Clean Rivers process through their review of assessment products as well as through their attendance and input at committee meetings and other Clean Rivers events.

As always, committee members and staff who are submerged in an intricate project of this sort depend on the public to provide a "common sense" perspective on how to make water quality management more effective. In addition to the many groups and agencies which are directly involved in the basin assessment process, H-GAC has contacted numerous others through its data-gathering efforts as well as through its outreach activities. Additionally, H-GAC's local government entity members and other interested individuals and organizations receive updates on Clean Rivers progress through newsletters, staff presentations, and distribution of basin assessment report summaries and other program materials across the region.