



Spring Creek Watershed Partnership **Public Participation Plan**



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February 26, 2020



Public participation opportunities are related to the development of a Watershed Protection Plan for the Spring Creek Watershed located in Montgomery, Harris, Waller and Grimes counties, Texas. This Public Participation Plan has been developed by the Houston-Galveston Area Council in cooperation with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, based on elements of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's *Handbook for Developing Watershed Plans to Restore and Protect Our Waters*. Funding for the development of this Watershed Protection Plan was provided through a federal Clean Water Act §319(h) grant to the Houston-Galveston Area Council, administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

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Figure 1 – Spring Creek

1. INTRODUCTION

A. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

The purpose of this Public Participation Plan (PPP) is to facilitate involvement of watershed area stakeholders in the development of a watershed protection plan (WPP) for the Spring Creek Watershed (Watershed). The PPP defines how Houston-Galveston Area (H-GAC) project staff will provide opportunities for public participation, engage stakeholders, and communicate with project partners and the public to promote future implementation efforts.

The objectives of this PPP are to:

- 1) Discuss the project and issues the PPP is designed to support (Section 1)
- 2) Identify public participation opportunities for the project (Section 2)
- 3) Establish means and methods for targeted outreach to engage the public (Section 3)
- 4) Define the WPP stakeholder group structure (Section 4)
- 5) Establish a set of ground rules for public participation (Section 5, Appendix B)
- 6) Present a projected schedule of stakeholder meetings and topics (Section 6)

B. BACKGROUND

Spring Creek flows eastward from its headwaters in the prairies of Waller County to a confluence with Lake Houston and is one of the primary tributaries of the West Fork of the San Jacinto River ([Figure 2](#)). The Spring Creek Watershed is composed of the drainage area of Spring Creek, a classified segment as defined by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), as well as 13 unclassified segment tributaries, several unassessed tributaries, and a network of natural and manmade drainage channels. This watershed area spans approximately 440 square miles and includes portions of Grimes, Waller, Harris, and Montgomery counties.

Spring Creek Stream Network Diagram

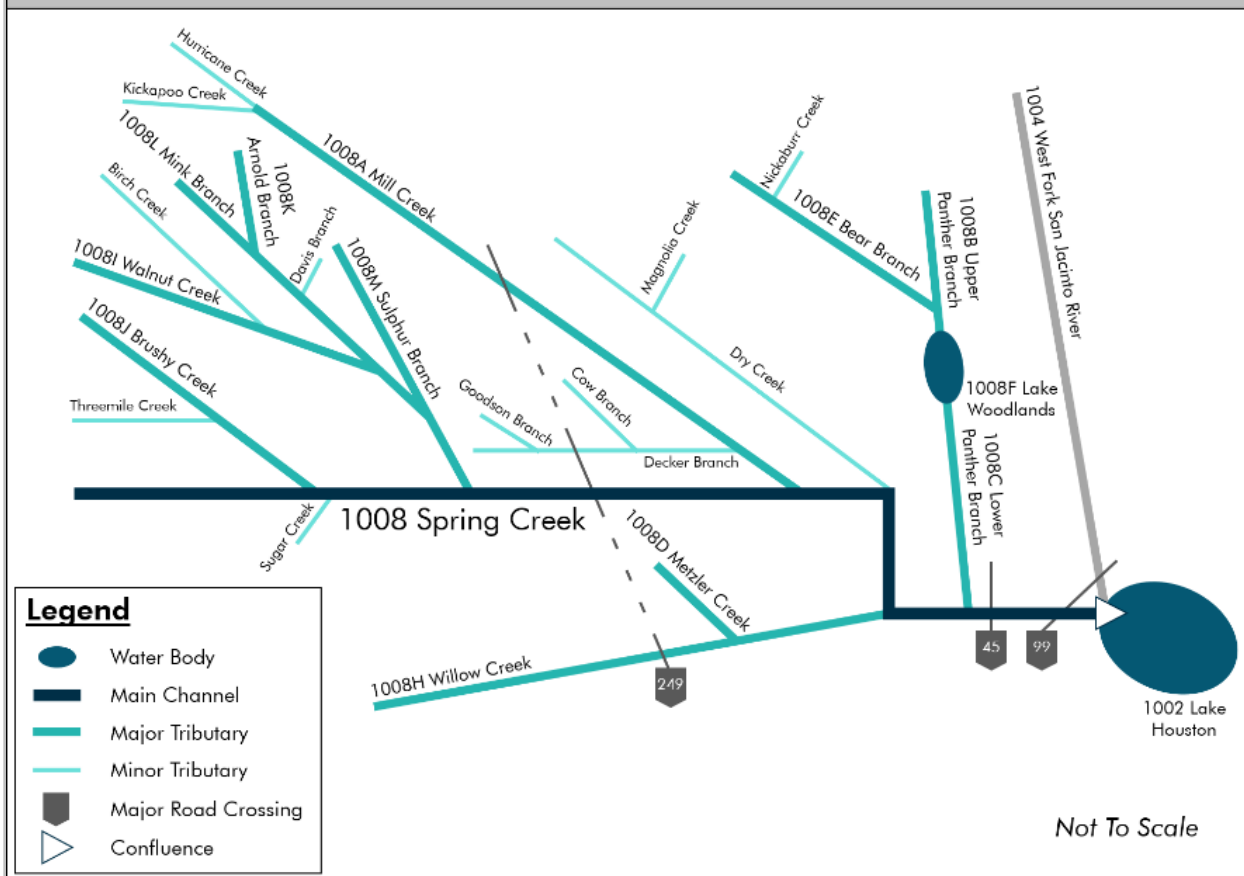


Figure 2 - Network Diagram of the Spring Creek System

Land cover in the watershed area varies longitudinally and is characterized by heavy development and scattered wooded areas in the eastern third, transitioning to lighter development, forest, and grasslands in the western reaches (Figure 3). Development has expanded in the last decade as growing populations have pushed northwest from the Houston area and from established urban areas in the Watershed along Interstate Highway 45, State Highway 249, and State Highway 99 (Grand Parkway) transportation corridors. Small cities such as Magnolia, Pinehurst, Stagecoach, Shenandoah, and Oak Ridge North intersect or are completely contained within the watershed area. Large cities and townships in the watershed area include Tomball, The Woodlands, Spring, and portions of Humble, Conroe, and Houston.

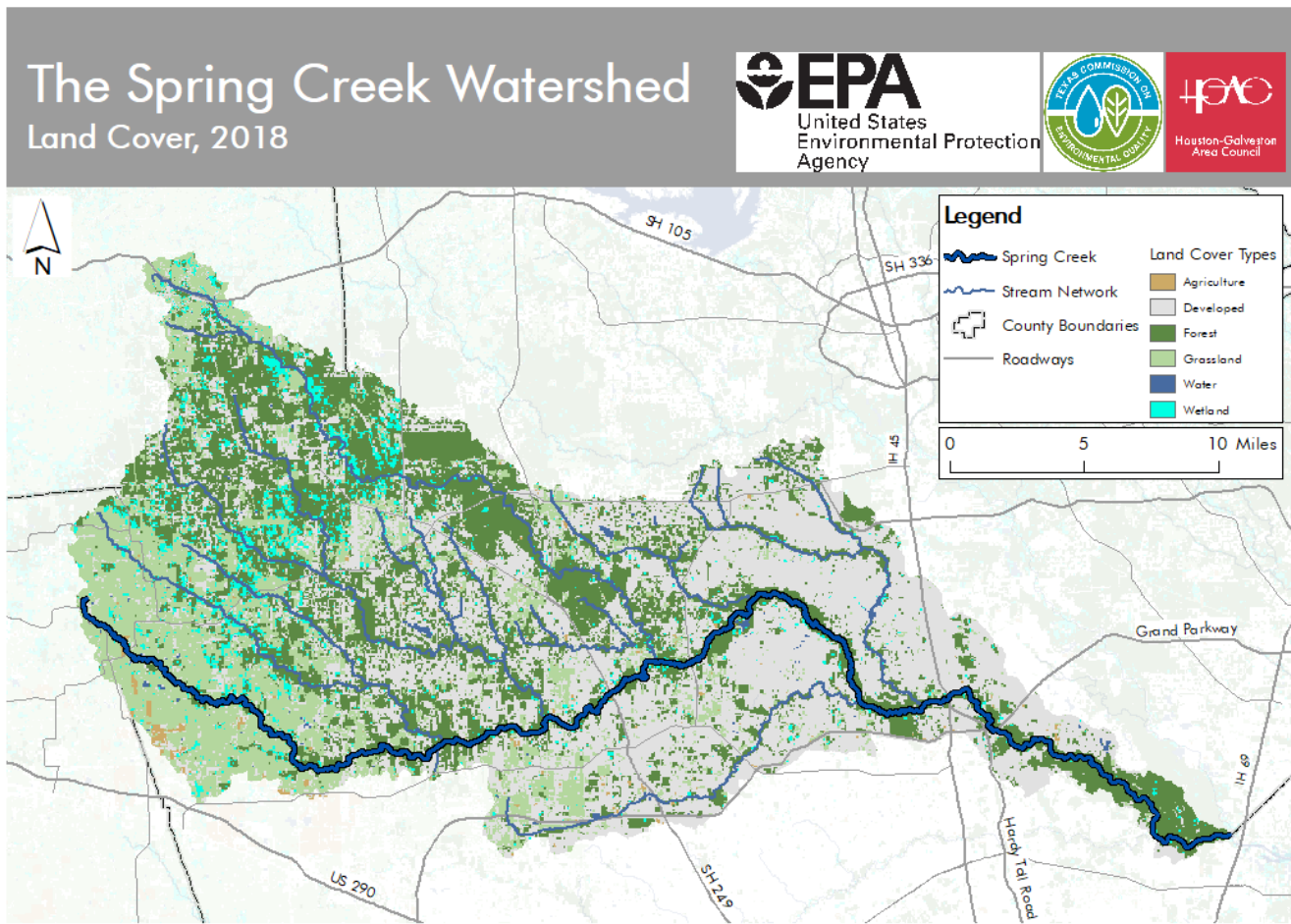


Figure 3 – Geography and Land Cover in the Spring Creek Watershed

Pressures from expanding development have created or increased water quality concerns. Based on assessments of water quality summarized by the TCEQ in the 2018 Texas Integrated Report of Surface Water Quality, the primary issues for water quality in Spring Creek and its tributaries are elevated levels of fecal indicator bacteria. However, nutrients, low dissolved oxygen, and impacts on ecological (macrobenthic) communities are also concerns in some portions of the project area. 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. Preliminary modeling and watershed characterization work for this watershed was completed prior to this project. However, additional concerns and feedback will be solicited from the stakeholders during the formal stakeholder process. The result of these discussions will be the Water Quality Goals adopted in the WPP.

There is strong existing support among active community groups, regional agencies, and local governments for addressing the water quality issues in the Watershed. Previous efforts by local governments (including Harris County and its component precincts), conservation organizations like the Katy Prairie Conservancy, and other project participants in urban and agricultural programs provide an existing network of interested parties for inclusion in a comprehensive WPP process. H-GAC is partnering with the TCEQ to develop a WPP for Spring Creek. **This PPP is designed to guide the public outreach aspects of those projects.**

Given the wide variety of water quality issues and diverse land uses, an equally diverse set of stakeholder interests exists in the Spring Creek Watershed. A robust and ongoing public participation process is necessary to engage these varying interests and coordinate their activity in a shared process.

C. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE WPP AND CHARACTERIZATION STUDIES

The WPP

The goal of the Spring Creek WPP is to characterize causes and sources of pollution in the system and facilitate local stakeholder decision-making in addressing sources through voluntary measures. The goal of the WPP is to achieve and maintain compliance with applicable water quality standards and address other stakeholder concerns. The intent of the WPP's future use is to provide a road map for guiding implementation and a means of assessing success. Engaging a diverse set of local stakeholders is fundamental to the success of this process and future implementation efforts.

D. TIMEFRAME

Development of the Spring Creek WPP is planned as a two-year process, beginning in October 2019 and ending in August 2021.

A bulk of the first year will be used to gather and assess data to update the existing characterization study and to build partnerships with local groups, governments, and other interested parties. Initial public outreach and meetings will be held during this period, which will be crucial to ensuring a varied and representative group of stakeholders are involved in the process. The second year will continue with a focus on public engagement, active stakeholder participation and decision-making, and education and outreach, resulting in the completion of the WPP document.

Subsequent to the development of the WPP, H-GAC and local partners will implement the plan, including identifying and acquiring additional funding needed to do so.

2. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION ROLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

A. OVERVIEW

H-GAC, in conjunction with TCEQ, will facilitate a stakeholder process with the following primary avenues for public participation:

- General participation by the public (via participating in outreach events, providing comments on documents, etc.);
- Indirect participation by partners (through coordinating related efforts or reviewing the WPP); or
- Direct participation in the stakeholder process through Partnership Meetings, Work Groups, and service on the Steering Committee.

The variety of opportunities for public participation are designed to reflect the differing levels of interest or time commitment stakeholders may have for the project. Each of these roles is important for developing a community-based plan. H-GAC will seek to communicate with the stakeholders in ways appropriate to their respective roles.

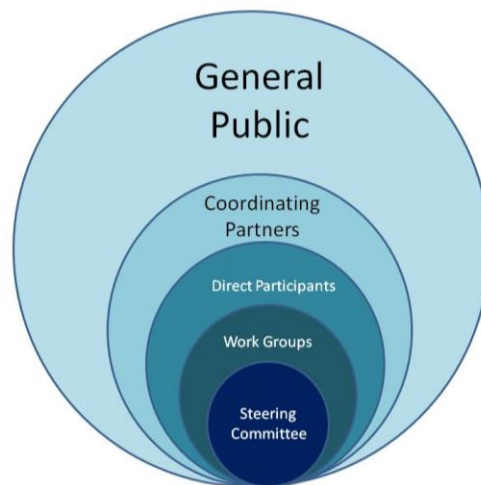


Figure 4 - Stakeholder Roles by Increasing Level of Participation

For the purpose of this PPP, the discussion of public participation opportunities and outreach efforts will focus on the WPP process.

B. GENERAL PARTICIPATION

Public involvement is an important aspect of WPP development. It spreads knowledge about watershed issues, develops engaged stakeholders, ensures transparency of process, cultivates familiarity with the project, and helps support related partner efforts.

H-GAC will provide opportunities for general participation¹ by:

¹ The specific methods and means are discussed in Section 3.

- Disseminating project information and updates on multiple media platforms
- Maintaining a staff presence at events in the watershed
- Supporting partner efforts that involve the public
- Soliciting public comment on documents

C. INDIRECT PARTICIPATION - COORDINATING PARTNERS

Many stakeholder organizations are pursuing similar or complementary efforts in the Spring Creek Watershed. These potential partners include local, regional, and state governments; community groups and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs), agricultural agencies, etc. Many of the activities of these groups can have direct or indirect benefits for the aims of the project (e.g. local municipalities controlling pollution through stormwater permit activities). While these groups may also choose to participate directly in the project, it is also important to coordinate the efforts of the project with their pre-existing or planned activities. This may help share resources, increase efficiency, reach additional audiences, and achieve mutually beneficial ends.

In addition to the efforts aimed at general participants, H-GAC will promote participation by partners through:

- Identifying all current or known planned activities that potentially overlap with the project
- Maintaining one-to-one communication with key partners
- Requesting initial comment on project documents, particularly for partner-related items
- Developing roles for implementation

D. DIRECT PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

A diverse stakeholder group who actively participates in project meetings, discussions, and decisions is the primary component of the watershed protection planning process. Interested stakeholders will form a watershed partnership (Partnership). The Partnership will be the guiding force in the development of the WPP and final decisions about its recommendations. The Partnership will establish a Steering Committee composed of representatives from various stakeholder interests to serve as its voting body. Additionally, the Partnership will establish Work Groups to address the needs of specific areas or topics in the project area. However, the Partnership meetings are open to the public, and any participant can provide feedback and join the discussions.

In addition to the efforts described for communicating with the public and partners, H-GAC will foster an active and diverse set of direct participants by:

- Forming and facilitating the Partnership;
- Assisting the Partnership in forming a Steering Committee; and
- Providing data and documentation for the Partnership to discuss and comment on.

More information on the structure of the Steering Committee is found in Section 4.

3. TARGETED OUTREACH PLAN

A. OVERVIEW

H-GAC's primary role in the project is as a facilitator. The size and diversity of the project area call for a comprehensive outreach plan. This section delineates the strategies, tools, and methods H-GAC will use to foster participation by local stakeholders and partners.

The goals of this targeted outreach plan are to develop and employ the means to:

- Engage a diverse group of local stakeholders
- Secure their commitment to an ongoing process
- Maintain their interest throughout the process
- Disseminate information to the general public to increase understanding
- Coordinate as appropriate with related, adjacent efforts like flood mitigation, urban forestry, habitat conservation, etc

The success of the Partnership and coordination with local partners will rely on early, frequent, and continual communication. During the development of the plan, emphasis will also be placed on ensuring the Partnership, and those partners likely to be actively involved in implementation activities, are preparing for the transition from planning to implementation phases.

B. PRELIMINARY ENGAGEMENT

Prior to engaging with the public on a broad and regular basis, project staff are proposing to meet with the following key partners to identify current programs, future plans, concerns, or recommendations for the WPP process and to generally smooth the transition into the project. These meetings will take place in Q2 and Q3 FY20.

The preliminary engagement meetings will include, but not be limited to:

- The Woodlands Township
- Harris County and associated precincts
- Waller County and associated precincts
- Grimes County and associated precincts
- Montgomery County and associated precincts
- Harris County Flood Control District
- Municipal utility districts and local neighborhood organizations
- Bayou Land Conservancy
- Katy Prairie Conservancy
- Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Major development interests (The Woodlands Development Company, White Oak Developers Inc., etc.)

In addition to these key partners, H-GAC will also engage the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB), United States Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) and other state and regional agencies to advise them of the project. H-GAC will continue to

maintain a presence and represent the project at local and regional groups including the Watershed Coordinators Roundtable, Watershed Coordinator Steering Committee (TSSWCB), Galveston Bay Estuary Program (GBEP) Water and Sediment Quality Subcommittee, and other appropriate professional organizations.

C. STAKEHOLDER IDENTIFICATION AND CONTACT

The numerous active projects in the watershed area will provide a starting point for identifying stakeholders and engaging them in the project. H-GAC will begin compiling a stakeholder list from existing efforts and participants in other related H-GAC and partner projects.

Project staff will use existing contact databases for these projects and local officials as a starting point. In evaluating the preliminary list, H-GAC will identify any gaps and seek to fill them. Specific attention will be given to agricultural producers, underserved communities, and in representatives that can effectively serve as a bridge with the numerous MUDs. After preliminary engagement meetings, H-GAC will seek to engage the broader set of stakeholders through the tools discussed in Section D. Whenever possible, H-GAC will seek to expand our network through existing contacts. Lastly, during the WPP development process, H-GAC will focus on preparing the Partnership for transition to implementation through general discussion and by identifying those partners likely to be actively implementing measures.

D. CONTACT TOOLS

H-GAC will use a series of tools to provide active and passive outreach opportunities for project stakeholders and the public. To ensure a unified and coordinated message, H-GAC will seek to coordinate releases across all platforms (e.g. concurrent messaging for a meeting would appear via email and on the website on the same day and have the same or similar content as a press release). Content of, and changes to, all contact tools and materials will be approved by TCEQ prior to use. To promote project familiarity, consistent logos, design, and themes will be used as branding for the project.

Distribution List

H-GAC will maintain a distribution list that includes all known contacts for the project. The distribution list will, to the greatest degree practicable, include both emails and physical addresses. The list will be organized in such a way as to be able to index and query information effectively. The list will include, but not be limited to elected officials and staff of local governments, local community organizations, local agricultural representatives, media contacts, state and regional government representatives, interested residents and landowners, local businesses and industry, and all other interested parties.

Email

H-GAC will use email as the primary means for project communication. Physical mail will be used upon request, in absence of email contacts, or for certain official notifications to governments. H-GAC will use an email management system (e.g. Constant Contact or equivalent) to send messages in a professional format. All return email will be directed to the H-GAC project manager unless specific circumstances warrant other recipients.

Website

The project website is hosted at www.springcreekpartnership.com. At a minimum, the website will host all public project documents, meeting materials for upcoming and past public meetings, information about the project, and contact information for the H-GAC project manager. The intended purpose of the website is to serve as a central repository for project materials, accessible to all stakeholders, and as an outreach/notification tool.



Figure 5 - Project Website

Project Summary

H-GAC has developed, and will update, a one-page project summary to use as a leave-behind for interested stakeholders and to disseminate to the public at events. The printed summary will be left with all stakeholders H-GAC meets with, and a digital version of the summary will be hosted on the website and other appropriate online venues. As the project progresses, the summary will be updated. The summary will be supplemented by the executive summary document at the conclusion of the project. A copy of the current summary is included as Appendix A.

Press Releases

H-GAC will initiate press releases to all relevant press contacts, social media, and internal newsletters in the contact database for project meetings, major milestones (WPP drafts, etc.), and other stories of particular interest. Press releases will be developed in H-GAC standard press release format to ensure acceptability to local media outlets.

Partner Outreach Tools

Whenever possible, H-GAC will seek to disseminate information through established partner communication tools and networks (community newsletters, bill inserts, etc.) H-GAC will request that partners disseminate H-GAC materials and will work with partners to produce content for partner publications.

Presence at Local Events

H-GAC will seek to participate in local events or meetings at which good exposure to interested stakeholders is expected. Examples include briefing local governments and maintaining a booth at local environmental events.

Targeted Contacts

While the project will focus on a holistic approach to watershed management, there are times when specific messages will be targeted to specific stakeholder groups. In these cases, a variety of tools may be used to craft and disseminate a message specific to the interests of these groups. For example, similar projects made efforts to reach agricultural producers and to coordinate with adjacent efforts like flood mitigation and urban forestry. To engage producers who are integral to project success but may be underrepresented at meetings, H-GAC may use GIS and other tools to target households on agricultural parcels and devise a meeting specifically for these stakeholders (e.g. a meeting focused on incentives or programs available through agricultural agencies that have water quality benefits).

In cases where targeted contact and messaging is used, H-GAC will ensure full transparency is still maintained. In no case will H-GAC misrepresent the goals and extent of the project, and all focused materials will include links or references to broader project resources. Targeted messages are developed to find and focus on shared values and goals, not to limit transparency.

E. PUBLIC MEETINGS

The core of the stakeholder participation and outreach process will be a series of public Partnership and Work Group meetings. The structure of the Partnership and Work Groups is explained in greater detail in Section 4, and the tentative timeline of meetings and topics is discussed in Section 6. Meetings will be advertised and conducted in a way to maximize transparency and inclusion. The focus of the meetings will be to develop the WPP according to the EPA 9-element process. Additional meetings to address other specific topics may be called to ensure that the primary focus of Partnership meetings remains on WPP development.

Meeting Schedule

Whenever possible, Partnership meetings will be scheduled for evening times on nights that best suit stakeholder needs. Based on previous experience and to avoid conflict with religious services, Tuesdays or Thursdays are often preferable. Stakeholder feedback in the process may change the focus of scheduling as the process progresses. Work Groups will be scheduled based on the best fit for the participants.

Meeting Locations

H-GAC will work with stakeholders to determine best meeting locations in the watershed(s). It is expected that multiple locations will be used throughout the process to ensure Watershed-wide participation. Central venues already identified include several Lone Star College campuses, community centers, and park meeting facilities. Work Group meetings will be held in the most appropriate venues for the participants involved.

Advertising/Announcements

Advertising for public meetings will be approved in advance by TCEQ and will be disseminated to all channels appropriate to that meeting at least 30 days prior to the meeting date, unless specific circumstances dictate otherwise. Reminders will typically be sent out 2 weeks, 1 week, and one day in advance of the meeting. All public Partnership meetings will be announced via press release. Work Group meetings will be announced through project communication tools only to avoid over-saturating media outlets with announcements.

Conduct

Conduct at meetings will follow the ground rules discussed in Section 5. H-GAC and TCEQ will seek to foster but not unduly influence conversation.

Feedback

Every meeting will have at least 15 minutes set aside for public comment and feedback. In general, meetings will be conducted such that feedback and discussion is encouraged throughout the meeting. Project staff will record any feedback and follow up within one week on any stakeholder questions or requests. Substantive feedback will be reflected in meeting minutes.

Meeting Materials

All meetings will have, at a minimum, an established agenda and will be summarized. Meeting summaries will be posted to the website. All materials will be available to the public.

F. OTHER PUBLIC OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to the public meeting process, H-GAC will seek to provide the public and project stakeholders with opportunities to expand their knowledge or become more engaged in Watershed efforts. These interim experiences provide a break from the meeting schedule and foster a broader sense of community for stakeholders.

Texas Stream Team

Volunteer water quality monitors through Stream Team are actively engaged in the health of their waterways. H-GAC maintains the Stream Team program for this area which will seek to expand existing monitors and include them in project efforts.

Texas Watershed Stewards

Texas Watershed Stewards (TWS) is a science-based watershed education program designed to help residents identify and take action to address local water quality impairments. The program has been implemented through the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service (AgriLife) and the TSSWCB. TWS workshops are one-day, 8-hour events. The focus is public participation in local watershed management. The program is open to all watershed residents, including homeowners, business owners, agricultural producers, decision makers, community leaders, and all other citizens. H-GAC will encourage AgriLife to host a TWS workshop in the Watershed in the early phase of this process. The goal is to engage as many residents as possible in the project and empower them to make informed decisions.

Other Programs

H-GAC will work with AgriLife and other entities to evaluate the possibility of holding additional workshops in the Watershed during the project term. Topics of specific interest include established programs highlighting feral hogs, soil health, onsite sewage facilities (OSSFs), urban forestry, water quality aspects of flood mitigation, and riparian corridors. H-GAC will seek to hold or coordinate on a meeting specifically for agricultural producers to introduce them to programs and incentives available from TSSWCB, AgriLife, and USDA NRCS or similar agencies.

4. STAKEHOLDER GROUP STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

A. OVERVIEW

The core of the WPP project will be a stakeholder group (The Spring Creek Watershed Partnership) that will convene through the public meeting process. This section details the structure of the Partnership, how it will be formed, the intended composition and selection of the Steering Committee, and the decision-making process.

B. PARTNERSHIP FORMATION

The initial and ongoing means by which project staff will engage the stakeholders are discussed in detail in Section 3. The intended result of this targeted outreach plan is an engaged and diverse group of local participants serving as a Partnership.

The initial formation of the Partnership will occur at the first public meeting, but its preparation begins prior. During preliminary engagement and in concurrent communications, H-GAC will invite key partners and other interested parties to participate in the Partnership. Project staff will request that contacted parties pass on the invitation to others, to expand that effort and take advantage of existing relationships in the watershed.

Prior to the first meeting, H-GAC will make a large public notification push, using all of the applicable tools outlined in Section 3, as well as print advertising at strategic locations in the Watershed and partner communications. The intent for the first meeting will be to cast as wide a net as possible before the stakeholder group naturally narrows down to committed ongoing members.

The Partnership will be officially formed at the first meeting, at which time the facilitators will ask that interested parties submit notice of intent to serve on the Steering Committee. Project staff will also solicit Steering Committee commitments from key partners and other parties who have already expressed an interest. Section 4D details how the Steering Committee will be formed.

To foster a common point of reference and group identity, branded materials (including a logo; [Figure 6](#)) will be used in all communications.



Figure 6 - Partnership Logo

C. PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE

The Partnership will be composed of three components: the Steering Committee, the Work Groups, and the general stakeholder body, convened by facilitators H-GAC and TCEQ. A separate and informal Technical Advisory Group will be maintained by project staff, composed of state and national

agency representatives with related experience. The opportunities for participation for each level are described in Section 2.



Figure 7 - Partnership Structure

Technical Advisory Group

The Technical Advisory Group is a loose, informal set of regional and state agency contacts maintained by the facilitators, to provide their expertise on various aspects of the WPP development process and related efforts in the Watershed (e.g. H-GAC may ask TPWD for their opinion on deer populations in the watershed). The Facilitators will interact with the advisors on a one-on-one, ad hoc basis, or via informal polling for information or opinions. The advisors will not serve on the Steering Committee of the Partnership to ensure local decision-making is preserved. The technical advisors may or may not participate directly in public meetings.

Facilitators

As the facilitators, H-GAC and TCEQ will support the efforts of the Partnership by providing data, helping members interpret results, fostering conversation, and providing guidance through the WPP process. The facilitators will not seek to unduly influence the outcome of stakeholder decisions.

The Partnership (general)

General participation in the Partnership is open to all interested parties. General members will attend meetings and provide feedback to the Steering Committee and Work Groups.

Work Groups

The WPP covers a diverse geographic area and a broad range of land uses, interests, and water quality issues. Work Groups are small, topic-focused groups that meet to provide more detailed feedback and recommendations to Partnership meetings for consideration by the Steering Committee. Work Groups are open to all interested parties, but participants are encouraged to be regular meeting attendants. The extent of Work Groups will be determined by the Stakeholders after the first meetings. Work Groups would emphasize participation by members with specific knowledge of the topic areas.

The Work Groups will meet separately from the Partnership and will bring recommendations for discussion and consideration by the Partnership and its Steering Committee.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is the formal voting body of the Partnership. Its members are expected to attend meetings regularly and be actively involved. Final decisions on Partnership matters and the WPP will be made by the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will not meet separately from the Partnership unless specific needs warrant.

Other *ad hoc* meetings or forums may be convened based on the needs of the project, including leadership forums for local governing bodies or similar targeted outreach efforts.

D. DEVELOPMENT OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee represents the most committed stakeholders in the process, and its active and maintained participation is crucial for the success of the project. To ensure that its membership is stable and representative of the interests in the watershed, H-GAC and TCEQ will seek to select or solicit interest in a broad range of interests.

Solicitation and Selection

Project staff will solicit potential Steering Committee members from key partners, including those visited as part of the preliminary engagement process (Section 3B). H-GAC will work to ensure that potential Steering Committee members have been contacted before the first meeting, to supplement any nominations that come from the meeting itself. H-GAC will not seek to unduly influence participation toward any interest, but rather, will seek to ensure representativeness of the Committee.

At the initial public meeting and via outreach tools, H-GAC will solicit all interested parties to consider participation in the Steering Committee. All solicitation will clearly indicate that H-GAC will make the preliminary selection based on established criteria, to be approved by the stakeholders at a subsequent meeting. H-GAC will contact additional parties after solicitation if gaps in representativeness are identified.

Size and Composition

To be functional, a Steering Committee should be representative, but not overly large. In considering the presence and relative abundance of various interests in the Watershed, H-GAC is recommending a Steering Committee of approximately 10-15 members. The recommended composition and potential key partners are identified in [Table 1](#).

Table 1 - Recommended Steering Committee Composition

Stakeholder Category	Seats	Potential Key Partners
Residents/Landowners	1	TBD
Agricultural Producers	1	Local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, individual producers TBD
Business/Industry	1	Developers (The Woodlands Development Company, White Oak Developers Inc., etc.), local commercial interests
Local Government	3	Harris County, Harris County Flood Control District, Waller County, Grimes County, Montgomery County, local municipalities, MUDs
Academia	1	Local ISDs, Lone Star College
Community/Environmental Organizations	2	Bayou Land Conservancy, Katy Prairie Conservancy, Houston Audubon, local neighborhood associations, Master Naturalists
Other Interests (Recreation, Forestry, etc.)	1	Texas Forest Service, recreational paddling groups

A smaller or larger Steering Committee is possible, but a preservation of the general ratio of participants per interest is recommended.

Selection Criteria

If there is duplication of nominations for stakeholder categories, or there are greater numbers of nominations than can be accommodated, H-GAC and TCEQ will make a primary selection based on the following criteria. In some cases, project staff may discuss duplicate nominations with nominees to see if a local arrangement can be made (e.g. if Harris and Waller counties both request a spot, Waller County may yield to Harris County if they are aware Harris County will represent counties in general).

- Representativeness – Selection of members will be made to ensure all interests are represented, proportionally based on the recommendation in Table 1. Nominees who generally serve a leadership role for their category (e.g. counties, local governments) may be given preference if duplication exists in their category. Geographic representation will be considered as part of representativeness (i.e. ensuring all Watershed areas are represented). Consideration will also be given to ensuring small local governments are adequately represented alongside larger urban areas.
- Implementation Role – slight preference will be shown for participation by entities expected to have a large role in implementation (Harris County, Katy Prairie Conservancy, etc.).

Expectations for Steering Committee members are that they commit to being fair, open minded, goal oriented, and tolerant of a diversity of opinion. They will be expected to bring ideas and communicate with their organizations and others to ensure that they are in the loop on the project.

Project staff will confirm with the selected slate of nominees prior to the next Partnership meeting to ensure they remain committed to serving. At that time, H-GAC will submit the recommended slate of Steering Committee members to the Partnership for discussion and approval by the general body.

Changes in Membership

After its selection, the Steering Committee may elect to change the number and composition of its body as the needs of the project demand, unless such changes would specifically exclude a category of stakeholders. H-GAC will assist the Steering Committee in identifying and pursuing additions, replacements, and other membership changes.

E. DECISION-MAKING BY THE PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership will focus on building consensus among its members in all regards. Decision-making will consider all points of view and seek to use data resources and recommendations to make informed choices. In the event that decisions cannot be reached by consensus, the following processes will be used.

Receiving Feedback

As part of an open and transparent process, project staff and the Steering Committee will seek to receive and consider all public feedback, supporting or contrary. H-GAC will use the outreach tools described in Section 3 to provide as many opportunities and avenues for feedback as possible, especially for key decisions (WPP section approval, etc.)

Quorum

To conduct formal votes, a quorum equal to one half (rounded down for an uneven number) of the Steering Committee must be present.

Alternates/Proxies

While Steering Committee members are expected to attend most meetings, absences may sometimes be unavoidable. Steering Committee members may designate a standing alternate, or a one-time alternate, by informing H-GAC in advance of a vote, in writing (email will be considered as in writing for this purpose.) Properly notified alternates and proxies will enjoy full voting privileges.

Formal Votes

For all formal decisions (including approval of Water Quality Goals, approval of WPP sections, approval of modeling results, and approval of membership changes), the Steering Committee will take a vote at a public Partnership meeting, following public feedback and comment. If a quorum is not present, H-GAC may seek to poll the Steering Committee on a proposal, with the understanding that the decision will not be considered a formal vote but will be announced and discussed at the subsequent Partnership meeting. This process will be used as a last resort. For any votes in which consensus is not reached, decisions will be made by simple majority. However, minority opinions may be reflected in the WPP and will be noted in the meeting summaries.

Transition Planning

As part of the WPP development process, the Partnership will discuss the transition from the planning phase of the project to implementation. The stakeholders will discuss and identify the roles and responsibilities and resource needs for entities involved in actively implementing management measures. The intent of these discussions is to foster continued engagement and commitment once the WPP is approved and to ensure that decisions on how that transition takes place are made by the stakeholders. The stakeholders will consider, among other items, the role of the Partnership after WPP development (e.g. stay an informal group, form a 501(c)(3), entrust facilitation to a specific entity, etc.), frequency of meetings in implementation, etc.

All decision-making processes, and participation in the Partnership in general, will be subject to a series of ground rules (Section 5).

5. GROUND RULES

A. GROUND RULES FOR PARTICIPANTS

To ensure that all stakeholders have the chance to provide feedback, direct participants in the WPP development project will be asked to abide by a set of ground rules. The ground rules describe the expected conduct, rights, and responsibilities associated with participation in the project. Attendance at meetings is acknowledgement and acceptance of these rules.

H-GAC will facilitate the development and adherence to the ground rules by:

- Developing the ground rules;
- Reviewing the ground rules with the stakeholders;
- Facilitating the Steering Committee to formally adopt the ground rules by vote;
- Making the ground rules available for public review on the website and by mail upon request; and
- Maintaining the adherence at meetings as the meeting facilitator.

The proposed ground rules are in Appendix B.

6. MEETING TOPICS AND SCHEDULE

A. STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

The WPP development process moves through a series of steps designed to identify causes and sources of pollution and select solutions designed to address them. Work on these aspects is conducted both by the Partnership and the Work Groups. The proposed meeting timeline is based on that process and is designed to work through the challenges facing the stakeholders in the projected timeframe.

The table on the following page is a tentative schedule of the topics to be discussed over the course of the project. General Partnership meetings are aimed at the full gamut of stakeholders. Work Group meetings are topic-focused meetings aimed at the specific work groups. Regardless, all meetings will be open to the public and publicized to the members of the Partnership.

The meeting schedule is designed to follow a general narrative flow, in conjunction with the WPP outline/chapters. The narrative leads from the general to the specific and is matched with the schedule for modeling to ensure the topics are timely for data work being completed by the project staff. Emphasis has been put on eliminating gaps in meeting schedules due to delays in project staff analyses. The major narrative steps are:

- **Formation of the Partnership/Goal Setting** – *Setting the groundwork for the process, including water quality goals. (Q1 FY20 – Q3 FY20.)*
- **Characterizing the Watershed** – *A focus on using local knowledge to expand existing characterization information and understanding of the watershed and to engage stakeholders early on. (Q3 FY20 – Q4 FY20.)*
- **Evaluating Causes and Sources** – *Developing a better understanding of the causes of pollution and the priorities and levels of reduction needed. (Q4 FY20 – Q1 FY21.)*
- **Developing Solutions** – *Identifying and prioritizing management measures based on reduction needs and knowledge of local feasibility. (Q1 FY21 through Q2 FY21)*
- **Building the Roadmap** – *Choosing the timing and logistics of implementation. (Q2 FY21 – Q3 FY21)*
- **Planning for the Future** – *Talking through future roles and evaluation steps. (Q3 FY21 – Q4 FY21)*

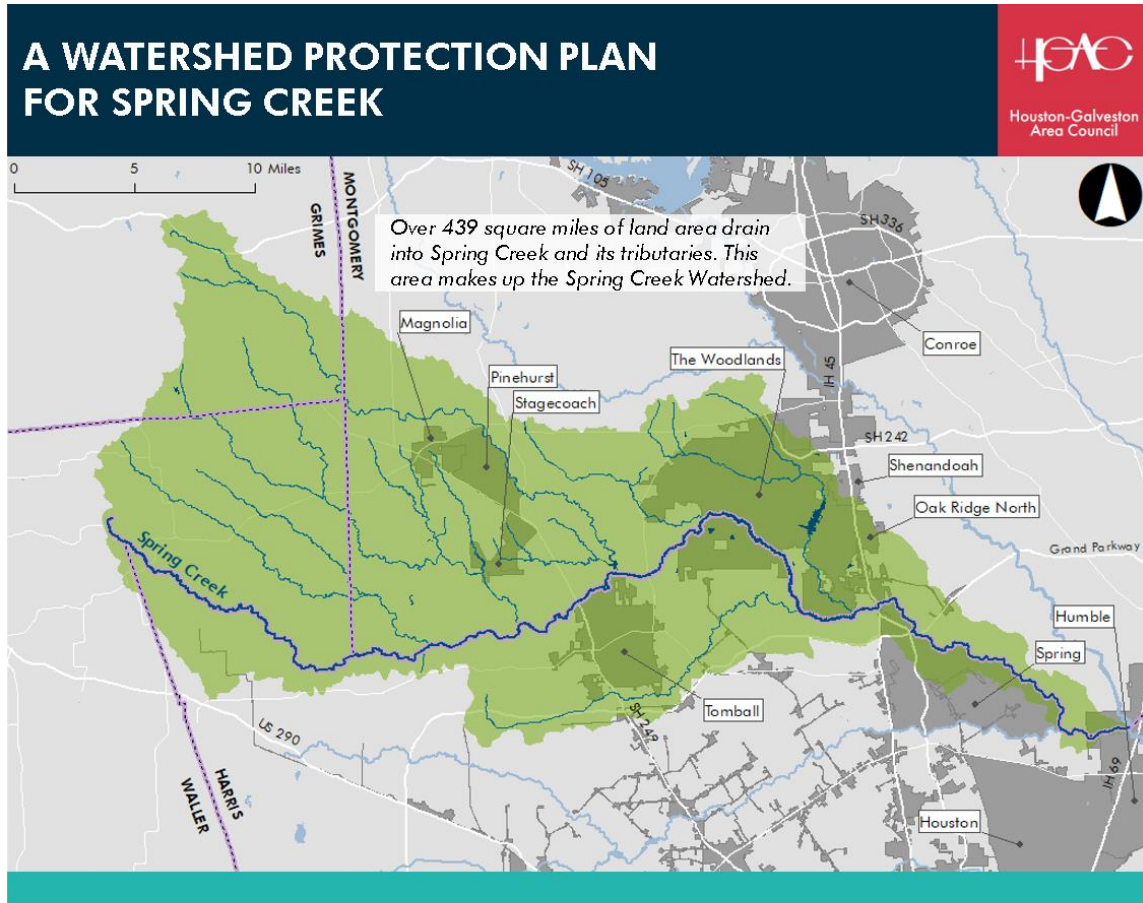
Table 2 - Meeting Schedule

Spring Creek Watershed Protection Plan - Tentative Meeting Schedule		
Quarter/Year	Meeting	Specific Topics
Q1, FY20	One-On-One Meetings	Establish communication with key partners. Discuss partner-specific knowledge, concerns & ideas.
Q2, FY20	One-On-One Meetings (continued)	Establish communication with key partners. Discuss partner-specific knowledge, concerns & ideas.
Q3, FY20	General Meeting – Introduction, Stakeholder Group Formation	Project introduction, general Watershed information, review of work completed prior to public involvement.
Q3, FY20	General Meeting – Goal Setting	Steering Committee formation, ground rules approval, introduction to the WPP Process, project timeline, potential representation gaps.
Q3, FY20	Work Groups – General Information (as needed)	Discuss stakeholder knowledge of land uses, sources, partners, activities & other information for each Watershed area.
Q4, FY20	Work Groups – Modeling	Discuss model assumptions, preliminary modeling data, related guidance & recommendations.
Q4, FY20	General Meeting – Modeling	Model assumptions, preliminary data, prioritization of sources, review of Work Group recommendations.
Q1, FY21	General Meeting –Solutions	Discuss potential solutions, begin prioritization & provide project update.
Q1, FY21	Work Groups –Solutions	Discuss recommendations for Steering Committee, review solutions in greater depth, begin discussion of logistics.
Q2, FY21	General Meeting – Solutions and Logistics	Accept solutions and logistics recommendations, begin discussion of continuity of the process.
Q3, FY21	Work Groups – Final Recommendations (as needed)	Use Steering Committee feedback to finalize solutions, timing, resources & metrics and initial WPP sections review.
Q3, FY21	General Meeting – WPP Development	Accept final Work Group feedback, provide feedback on WPP.
Q4, FY21	General Meeting – WPP Revisions	Discuss revisions to the WPP as needed based on TCEQ/EPA feedback.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: WATERSHED PROJECT SUMMARY

As described in Section 3, H-GAC has developed a one-page summary of the watershed project as an outreach tool. The following is the current version, which is expected to be updated regularly.



Water Quality Challenges

Spring Creek is a popular recreational waterway, provides critical habitat for aquatic life, and is an important drinking water source as a tributary of Lake Houston. Low dissolved oxygen levels and elevated concentrations of bacteria indicating fecal waste threaten these uses.

The Project

The Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) will work with local stakeholders to develop a **watershed protection plan** (WPP) for Spring Creek. The WPP will engage local partners to identify and implement voluntary approaches to improve water quality in the Creek.

Community Benefits

Local communities can expect direct involvement in WPP decision-making which could attract funding to support the efforts of local partners. The ultimate goal of WPP development is to improve water quality for the benefit of public health, local economies and the environment.

Get Involved

H-GAC invites local stakeholders to take part in the Spring Creek Watershed Partnership. Our success depends on insights and engagement from the community. Please visit <http://springcreekpartnership.com> to learn more.

CONTACT: RACHEL WINDHAM ☎ 713-993-2497 ✉ RACHEL.WINDHAM@H-GAC.COM

APPENDIX B: GROUND RULES

As described in Section 4, H-GAC has prepared a set of ground rules to ensure civil and fruitful discussion in public participation opportunities. These ground rules set the tone, expectation, and desired outcomes for the stakeholder meetings and participation. These ground rules will be reviewed, potentially revised, and approved by the Stakeholder Committee.

Spring Creek Watershed Partnership Ground Rules

The following are the ground rules for the Spring Creek Watershed Partnership (Partnership) agreed to and approved by the Steering Committee of the Partnership. Participants in the Partnership's public meetings, events, and discussions agree to follow these ground rules.

Goals

The goal of the Partnership is to develop and implement a watershed protection plan (WPP) to improve and protect the water quality of Spring Creek and its tributaries. This goal will be achieved by using sound science and local knowledge as part of a public process facilitated by the Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC) and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ).

General Conduct

Participants in the Partnership's meetings, events, or other facilitated discussions agree to follow a general code of conduct. By attending meetings or participating in discussions, participants agree to:

- Represent their viewpoints without personal attacks or uncivil speech.
- Respect other speakers by not interrupting them.
- Respect the process by not disrupting meetings. Expressing differing viewpoints is encouraged, disrupting the process is not.
- Be honest in all information shared, including avoiding dishonesty by omission.
- Address any concerns about the conduct of other participants with H-GAC and TCEQ.
- Refrain from speaking in the name of the Partnership, its Steering Committee, Work Groups, or other members unless authorized to do so.
- Generally seek to find areas of common value and promote consensus.

Public Meetings

The following are the expectations for all meetings held by the Partnership:

- **Accessible and Open to the Public** - All meetings of the Partnership are open to the public, and all interested stakeholders are encouraged and welcomed to participate. Meetings will be held, to the greatest extent possible, in locations accessible to stakeholders
- **Prior Notice** – Stakeholders will receive notice of meetings, or changes thereof, at least 30 days prior to the meeting date. Notice may be less than 30 days if there are extenuating circumstances (inclement weather cancellations, unforeseen change in time or location, etc.). H-GAC will use every practical means to ensure stakeholders are aware of meeting status change.
- **Respectful of Time** – H-GAC will start and end meetings at the times on the agenda.

- **Meeting Documents** – Meeting documents will be sent with meeting notices and be made publicly available online at www.springcreekpartnership.com or another site as designated by H-GAC. Mailed materials can be sent by specific request, but digital documents will be the default. Meeting documents include an agenda, minutes from the previous meeting(s), and any other relevant information needed for the meeting.
- **Open Discussion** – Meetings will be conducted such that open discussion, questions, and feedback are allowed throughout. However, there may be times during presentations or when other stakeholders are speaking, that stakeholders will be requested to hold their questions/comments until later.

Structure

The Partnership is composed of five participation levels: General Stakeholders, Facilitators, Technical Advisors, Work Groups, and the Steering Committee.

- **General Stakeholders** are stakeholders who attend meetings and provide information.
- **Facilitators** are H-GAC and TCEQ who serve the Partnership by funding the process, arranging meetings, facilitating conversation, providing data for decisions, and creating project documents.
- **Technical Advisors** are members of state and federal agencies, or other entities who serve the Partnership by lending expertise to conversations and coordinating with other efforts. To ensure decision-making remains local, Technical Advisors do not serve on the Steering.
- **Work Groups** are topical or geographically specific committees of the Partnership. They discuss issues in depth and make formal recommendations to the Partnership and Steering Committee.
- **The Steering Committee** is the formal decision-making body of the Partnership. Final decisions on all matters are made by the Steering Committee, in consideration of input from other stakeholders and the Work Groups.

Participants agree to respect this organizational structure. Regardless, everyone at the meetings is welcome to participate and encouraged to make their voice heard.

Steering Committee Selection

The Steering Committee will be selected from among stakeholders who express their interest in writing or at initial meetings. H-GAC will seek to ensure that all interests in the watershed are represented (if they choose to be) on the Steering Committee. If interest in membership is greater than the expected 15 representative positions, H-GAC will work with TCEQ to make the final selection. The Steering Committee will be approved by the stakeholders by majority vote at an initial meeting of the Partnership. The Steering Committee candidates agree to make a good faith effort to attend all general Partnership meetings and commit to the ground rules and goals of the project. H-GAC and TCEQ will address multiple absences with the Committee members if they occur and may ask a member to step down if necessary.

Replacements and additions may be made during the project to replace outgoing members or to represent interests not already adequately represented. Voting alternates may be designated by the Committee members if done by email or in writing prior to the meeting.

Decision-Making

The Partnership's Steering Committee is the ultimate decision-making body for the Partnership. As such, the Steering Committee will approve final decisions concerning all aspects of developing the WPP. Formal Steering Committee recommendations will be identified as such in the planning documents and meeting summaries.

The Steering Committee will duly consider the feedback from other local stakeholders and the Work Groups. Decision-making is focused on achieving consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved, decisions will be made by majority vote.

Quorum

To vote on formal recommendations, a quorum of at least 50% of the Steering Committee must be present or must have previously nominated a replacement by email or in writing.

Approval

These ground rules were drafted by the H-GAC and TCEQ and presented to the Steering Committee for their review, possible revision, and adoption. Once adopted, all participants will be responsible for abiding by these ground rules.

The ground rules, as detailed above, were reviewed and approved by the Steering Committee for the Spring Creek Watershed Partnership on _____.