EAST FORK SAN JACINTO RIVER
WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

Virtual Public Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 17th, 2023
2:00 pm – 4:00 pm

In Attendance:

Organizers:

Houston-Galveston Area Council (H-GAC):
- Andrea Tantillo, Meeting Coordinator
- Rachel Windham, H-GAC Project Manager

Attendees:

Ashley Morgan-Olvera (Texas Research Institute for Environmental Studies (TRIES))
Brandy Deason (Resident)
Becky Martinez (Bayou Land Conservancy)
Chris Baecke (Harris County Pollution Control)
David Henderson (Resident)
Justin Bower (H-GAC)
Niki Ragan-Harbison (Texas Parks and Wildlife Department)
Rachel LaSota (Harris County Pollution Control)
Roberto Vega (Harris County Flood Control District(HCFCD))
Ron Diderich (Texas Master Naturalists)
Steven Johnston (H-GAC)
Sylvester L. Reeder, III (Health EXS)
Tom Douglas (Bayou Preservation Association)

Meeting Notes:

Welcome and Introductions

- Rachel Windham (H-GAC) commenced the hybrid meeting at 2:00 pm by welcoming the attendees. Ms. Windham introduced herself and called roll for virtual attendees and provided a brief project introduction.

Project Background

- Ms. Windham provided an overview of the East Fork San Jacinto River watershed.
    - The East Fork of the San Jacinto River watershed includes parts of Walker, San Jacinto, Liberty, Harris, and Montgomery County. Much of the watershed area overlaps with the Sam Houston National Forest. More natural land cover is observed north of the San Jacinto-Liberty County line, and more developed areas are located south of that line.
    - Assessments of surface water in the East Fork of the San Jacinto River watershed indicate impairments for contact recreation use due to bacteria levels in exceedance of the state water quality standard.
    - Sources of fecal indicator bacteria include point sources such as improperly treated wastewater discharge, and nonpoint sources including overflow from on-site sewage facilities and illicit sewage, waste from pets and livestock, and waste from wildlife and invasive species.

Bacteria Source Model Revisions

- Ms. Windham reviewed the results of the Spatially Explicit Load Enrichment Calculation Tool (SELECT) assessments shared at the last meeting (2/15/23). Since that meeting, workgroups for Agriculture, Wildlife and Invasive Species and Human Sources and Pet Waste were called together to suggest methods for improving these results. These revisions were summarized for the general stakeholder group as follows:
    - Wastewater Treatment Facilities

      Depending on on-site sewage facilities methods, consider adding a failure rate based on exceedances

        - Stakeholders opted to revise the on-site sewage facilities methods rather than the wastewater methods.

    - On-Site Sewage Facilities

Depending on wastewater treatment facility methods, consider no failure rate for permitted systems and higher (20%) rate for unpermitted systems

- This suggestion was supported by the stakeholders. When this calculation is incorporated, the overall percent contribution of estimated on-site sewage facility discharge to the total load is relatively unchanged.

- Dog Waste

Seek further stakeholder input on accuracy of American Veterinary Medical Association (2018) estimation of 0.6 dogs per household

- Stakeholders did not suggest a change in the estimation of dog ownership from the assumed 0.6/household.

- Livestock Waste

Apply good-faith reduction similar to calculation for dog waste based on best management practices in use by landowners

- Brian Koch of the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board provided comment via email before the meeting. His suggestion was not to apply a good-faith reduction.
- Tom Douglas (Bayou Preservation Association) suggested review of the agriculture loading assumptions that may be updated in light of more recent publications on the subject. This will be reviewed at further workgroups meetings tentatively scheduled for late June.

- Deer Waste

No changes recommended, however, stressed that populations are more dense in mixed land cover areas and that bottomland populations are seasonal

- Feral Hogs

Allocate 50% of lowest population density estimate to the riparian buffer in areas of medium to high development

- This suggestion was supported by the stakeholders.

- Other Sources

  This category has been implemented on previous watershed protection plans to account for impacts from wildlife populations with no measurable population data. Workgroups suggested to continue using the current assumption of +10% of the measured load (sum of all previous sources). However, workgroups also suggested not to assume consistent percent contribution from wildlife in future projections due to loss of habitat.

  This suggestion was supported by the stakeholders.

- Ms. Windham reminded the group of sources that could contribute to instream loads that were not accounted for in the SELECT analysis due to insufficient or incompatible data. These include wildlife other than deer, birds, and sanitary sewer overflows. Ms. Windham pointed out that while the impacts of these sources were not estimated, they can still be included as priorities in the Watershed Protection Plan.
- Finally, Ms. Windham explained summary charts showing the total daily load estimate as of 2022 and the projected daily load for 2050 and how those numbers would be affected by the suggested revisions.
- These revised results will be discussed further with workgroups consisting of volunteers from the partnership and revised to better reflect observed conditions in the watershed. Workgroups will also discuss implementation priorities based on the finalized model results which will be discussed with the stakeholders at the next public meeting.

Implementation Strategies

- Ms. Windham provided a general overview of implementation strategies. The goals of implementation prioritize compliance with water quality standards, but also consider coordination with ongoing efforts, cost effectiveness, and the ability to use a phased approach. Generally, strategies are prioritized in order of existing projects, planned projects, projects awaiting resources, and finally new projects. Solutions included in the WPP should identify responsible parties, resource needs, timelines, and measures of success.
- Ms. Windham stressed that implementation efforts are not required to be proportional to model results and can be more reflective of stakeholder priorities and capacity for action. Further, implementation measures can be customized in different areas for more effective results.

Next Steps and Discussion

- The outlook between the current meeting and the next prospective workgroup meeting (tentatively June 2023) and stakeholder meeting (tentatively July 2023) was discussed. At the next stakeholder meeting, model revisions suggested by the workgroups will be shared with the partnership and H-GAC will provide an introduction to potential implementation strategies corresponding to sources of concern.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:30 pm.

For more information, visit www.eastforkpartnership.com,
or contact Rachel Windham at:
Phone: 713-993-2497
Email: rachel.windham@h-gac.com

This project is funded by a Clean Water Act 319(h) grant from the United States Environmental Protection Agency, administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and facilitated locally by the Houston-Galveston Area Council.