

The Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership

History

The Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership (Watershed Partnership) came together because of a shared interest in preserving and enhancing the natural integrity of the watershed through the coordinated management of natural resources. Local, state, and federal resource agencies and institutions share this interest explicitly through their responsibilities and activities in the watershed. The Watershed Partnership believes that all users in the watershed, including residents, industries, business, and development groups, share this interest implicitly.

Two overlapping groups formed the genesis of the Watershed Partnership (originally known as the Armand Bayou Watershed Working Group). In early 1998 Texas Cooperative Extension and Texas Sea Grant, operating under a USEPA Section 319 Water Quality Grant (Clean Water for Armand Bayou), brought together a group of interested stakeholders to address watershed health concerns. At about the same time, the Houston-Galveston Area Council was contracted by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to conduct stakeholder meetings for a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL)¹⁵ that was to be conducted on Armand Bayou. Because both the stakeholders and much of the focus for both projects was almost identical, the two groups coalesced and began meeting together. The TMDL issues were

¹⁵Total Maximum Daily Load. A procedure under the Clean Water Act for assessing and allocating pollutant loads for water bodies not meeting water quality standards.

handled by a subcommittee of the larger Watershed Partnership. As of this writing, the Armand Bayou TMDL is “inactive pending further data.”

The Watershed Partnership met frequently during 1998 and 1999. The Watershed Partnership held training sessions on water quality, water quantity (supply), flooding, habitat, and urban growth/demographics as part of a “collaborative learning” process that was instituted with the help of the Bush School of Government at Texas A&M University. A list of priority issues was developed as part of this process. The oversimplified diagram of the complex interactions occurring in the watershed was developed as part of this process. (See Figure 3.)

With new funding support, Texas Sea Grant Extension began reconstituting the Watershed Partnership in November 2002, resulting in this Phase I of the Armand Bayou Watershed Plan.

Organization

Subcommittees operating under the aegis of the Watershed Partnership carry out most of the detailed work of the Watershed Partnership, drawing from group members and technical advisors. Four subcommittees are currently constituted: Habitat, Outreach and Education, Water Quality, and Flooding and Stormwater Management. Task forces may be formed on specific projects, such as the Plan Task Force that helped write and assemble this plan document.



Technical advisors are drawn from member organizations, other stakeholders in the watershed, and other agencies with expertise/interest in the watershed.

The physical boundaries that govern the Watershed Partnership are those of the watershed. The programmatic boundaries are those that envelop water issues – quality, flooding/stormwater management, and habitat – and community involvement issues – outreach, education, and stewardship. The Watershed Partnership does not directly consider enforcement issues.

As a collaborative effort, the Watershed Partnership relies on the insights, expertise, and input of the broad spectrum of the Armand Bayou watershed community. Anyone sharing the mission and vision of the Watershed Partnership is welcome and heartily encouraged to participate.

Mission, Vision, and Goals

Mission

To protect, preserve and enhance the ecological integrity of the Armand Bayou watershed while improving the quality of life in our communities.

Vision

1. The ecological function of Armand Bayou is restored.
2. The watershed's valuable natural resources – its physical and biological integrity – are maintained.

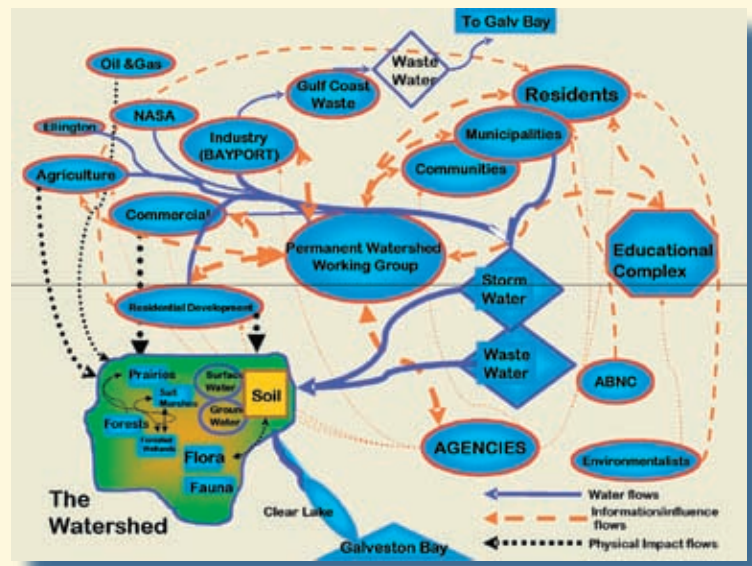


Figure 3. Armand Bayou Dynamic Interactions Diagram developed by the Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership captures a portion of the complexity of the interactions of the watershed.



3. All who live and/or work in the watershed are aware of the values of the Bayou to the community and its relationship to the ecology of Clear Lake and Galveston Bay, and understand their role in maintaining its health.
4. Residents and business interests make choices, individually and collectively, that enhance the watershed's health and minimize negative impacts.

Goals

1. Improve awareness and understanding of Armand Bayou and its values to the community.
2. Increase stewardship of Armand Bayou and its tributaries.
3. Enhance water quality to minimize fish kills and maintain aquatic diversity in Armand Bayou and its tributaries.
4. Reduce erosion and runoff pollution through measures both in the watershed and along stream banks.
5. Avoid harmful changes in the salinity regime of Armand Bayou.
6. Reduce the impact of flooding on homes and businesses, using the watershed's natural ability to absorb floodwaters wherever possible.
7. Protect and restore valuable habitat areas through the watershed.
8. Protect the riparian and adjacent habitats along the lower reaches of Armand Bayou.
9. Support coordinated decision-making for protection, restoration, and enhancement of Armand Bayou and its watershed.
10. Develop and implement a monitoring strategy to evaluate the effectiveness of watershed protection and restoration methods.

The Watershed Approach

Groups from across the nation have formed—sometimes prodded by governmental legislation, sometimes spontaneously—to protect and improve their watersheds. Their goals and methods vary widely, but all recognize people's impact upon their watersheds and that coordinated efforts are needed to better utilize the limited resources, both human and monetary. Hence, the "watershed approach" developed.

The watershed approach is "a coordinating framework for environmental management that focuses public and private sector efforts to address the highest priority problems within hydrologically-defined geographic areas, taking into consideration both ground and surface water flow."¹⁶ Its guiding principles are that (1) the people who are most affected be involved in the process, (2) the effort be geographically based, i.e., within the watershed, and (3) sound management, based on strong science and data, in an iterative decision making process to improve the watershed.

Following this process, the Watershed Partnership has opted to create a Watershed Action Plan in multiple phases. The first phase establishes the baseline conditions and an initial vision for the watershed. While extensive information on the Armand Bayou watershed prior to major settlement does not exist, substantial data on the watershed's current conditions and recent history have been collected. This plan also lists the mission, vision, and goals of the Watershed Partnership. From this first phase plan, the Watershed Partnership will work to establish priorities, create a detailed plan of management options, and implement improvement projects. Group members will evaluate the progress and repeat various stages as necessary—again, this is an iterative process.



¹⁶ EPA Watershed Approach brochure (<http://www.epa.gov/owow/watershed/>)