

Cotton Bayou Watershed Public Meeting

Monday, June 17th, 2024
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

In Attendance:

Organizers:

Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC)

Cornell Evans, Jr., H-GAC Project Staff

Rachel Windham, Presenter, H-GAC Project Manager

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ)

Lauren Dawson, TCEQ Project Manager

Sam Bickley, TCEQ Staff

Attendees:

Francisco Carrillo, City of Mont Belvieu

Sam Hill, Texas A&M Forest Service

Stephen Smith, City of Mont Belvieu

Meeting Notes:

Welcome and Introductions

- Rachel Windham (H-GAC) commenced the meeting at 10:00 a.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 contact 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 an estimation of total bacteria load from known sources has been combined with a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) or “budget” for bacteria pollution to determine what source-specific reductions needed to achieve compliance with water quality standards. Strategies to achieve these reductions have been included in a draft Implementation Plan (I-Plan).
- Stakeholders prompted further discussion into the bacteria source estimation methodology and the role of surface water quality monitoring data in determining the TMDL. As part of this discussion, stakeholders shared that the City of Mont Belvieu is already taking steps to incorporate water quality and conservation into their city planning. H-GAC confirmed with TCEQ that these best management practices can be included in future status reports to reflect the proactive efforts of the City in supporting the I-Plan.

Implementation Plan Development

- Ms. Windham provided an overview of the components of an I-Plan including:
 - Strategies - actionable items to address bacteria reduction for 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 described the adaptive management methodology of I-Plans which allows for stakeholders to periodically assess plan measures for efficiency and effectiveness.
- Ms. Windham also explained the usual management measures for which strategies, milestones, schedules, and load reductions are included in I-Plans.
- Based on stakeholder feedback shared at a July 2023 meeting combined with 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) Promoting safe OSSF use and maintenance
 - 3) Supporting land management initiatives
 - 4) Promoting feral hog management
 - 5) Maintaining and improving WWTF and collection system function
- Ms. Windham reviewed specific actions suggested for each management measure. Stakeholders reinforced their support of the I-Plan effort and shared information on progress with measures the City of Mont Belvieu is already implementing or pursuing in the near future that will support the I-Plan. An investment of \$32 million is currently being considered that will be aimed towards the improvement of the City's wastewater treatment facility programs. Future collaborations with partners such as Texas A&M Forest Service to achieve forestry related goals may be possible in the future.

Next Steps

- The draft I-Plan is currently being reviewed by the TCEQ. H-GAC will update stakeholders as the plan progresses through review.
- An addendum to the original TMDL for the tidal portion of Cotton Bayou (0801C) will be developed to include a TMDL assessment for the above tidal segment (0801E).
- Cornell Evans, Jr. will be the new H-GAC Project Manager moving forward.

Discussion

- Discussions following the presentation focused on the importance of outreach. Stakeholders shared ideas and resources for distributing educational materials and raising awareness. The need for connections with younger generations through school programs and social media was emphasized.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:00 a.m.

For more information about the meeting or the project, please contact:

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