



EAST FORK SAN JACINTO RIVER WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

Virtual Public Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, August 30th, 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:

Ashley Morgan-Olvera, Texas Research Institute for Environmental Studies (TRIES)

Bruce Bodson, Lower Brazos Riverwatch

Chris Baecke, Harris County Pollution Control

Helmi Merghi, Harris County Pollution Control

Jessy Stone, Texas Research Institute for Environmental Studies (TRIES)

N. Brown, Resident

Nate Lavigne, Resident

Ron Diderich, Texas Master Naturalists

Tim Brooking, Resident

Tom Douglas, Bayou Preservation Association

Victoria Bryant, Montgomery County Precinct 4

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 (OSSFs) and illicit sewage, waste from pets and livestock, and waste from wildlife and invasive species.

Model Revision Update

- Ms. Windham reviewed the use of the Spatially Explicit Load Enrichment Calculation Tool (SELECT) to estimate the total bacteria load in the watershed and the proportion of each source considered in the analysis contributing to the total.
 - As of the meeting on 7/12/23, a method for OSSF load estimation was yet undecided. Since that meeting, Ms. Windham reached out to the Authorized Agents in each county touched by the watershed area to request an estimated failure rate for OSSFs. While agents agreed that older units were more likely to fail or be improperly maintained, there was no consensus on a failure rate that could be applied to unpermitted systems, permitted systems, or all systems together. In light of this, H-GAC recommended returning to the initial estimate of a 10% failure rate applied to all OSSFs in the watershed based on precedence in previous watershed protection plan (WPP) development projects and as a more conservative alternative to the 12% failure rate presented in Reed, Stowe & Yanke, LLC, 2001.

- Tom Douglas (Bayou Preservation Association) recommended using the 12% failure rate for OSSFs as it is a defensible literature value.
- Ms. Windham will follow up with the Steering Committee to finalize this estimate.
- Using the 10% OSSF failure rate adjustment for demonstration until a consensus is reached by the steering committee, updated model results were reviewed. Earlier changes to the estimated percent contribution from livestock continue to have the largest impact. Roughly 66% of the total potential load as of 2022 is attributed to livestock.
- Ms. Windham explained that the overall load calculated from SELECT is combined with bacteria reduction percentages estimated from Load Duration Curve (LDC) analyses to calculate the load reduction targets. These targets can be further adjusted to account for the load that will be accrued between the 2022 analysis and the target year selected by the partnership. This data supports the selection of implementation strategies.

Implementation Strategies

- At this meeting, the main goals of the implementation strategy discussion were to select a milestone date for bacteria reductions to be achieved, decide how to section off the watershed into attainment areas with similar source pressures, and show how stakeholder priorities could affect the number of practical units to be addressed for each bacteria source.
- After explaining the concept of a milestone year and demonstrating the need for balance between model accuracy and time allowance for implementation, Ms. Windham polled the attendees to identify the preferred target year. The results of the poll showed that most stakeholders preferred to target the year 2040.
 - Before moving on, the partnership discussed the different ways reductions could be achieved and the timeframes needed to implement those strategies. Ms. Windham clarified that some strategies such as outreach and education can be implemented on a short timeframe, whereas addressing OSSFs and pet waste could be multi-year efforts that depend on the availability of funding which also takes time to secure. Further, some efforts such as feral hog control could be ongoing. After clarifying this, attendees further supported opting for a fifteen year timeline (out to 2040) to accomplish the longer term strategies.
- Next, Ms. Windham presented an option for attainment area designation based on land cover types and availability of data. Using these criteria, the watershed could be divided into three sections—the Lower East Fork San Jacinto River (most

developed area), the Upper East Fork San Jacinto River (most forested area), and the Tributaries (most pasture and grassland area). Ms. Windham polled the attendees to decide whether the three suggested attainment areas were sufficient, whether the watershed needed to be divided further, or if fewer attainment areas were needed. The results of the poll showed that most stakeholders felt the three suggested attainment areas were a good representation of areas with similar source pressures.

- Lastly, Ms. Windham reviewed the unit reductions or number of each source that needs to be addressed in order to achieve targeted bacteria reductions by the year 2040. These units were presented in a table showing which sources would require the greatest amount of effort to achieve reduction. Ms. Windham explained that some categories such as “Other Sources” can’t be directly addressed. Because of this, more effort can be applied to reduce sources with more straightforward controls in order to achieve the overall target reduction.
 - To demonstrate this concept, Ms. Windham presented an Excel document where the unit reductions could be adjusted in real time.
 - Ron Diderich (Texas Master Naturalists) suggested adding a cost per unit estimation to help with decision making.
 - Mr. Douglas asked what the unit reductions would equal if the burden from deer, other sources, horses and wastewater was redistributed into increased efforts to control feral hogs. Heather Robinson (TCEQ) asked if different redistributions of effort could be used in different attainment areas based on likelihood of implementation. For example, overcompensating for hard-to-control-sources by increasing efforts in pet waste management could be more effective in the Lower East Fork San Jacinto River attainment area with the most developed area. Conversely, feral hog management might have more impact in the Upper East Fork San Jacinto River and Tributary attainment areas. This strategy was supported by Tom Douglas.
 - Bruce Bodson (Lower Brazos Riverwatch) suggested researching whether any concentrated boarding stables are present in the watershed to determine how likely horses are to have an impact on the total bacteria load.
 - Nate Lavine (Resident) asked whether there are any barriers to feral hog management on federal land such as the Sam Houston National Forest. Ms. Robinson pointed out that the National Forest Service may already have control measures in place that run parallel to the interests of the partnership.
 - Ms. Windham made adjustments to the calculations based on the discussion and will continue to edit them as needed after following up on

stakeholder questions. These adjustments will be reviewed by the Steering Committee and will form the basis of discussion at the next meeting.

Next Steps and Discussion

- The outlook between the current meeting and the next stakeholder meeting (tentatively October 2023) was discussed. At the next stakeholder meeting, details for implementation including identifying responsible parties and selecting interim milestones will be discussed to form the basis of the first draft of the WPP.
- Before the next meeting, Ms. Windham will begin drafting sections of the WPP that do not refer to implementation (those sections will be added after the October meeting). In light of this, Ms. Windham polled the attendees to determine whether they would like to receive sections of the WPP to review as they are written or if they'd rather wait to receive the full document. The results of the poll showed that most stakeholders preferred to receive the full document.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:45 pm.

For more information, visit www.eastforkpartnership.com,

or contact Rachel Windham at:

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