



# EAST FORK SAN JACINTO RIVER WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

## Virtual Public Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 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

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ):

- Heather Robinson, TCEQ Project Manager

#### Attendees:

Andrew Isbell, Walker County

Brian Koch, Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB)

Bruce Bodson, Lower Brazos Riverwatch

Chris Baecke, Harris County Pollution Control

Jeff Lu, Harris County Engineering Department

Kevin Muraira, Bayou Land Conservancy

Rachel LaSota, Harris County Pollution Control

Roberto Vega, Harris County Flood Control District

Ron Diderich, Texas Master Naturalists

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 workgroup-recommended updates to the Spatially Explicit Load Enrichment Calculation Tool (SELECT) assessments shared at the last meeting (5/19/23). These revisions were summarized for the general stakeholder group as follows:
  - On-Site Sewage Facilities  
Building on suggestions from previous workgroup and stakeholder meetings and additional literature review, consider:
    - no failure rate for permitted systems and 20% failure rate for unpermitted systems,
    - no failure rate for permitted systems and 50% failure rate for unpermitted systems, or
    - 20% failure rate for permitted systems and 50% rate for unpermitted systems

- Livestock Waste  
Update cattle daily load value to  $1.1 \times 10^{10}$  cfu/day based on broader literature review
- Feral Hogs  
Allocate 50% of lowest population density estimate to the riparian buffer in areas of medium to high development
- 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.
- Using these adjustments, updated model results were reviewed. The greatest change observed was an increase in the estimated percent contribution from livestock which now ranges from 62 to 65% of the total depending on method compared to an estimate of 45% in the first draft. This increased percent contribution from livestock decreased the percent contribution from other sources relative to the first draft. However, it should be noted that the overall instream load estimate doubled compared to the amount calculated in the first draft. This will lead to larger reductions needed to achieve compliance with the standard.
  - Brian Koch (TSSWCB) shared more information on agricultural land management and how to seek resources for implementing best practices through water quality management plan development. Mr. Koch also shared a success story where these practices were implemented on the Lower San Antonio River (click [here](#) for more information).
- Discussion continued regarding the estimation OSSF impacts on the instream load.
  - Andrew Isbell (Walker County) requested further consideration of the most appropriate estimate for OSSF inputs and whether to incorporate a failure rate for wastewater treatment facilities (WWTFs).
  - Heather Robinson (TCEQ) pointed out that while the WWTF data depends on what is reported, WWTF effluent is highly regulated.
  - Mr. Isbell noted that in Walker County, permitted OSSFs are monitored for the lifetime of the system and must be checked three times a year.

- Mr. Koch pointed out the limitations of the SELECT estimation process and stressed that local knowledge on potential pollutant sources (e.g., untreated discharge from WWTFs) is key in refining prioritization of implementation strategies in the watershed protection plan (WPP).
- Mr. Isbell supported making note of potential failures in industrial wastewater management in the narrative of the WPP.
- To better estimate OSSF contributions to the overall load, H-GAC will reach out to the Authorized Agents in the watershed to decide on the best failure rate to include in the analysis.

### 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 pointed out the focus of the next meeting would be to select a target date for implementation, attainment areas in which to focus implementation efforts, and details related to implementation such as identifying responsible parties and establishing a timeline.
- After demonstrating what needed reductions look like in terms of representative units (e.g., number of failing OSSFs to be addressed to achieve the target reduction in OSSF load, etc.), 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 attainment areas for more effective results.

### Next Steps and Discussion

- The outlook between the current meeting and the next stakeholder meeting (tentatively August 2023) was discussed. At the next stakeholder meeting, implementation strategies corresponding to sources of concern will be discussed and fleshed out to form the basis of the first draft of the WPP.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:10 pm.

For more information, visit [www.eastforkpartnership.com](http://www.eastforkpartnership.com),  
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