



Public Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 29th, 2020
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

In Attendance:

Organizers:

Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC):

- Andrea Tantillo
- Justin Bower
- Rachel Windham

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ):

- Nicole Hall

Attendees:

Alice Best (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD))

Andrew Moore (Halff)

Becky Martinez (Bayou Land Conservancy)

Ben Thompson (Community Impact)

Bobby Martin (Harris County Precinct 4 (HCP4))

Brenda Reeves (Texas Master Naturalists (TMN) - Heartwood)

Brian Koch (Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board)

Carson Stokes (TMN - Heartwood)

Clare Hubbell (Harris County Engineering)

Clifton Edwards (HCP4)

Danielle Cioc (Harris County Engineering)

Deborah January-Bevers (Houston Wilderness)

Diana Foss (TPWD)

Glenna Sloan (TMN - Heartwood)

Heather Robinson (TCEQ)

Jack Morman (HCP4)

Jennifer Seale (TMN - Heartwood)

Kendra Park (TMN – Heartwood)

Mac Martin (Texas A&M University - Texas Forest Service)

Paul Nelson (Woodlands GREEN)

Rob Ziehr (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service)

Robert Johnston (TMN - Heartwood)
Samantha Litchke (TCEQ)
Shawn Schoeller (TMN – Heartwood)
Stephanie Zertuche (Montgomery County MUD 7)
Stephen Benigno (Harris County Flood Control District)
Steve Ellison (TMN - Heartwood)
Steven Johnston (H-GAC)
Terrilyn MacArthur (TMN - Heartwood)
Todd Running (H-GAC)
Tom Douglas (Houston Canoe Club)

Meeting Notes:

Welcome and Introductions

- Andrea Tantillo (H-GAC) commenced the meeting at 2:00 pm by welcoming the attendees and reviewing GoToWebinar functions for asking questions and making comments throughout the presentation. She then introduced the speaker, Rachel Windham (H-GAC). Ms. Windham also introduced TCEQ Project Manager Nicole Hall and colleague Justin Bower (H-GAC). Attendance was recorded by the GoToWebinar platform.

Project Overview and Preliminary Findings

- Ms. Windham provided an overview of the Spring Creek Watershed Protection Plan Project facilitated by TCEQ and H-GAC:
 - Spring Creek and many of its tributaries are impaired for contact recreation use due to bacteria levels in exceedance of the state water quality standard. Depressed dissolved oxygen and high nutrient levels are also causes for concern.
 - The Spring Creek Watershed Partnership is being formed to develop a watershed protection plan informed by data analyses and stakeholder knowledge.
 - Preliminary analyses of data collected quarterly between 2009 and 2019 show bacteria levels exceeding state water quality standards in Spring Creek and many of its tributaries. Levels of total phosphorous exceeding the screening level are also widespread. High nitrate levels were observed in Lower Panther Branch and Willow Creek.
 - Over time, bacteria levels have not followed significant trends in most of the watershed. Dissolved oxygen levels appear to have improved in Spring Creek and several of its tributaries over the past 10 years. Of the nutrients assessed, ammonia nitrogen levels are following a declining trend in the

water bodies in the northeast portion of the watershed near The Woodlands Township.

- Load duration curve analyses relating streamflow to water quality data indicate:
 - Non-point source pressures are the major influence of high levels of bacteria in Spring Creek and its tributaries, and
 - Greater bacteria reductions are needed at higher rates of flow to comply with state water quality standards. Low or no reductions are indicated in dry or low-flow conditions.
- Pollutant Source Overview and Partnership Outlook
 - Potential sources of bacteria contamination were reviewed as well as strategies for estimating sources relative to the Spring Creek Watershed. These sources include wastewater discharge, sanitary sewer overflow, failing onsite sewage facilities, and domestic and wildlife animal waste among others.
 - Framework for the Spring Creek Partnership was described and included more detail on meeting roles including general stakeholders, focused work groups and steering committee members. A projected timeline was reviewed showing the milestones that the partnership hopes to achieve by late 2021. A call was made for notice of any other projects or organizations that may already be established in the watershed that the partnership can work alongside.
 - The outlook between the current meeting and the next scheduled meeting (fall 2020) was discussed. At the next meeting, the partnership will decide on a steering committee and review more technical information produced by H-GAC.

Discussion and Public Comments

- What do stakeholders value about the watershed?
 - Tom Douglas (Houston Canoe Club) pointed out that Spring Creek is important for recreational use and as an influence on regional drinking water (drains to Lake Houston).
 - Mr. Bower reminded the partnership that Spring Creek is an important part of the Lake Houston-San Jacinto River system and that work done on this project will coordinate well with management of flooding and other issues adjacent to water quality.
- What changes have stakeholders observed in the watershed?
 - Mr. Douglas and Mac Martin (Texas A&M University – Texas Forest Service) indicate sedimentation as a major challenge in this watershed. High flow

events push sediment into channels and onto floodplains. At the confluence of Spring and Cypress Creeks, streambank erosion brings in sedimentation as well.

- What would stakeholders like to see added to water quality/bacteria source analysis?
 - Sedimentation was pointed out as a factor that needs to be considered moving forward.
 - Kendra Park (TMN – Heartwood) asked if feral hogs are contributing to high bacteria levels and if trapping efforts are being carried out?
 - Mr. Douglas referenced work that has been done with genetic analysis to trace bacteria sources. This includes identifying pig DNA in water samples as a proxy indicator for feral hogs.
 - Paul Nelson (Woodlands GREEN) confirmed that work has been done to control the feral hog population, but that there have been no updates in the past 6 months.
 - Mr. Douglas requested that care be taken to separate feral hogs (invasives) from the general wildlife category when considering bacteria sources.
 - Mr. Nelson also pointed out that upstream development may pose challenges to water quality in the future. Green infrastructure should be encouraged.
- What organizations or projects are taking place in the watershed?
 - Clifton Edwards (HCP4) described a project on Spring Creek from Tomball to West Fork San Jacinto where land is being acquired by Harris County to help with flood mitigation, expand network of trails & amenities, and improve water quality.
 - Rob Ziehr (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service) described a flood plain easement program being developed in this area.
 - Becky Martinez (Bayou Land Conservancy) shared details of the San Jacinto Regional Watershed Master Drainage Plan project being conducted (more information at www.sanjacstudy.org). This group will be holding a public meeting on August 13, 2020.
 - Related to this, Mr. Edwards shared details of a study being developed with US Army Corps of Engineers to assess how sedimentation from Spring Creek may impact the Houston Ship Channel.
 - Ms. Martinez shared details of a Strategic Conservation Plan which is conserving land along Spring Creek. This will benefit water quality in Spring Creek.

- Mr. Nelson shared that additional dog waste stations have been installed in The Woodlands as a result of education and outreach efforts, and he supports continued partnership with this organization.
- Members of TMN – Heartwood Chapter expressed their support. This organization is very hands on in this watershed and has experience with collaborating on similar projects.
- Other organizations suggested to collaborate with: Galveston Bay Foundation, Bayou Preservation Association, AgriLife, and Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:30 pm.

For more information, visit <http://springcreekpartnership.com>,
or contact Rachel Windham at:
Phone: 713-993-2497
Email: rachel.windham@h-gac.com



Houston-Galveston
Area Council



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