

9/28/2022 Baffin Bay Stakeholder Meeting
Kingsville, TX

Minutes:

10:10 Introductions around the room.

10:20 Mike Wetz gives overview of the Bringing Baffin Back initiative, which is a long-term effort to address water quality issues and habitat loss in the bay, as well as to foster stewardship.

10:35 Adrien Hilmy gave updates on:

1. Wastewater plant outreach efforts and regional plant development being conducted by the Nueces River Authority, which have been successful at improving quality of effluent at several plants. The group identified a need to engage with additional county leaders to increase awareness of the need for the regional plant that would consolidate sewage treatment currently being done at several aging plants in the area. A request was made to consider the potential impacts of discharge from a consolidated regional facility – will it impact flushing and loads to Petronila Creek?
2. A program being conducted by the Nueces River Authority to repair and/or replace failing residential septic systems in the Baffin Bay area.
3. Efforts by the Nueces River Authority and Texas Water Resources Institute to identify and engage with landowners in the Baffin Bay watershed, particularly farmers. The group identified this as a priority focus over the coming year.

10:55 Kathryn Tunnell gave an update on two projects that CBBEP is working on with partners to address illegal dumping in the Coastal Bend, including the Baffin Bay watershed. The team will be hosting community waste disposal events and will conduct an outreach campaign to hopefully reduce the tendency/need for illegal dumping

11:10 Kiersten Stanzel gave an update on funding from the Natural Resources Damage Assessment, Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill water quality program in Texas. Two projects in the Baffin Bay watershed have been selected: a) engineering and design phase of a constructed wetland project on Danna Orr's property on Petronila Creek (~\$500,000) and b) farmer outreach and land management plan development (\$4.3 million). Should know more about project start dates soon.

11:30 Lucas Gregory gave an in-depth overview of the recently approved Petronila Creek and San Fernando Creeks Watershed Protection Plan. Now that EPA has accepted the WPP, this opens the door to new funding sources to implement plan action items. Several proposals seeking funding for a watershed coordinator, educational program delivery, continued water quality monitoring and septic system inspections have been developed and sent off for funding consideration. Over the coming year, there will be an emphasis on hiring a watershed coordinator and on stakeholder engagement. There was considerable discussion about the need to address

poor riparian habitat conditions in parts of the watershed – need funding to incentivize farmer participation and this will be a major focus over the coming years.

12:30-1:30 Breakout groups focused on developing action items related to stormwater, wastewater/septic, agriculture/wildlife/habitat, and science and monitoring.

Science and Monitoring:

- a. Importance of watershed and bay water quality sampling emphasized. Need to get the state to consider setting screening levels for TN/TKN and not just nitrate. Most of the nitrogen in Texas estuaries is in organic form.
- b. New study starting by NRCS to assess soil types/condition in watershed and in bay.
- c. Expand metal sampling in Petronila Creek in anticipation of battery factory to be built in Robstown.
- d. Expand water quality sampling further up into Los Olmos Creek.
- e. Need for targeted rain event sampling – might be addressed through NOAA Restore Science proposal. Need to get TX DOT to respond to requests for permission. Lee Schroer at TGLO may have contacts to help with this.
- f. Need for continuous water quality and weather monitoring in the bay.
- g. Need for study on erosion rates in the watershed, esp. Petronila Creek and lands on north side of bay.
- h. TPWD moving towards ecosystem-based management of fisheries – need better/more data on critical habitat and ecosystem components such as seagrass, serpulid reefs, benthic prey.
- i. TPWD requests that folks report all fish kills in the Baffin area: 512-389-4848

Wastewater/septic:

- a. Increased public awareness is a primary need to build support for funding aimed at addressing these issues.
 - i. Need community awareness of issues and voicing of concerns at local city council & commissioners' meetings
 - ii. Continue working with elected officials
 - iii. Leverage other outreach efforts (e.g. Up2U) to provide WW and septic related information. Provide info at boat ramps and other bag distribution points
- b. Awareness of septic maintenance needs for existing and future homeowners
 - i. Build off of NRA outreach campaign – postcard mailers with links and info about septic replacement program, importance of maintenance, links to resources. Need outreach for extended period of time
 - ii. Sticker campaign in schools for do's and don'ts
 - iii. Can information/literature be provided to realtors association/title companies, to be provided to future home buyers at time of purchase?
 - iv. Proximity to receiving water body (creeks or the bay) should be considered when prioritizing systems for inspection and replacement
- c. Watershed model currently in development will be a good tool (can be paired with sticker campaign if taken into schools)

Stormwater:

- a. Discussed the opportunity to build on the recent FAST workshop that was hosted in the region – specific follow up steps from the workshop included providing outreach materials that gave local examples and cost estimates (both short-term and long-term costs); hosting a follow-up GIFT workshop; and developing a partnership with TAMUK engineering department and promoting student involvement.
- b. There was also a great deal of discussion about the term stormwater management and whether or not this term was an effective communication strategy. The group discussed alternatives that may resonate more with individuals, such as flood water management. Once a message is determined, could develop a logo and tagline that could be used state-wide, not just in Baffin Bay.
- c. Related to the bullet above, the group discussed the need to identify our audience and develop appropriate messages. For example, when communicating with rural landowners, the message may need to focus on erosion, while in urban areas it may be more about flooding.
- d. Group also discussed the need to look through existing ordinances/permitting requirements and determine what “tools” were available for communities to use currently. Once this has been done, then new ordinances/permitting requirements could be introduced to help address stormwater issues.
- e. There was also discussion about using the Buffalo Bayou Partnership as a model for what could be done in more urban areas.
- f. Finally, there was some discussion about stormwater fees and other similar tools that could be used to try and generate funding for future green infrastructure projects.

Agriculture/Wildlife/Habitat:

- a. Over-arching focus of discussion revolved around the need to engage stakeholders in education and demonstration events – not just meetings, but field days and result demonstrations to illustrate exactly how natural resource management (cropping systems, grazing, riparian restoration) can work in/very near the watershed
- b. Financial assistance needs were highlighted as a primary need for adoption of conservation practices
 - i. Education/field day events should include a session on these relevant assistance opportunities
- c. Need to partner with all pertinent agencies to highlight the synergy between programs (ag production, habitat creation, resource conservation, water quality improvement)
- d. Need to really promote the NRCS Petronila Creek Nutrient Reduction Initiative due to limited watershed area that is eligible

1:55 Group discussion about priority next steps. Agreed that we will conduct a survey of the full stakeholder group to get additional input on action items under the four breakout group categories and to identify the best days/times/locations for future meetings. There was a general consensus that the group needed to continue to focus on landowner and community leader

engagement over the coming year, and may want to seek partnerships with already-engaged entities (CCA) to promote key action items.

2:00 Meeting adjourned.