



SPRING CREEK WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

Human Sources and Pet Waste Workgroup Meeting Minutes

Monday, March 1st, 2021
5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

In Attendance:

Organizers:

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

Attendees:

Camila Biaggi (Harris County Engineering)
Jennifer Seale (Texas Master Naturalists (TMN) - Heartwood)
Kendra Park (TMN – Heartwood)
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 5:30 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) asks about what to expect after the watershed protection plan is developed—who becomes responsible for implementation and how will the timeline be affected? Ms. Windham touches on the possibility of bringing on a watershed coordinator through Clean Water Act 319(h) funding. Tom Douglas (BPA) notes that other watersheds in the region share a watershed coordinator and therefore the cost of maintaining a coordinator.
 - Mr. Douglas leans toward a longer project timeline targeting 2035 or further as the end date as long as regular check-ins at 5 year intervals are incorporated to increase plan flexibility. Ms. MacArthur points out that a longer overall timeline may result in loss of stakeholder participation. Her leaning is still closer to 2030 in order to harness enthusiasm and motivation in the early phases of partnership formation.
 - Mr. Douglas prompts the group to consider how much reduction is achievable on a 2030 vs. 2035 end-date timeline.
 - Ms. MacArthur points out that partnership efforts can continue after the projected end-date. She asks the group what range would represent a reasonable time commitment.
 - Jennifer Seale (TMN – Heartwood) and Camila Biaggi (Harris County Engineering) offer support from their respective organizations for the duration of the watershed protection plan.
- 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.

- The group reviewed some hypothetical redistribution of effort calculations which shift the burden of reducing dog waste and safety margin impacts into onsite sewage facility remediation which is more easily controlled.
- Mr. Douglas agrees that for hard to define impacts such as those accounted for in the safety margin, redistribution into a category like onsite sewage which is known to be an issue in the watershed is reasonable.
- Ms. MacArthur agrees that redistributing the burden related to dog waste will make achieving a reduction goal more attainable and increase the chances of project success.
- Mr. Douglas also notes that reducing the dog waste reduction goal could help offset any overestimation of dog waste impact incurred as an artifact of the SELECT model calculations. Meanwhile, the partnership could pursue instream DNA testing to improve our understanding of bacteria source dynamics in the watershed.
- Ms. MacArthur suggests a similar redistribution of effort in relation to livestock waste reduction targets.

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:
 - Wastewater Treatment Facilities (WWTFs)

Strategy	Responsible Parties and Contacts	Focus Area	Needs	Timeline
Assist in identifying resources to improve operations	Partnership	Downstream	List funding sources, feedback from partnership	Early, ongoing
Consider	Utilities, Cities,	Downstream	Facility	Ongoing

regionalization	(Outreach help from NGOs)		tours/outreach/PSA videos	
Recommend increased testing	Utilities, Partnership	Downstream, nutrients in Willow Creek	Identify funding for staff/supplies, Stream Team volunteers	Early, Ongoing

○ Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs)

Strategy	Responsible Parties and Contacts	Focus Area	Needs	Timeline
Join the SSO Initiative	Utilities	Downstream	Outreach to public and facilities, engage volunteers ahead of inspectors, set checkpoint goals for volunteer efforts	Ongoing
Evaluate lift station generator backup capacity	Utilities	Downstream	Identify funding for staffing/remediation	Early, Ongoing
Identify areas affected by floods	Utilities	Downstream	Outreach to public and facilities, promote floodwater contact awareness/public reporting	Ongoing

○ Onsite Sewage Facilities (OSSFs)

Strategy	Responsible Parties and Contacts	Focus Area	Needs	Timeline
Provide financial support for remediating low	H-GAC	Whole Watershed, special consideration	Staff time to manage remediation	Ongoing

income OSSFs		for Tomball area		
Improve spatial data, help identify priority areas	H-GAC	Whole Watershed	Currently maintained under CWA 604(b) contract, staff time	Ongoing
Convert to sanitary service where appropriate	Utilities, Residents	Whole Watershed, special consideration for Tomball area	Promote conversions (outreach), contract skilled professionals, permits for conversion	Ongoing
Hold residential OSSF workshops	H-GAC	Whole Watershed	Staff time	Ongoing

○ Pet Waste

Strategy	Responsible Parties and Contacts	Focus Area	Needs	Timeline
Install pet waste stations in high traffic public areas	Local Government, Homeowners Associations, Apartment Complexes	Downstream, New Development	Identify funding, HOA sponsors	Early, ongoing
Increase dog parks/capacity	Local Government	Downstream, New Development	May need staff to clean park, outreach in parks, special attention for water features	Ongoing
Sponsor spay/neuter events	Local Government, Homeowners Associations, Local Businesses, Residents	Downstream	Not priority, more important to target pet owners, work with vet clinics to distribute info	Ongoing
Consider increased	Homeowners Associations,	Downstream, New	Seek political buy-in	Ongoing

enforcement	Apartment Complexes	Development		
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○ Stormwater

Strategy	Responsible Parties and Contacts	Focus Area	Needs	Timeline
Install drain markers	Local Government, Homeowners Associations	Downstream	Volunteer training, staff time, funding	Early, Ongoing
Identify illicit connections in waterways and channels	Local Government	Downstream	Identify funding for staff time	Early, Ongoing
Promote low impact development; promote water quality features in detention	Local Government, Developers	Downstream, New Development	Promote LID (outreach), develop materials	Ongoing

○ Conservation and Restoration

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

○ 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-GAC; SJRA

- 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 7:30 p.m.

For more information, visit <http://springcreekpartnership.com>,
or contact Rachel Windham at:
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Email: rachel.windham@h-gac.com



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