



SPRING CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

Agriculture, Wildlife and Invasives Workgroup Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 2nd, 2021
1:00 – 3:00 p.m.

In Attendance:

Organizers:

Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC):
Andrea Tantillo
Rachel Windham

Attendees:

Brian Koch (Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB))
Diana Foss (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD))
Mac Martin (Texas A&M Forest Service)
Monte Parks (Harris County Precinct 4 (HCP4))
Neil Gaynor (Montgomery County MUD 6)
Teri MacArthur (The Woodlands Township)
Tom Douglas (Bayou Preservation Association (BPA))

Meeting Notes:

Outline and Statement of Purpose

- Rachel Windham (H-GAC) commenced the meeting at 1:00 p.m. by welcoming the attendees and asking them to quickly introduce themselves/test their Zoom functions.
- Before starting the meeting, the agenda was reviewed.

Timeline and Reduction Targets

- Ms. Windham refreshed the workgroup on the concept of a milestone year or end-date goal for implementation of the Watershed Protection Plan. Based on feedback from the last round of workgroup meetings, regular checkpoints will also be integrated to improve plan flexibility and provide a better guide for measuring

success. These checkpoints can also help to highlight different phases of the project (early, middle, late and ongoing) which will help to indicate where in the timeline specific water quality improvement strategies could be deployed.

- The determination of the milestone year is at the discretion of the partnership and will determine the numerical targets for bacteria reduction as well as the duration between checkpoints. The partnership should select a milestone year based on a balance between model accuracy (which is less reliable with increased time) and time for implementation (an allowance for improvement strategies to be carried out and gaged for efficacy).
 - Teri MacArthur (The Woodlands Township) restates her position from the Human Sources and Pet Waste Workgroup meeting in stressing the importance of capturing momentum and enthusiasm in the early years of the project to carry out the bulk of implementation. Additionally, she prompts the workgroup to think about practical long-term time commitments.
 - Brian Koch (TSSWDB) shares insight on the procedure of bringing on a watershed coordinator through Clean Water Act 319(h) funding as he has seen it carried out through TSSWCB (may be slightly different through TCEQ). He suggests building a proposal for a watershed coordinator as soon as possible as the process could take at least 1 year. In the interim, he suggests reaching out to partners in the watershed, securing commitments and beginning implementation which would strengthen the partnership's case. He also points out that with the neighboring Cypress Creek WPP nearing completion, it might be possible to request a coordinator for the combined watershed areas and therefore split the cost burden.
 - On the topic of funding, Ms. MacArthur asks Diana Foss (TPWD) if there are any funding sources from TPWD that the partnership could seek. Ms. Foss notes that the most likely proposals to receive funding would be for specific research projects or projects tied to rare species. Mr. Koch adds that while 319(h) funding is the most common channel for seeking a watershed coordinator, he supports efforts to seek funds outside 319(h) to supplement the project.
 - Ms. Foss asks the group if 2030 is a reasonable end-date target in light of the discussion on acquiring funding and the turnover time involved in that process.
- Ms. Windham also reminded the workgroup about the calculation of reduction targets based on the selected milestone year. Though these calculations act as a general guideline for source-specific reduction targets, achieving the overall load reduction is more important than adhering to reduction percentages by source.

Because of this, the partnership may decide to direct more effort to reducing load from sources they view as higher priorities or easier to improve based on efforts already underway or availability of resources. Ms. Windham prompted the group to discuss whether any rough changes to the distribution of effort needed to be made relative to the source load reduction percentages indicated by the SELECT modeling process.

- Monte Parks (HCP4) shares that the watershed is expected to lose agricultural land perhaps even faster than predicted by the models (example: two large ranches in the Tomball area are selling and this trend is expected to continue along the SH 99/Grand Parkway corridor). In light of this, it might be better to redistribute efforts to reduce agricultural impacts into other categories.
 - Mr. Koch points out that this might be an opportunity to work with land trust and conservation groups to maintain natural land cover. Ms. Foss also suggests partnering with Harris County Flood Control who is looking for detention areas along creeks and the potential development of a reservoir. Ms. MacArthur also suggests working with developers to incorporate water quality/quantity design elements such as Town Lake and Bridgeland in the Cypress Creek Watershed. Mr. Douglas suggests an incentive to this strategy would be increased property value.
- Ms. MacArthur suggests splitting the agricultural burden in half and redistributing to the pet waste and feral hog categories evenly. Mr. Parks supports this by agreeing this will probably be closer to the future reality of the watershed in terms of contribution to the total load.

Implementation Strategy Logistics

- Ms. Windham reminded the workgroup that the strategies discussed at the previous meeting were meant to enhance, support and fill gaps in existing efforts where possible. For new proposals implemented as a result of this Watershed Protection Plan development, information is needed on who the responsible parties would be, what the resource needs are and where on the project timeline the strategy would be active. While most notes were added during the workgroup meeting, additional information from workgroup members and other stakeholders unable to attend the meeting were added as appropriate after follow-up conversations.
- Due to the focused nature of the workgroup, logistics for reducing loads related to the following bacteria sources were discussed:
 - Agriculture

Strategy	Responsible Parties and Contacts	Focus Area	Needs	Timeline
Promote and engage in existing agricultural programs	Agencies, Landowners	Headwaters	Outreach/education	Ongoing
TSSWCB WQMPs, USDA-NRCS Conservation Plans/Farm Bill programs	Landowners	Headwaters	Continued outreach/education, grazing BMPs	Ongoing
Develop manure composting program	Local Government, Stabling Facilities, Nature's Way	Headwaters	Raising awareness, coordination, identify contractor?	Ongoing

o Deer and Other Wildlife

Strategy	Responsible Parties and Contacts	Focus Area	Needs	Timeline
Restore habitat away from riparian areas	Landowners, NGOs ¹ , Local Government	Headwaters	Landowner contributions, staff time for management	Early, Ongoing
Manage feeding	Residents, Local Government	Whole Watershed	Exclusionary devices around deer feeders, work with local governments to explore possibility of feeding ordinances	Ongoing
Address deer and other wildlife impacts indirectly by compensating with additional	See other strategies	See other strategies	See other strategies	See other strategies

response to other sources (e.g., OSSFs ²)				
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o Feral Hogs

Strategy	Responsible Parties and Contacts	Focus Area	Needs	Timeline
AgriLife education, technical services	AgriLife	Whole Watershed	Outreach, coordination with AgriLife	Ongoing
Promote and engage in existing agency programs	Residents, Agencies	Whole Watershed	Outreach, coordination with partners	Ongoing
Increase trapping and hunting of hogs	Landowners, Local Government, NGOs, Development	Whole Watershed	Identifying funding	Ongoing
Manage feeding	Residents, Local Government	Whole Watershed	Exclusionary devices around deer feeders, work with local governments to explore possibility of feeding ordinances, education materials (flyer, brochure, web materials)	Ongoing

o Conservation and Restoration

Strategy	Responsible Parties and Contacts	Focus Area	Needs	Timeline
Promote and engage in existing	Agencies, Landowners, NGOs	Whole Watershed	Outreach, coordination with partners	Early, Ongoing

conservation programs				
Restore and maintain riparian buffers	Landowners, Local Government, NGOs	Headwaters, Riparian Areas	Landowner contributions, staff time for management	Early, Ongoing
Increase tree canopy	Agencies, Landowners, NGOs	Headwaters, Riparian Areas	iTree Hydro modeling, staff time for management, identify funding	Early, Ongoing

o Education and Outreach

Topic	Partners/Programs/Events
Pet Waste	H-GAC Pitch the Poop; Kennel Club; Canine Good Citizen; Woodlands Township Envi. Services; Woodlands GREEN; Scouts/Youth Programs; Woodlands Water Agency (MUDs)
Onsite Sewage Facilities	H-GAC Homeowner Education Workshops; Promote SEP
Conservation & Restoration	Bayou Land Conservancy Ambassador Program; Native Plant Society; Texas Master Naturalists; Woodlands Township Envi. Services; Woodlands GREEN
Trash Reduction	Trash Bash; Trash Free Texas Adopt-A-Spot
Lawn Maintenance	Healthy Lawns, Healthy Watersheds; Native Plant Society; Woodlands Water Agency (MUDs); Woodlands Township Envi. Services (overwatering); Woodlands GREEN; Scouts/Youth Programs; Extension; Nature's Way
Agriculture	SWCD Leadership Development Workshops; County Extension/Extension Programs, TSSWCB, NRCS
Stormwater	Drain Markers; TCEQ Water Quality/Stormwater Seminars
Fats, Oils and Grease	City of Houston Protect Our Pipes; Woodlands Township Envi. Services; Woodlands GREEN; Woodlands Water Agency (MUDs); Woodlands Township Envi. Services; Woodlands GREEN; Scouts/Youth Programs; GBF (partner?); H-

- Supportive Research
 - Ms. Windham reviewed other elements to consider including in the Watershed Protection Plan that would not necessarily reduce bacteria loads but could provide useful context for conditions impacting water quality. Among these are the targeted use of microbial source tracking (instream source identification based on bacteria strains specific to different animal types), DNA-based source tracking (instream genetic identification of species-specific E. coli strains or human DNA specifically) which can both be used to detect illicit discharge or characterize localized spikes in fecal indicator bacteria concentration. Another important task includes coordination with flood management efforts and projects modeling environmental effects and costs of management decisions.
- Continue Partnership
 - Lastly, Ms. Windham points out that the next step to consider after the Watershed Protection Plan is completed and approved will be to seek a watershed coordinator to guide plan implementation and continue to coordinate with local governments, organizations and stakeholders.

Discussion, News and Questions

- Ms. Windham closes the meeting by inviting workgroup members to attend the next Spring Creek Watershed Partnership Meeting via Zoom on April 8th from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. She then opened the floor for partnership news, questions and general discussion.
- Mr. Douglas invites the group to join the Houston Sierra Club meeting also scheduled on April 8th at 7:00 p.m. They will be discussing recreational uses of waterways and will feature a presentation from Mr. Douglas.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

For more information, visit <http://springcreekpartnership.com>,
or contact Rachel Windham at:
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