



**DOUBLE BAYOU WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP
AGRICULTURE / WILDLIFE / FERAL HOGS
WORKGROUP MEETING**

**Tuesday, February 18, 2014
5:30 - 7:30 P.M.**

Tony's Barbecue Restaurant
1102 Miller Street
Anahuac, TX 77514

MEETING NOTES

Attendees: David Boyd (Sierra Club), Linda Broach (TCEQ), Clay Dean, Betty Dugat, Leroy Ezer, Clint Fancher, Justin Jenkins, Charles Johnson, David Manthei (NRCS), Steven Mitchell (TPW), Phillip Stewart (NRCS), Blake Turner, George Turner, Joyce Turner, Kyle Wright (NRCS)

Team Members: Kristi Alexander (Shead), Brian Koch (TSSWCB), Linda Shead (Shead), Danielle Vinette (Shead)

1. Welcome, Agenda Review, and Introductions – Kristi Alexander

Kristi welcomed and thanked everyone for coming. She pointed out the paperwork from past meetings and watershed protection plans from other watersheds, which are available for anyone who is interested in them. Kristi told the attendees that this meeting would be recorded to make sure that the notes are more complete, and once the notes are done, the recording will be deleted. Additionally, the recordings will not be used to attribute any statements to any individual. She asked if anyone was concerned about this, and no one voiced any concerns. Kristi then reviewed the agenda and started self-introductions.

2. Review of Potential Sources – Linda Shead

Linda reviewed the list of potential sources of bacteria that was created during the last meeting: waterfowl, feral hogs, goats/horses (confined), nesting birds, livestock (goats, cattle, horses), deer, small mammals (rabbits, squirrels), scavenger roosts, and coyotes. This list focused on the types of bacteria that could make people sick.

4800 Research Forest Drive The Woodlands, Texas 77381 Tel: 281-367-1348 www.doublebayou.org

Double Bayou Watershed Partnership is a project of the following entities:



HARC



Question: Should humans be added to the list? Answer: The Wastewater and Recreation workgroups are already considering humans as a source, and it was not being added to the list for the agriculture workgroup.

Feral hogs as sources of bacteria could also apply to the Recreation/Hunting workgroup, so they may also be addressing that issue. This meeting is focused on learning about solutions that were used in other watersheds and considering them for possible use in Double Bayou.

Linda also went through the list of other watershed issues that were identified at the last meeting: fish kills, collection of vegetation, red tide, water hyacinth, alligator weed, Chinese tallow, debris, sword grass, and giant Salvinia. Participants provided some comments on these sources: Red tide was noted as a toxic issue for fish, and not a dissolved oxygen issue; Alligator Weed creates the same problems as Water Hyacinth; debris from clearing of Chinese tallow causes blockages in waterways; another name for Sword Grass is Saw Grass; Giant Salvinia has not posed a problem in Double Bayou yet, but it could create one in the future.

3. Lone Star Healthy Streams and Water Quality Management Plans – Brian Koch

Brian Koch started his presentation on Best Management Practices, which are particular solutions to pollution sources in the watershed. Lone Star Healthy Streams is a TSSWCB-funded program of AgriLife Extension and is one of the end results from doing many watershed protection plans. Its main purpose is to provide handbooks to address those statewide issues in water quality that arise from agriculture. The manuals give ideas on practices that can be used for different situations, such as: feral hogs, beef cattle, and poultry, among others. Horses are usually kept on a small scale, and programs are not targeted to these small operations; education and outreach are the primary methods for improvement for them. The material provides information about where people can get assistance to implement these practices. There will be a full scale presentation from AgriLife at the upcoming stakeholder meeting on March 18th. Brian encouraged everyone to look through the booklets he brought to this meeting.

The second part of Brian's presentation was a PowerPoint on Water Quality Management Plans (WQMPs). A WQMP is a site-specific plan for land improvement measures, developed through the Soil and Water Conservation Districts, for agricultural lands. They provide farmers and ranchers a voluntary opportunity to deal with potential pollution sources and improve water quality. Many times when a plan is being written, the farmers and ranchers are already using many of the better management practices. The enrollment is voluntary for everyone, except dry-litter poultry operations.

Brian reviewed technical components of WQMPs: technical criteria, "essential practices" for different land uses, and other features to be included, such as: nutrient, pest, and waste management; and erosion control measures. Printouts of the approved practices were made available for people to pick up during the meeting. Brian also presented information on why to have a WQMP, what documents the WQMP contains, and the process for getting a WQMP. If anyone needs financial assistance to implement these practices, some funding

is available from TSSWCB and NRCS. This is a good time to implement these practices, because it is currently easier to get funding in this geographic area.

Question: Are there any WQMP's in the watershed? Answer: Yes, but most are outdated and need updating. Brian will get a tally of how many plans and how many acres are involved in the Double Bayou watershed.

Question: How can WQMPs be woven into a watershed protection plan? Answer: In the Plum Creek example, livestock was identified as a potential source of bacteria and nutrients, so they came up with a strategy to implement WQMPs, and hired someone to help those in the watershed with plans and getting funding. They needed a certain number of plans to reach the level of pollution control that was needed – with that number identified through modeling. Then they went to different workshops and meetings to promote the program and better management practices, without soliciting individuals. People enhanced their property and increased production by implementing these practices.

4. Latest Update on Farm Bill Programs – David Manthei

The Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) will say what certain practices will be done to address the water quality issues. The WQMP or EQIP (Environmental Quality Incentive Plan) can help with implementation and show proof that the practices are being practiced, along with providing some funding to carry out the practices. Based on the new Farm Bill, everything covering environmental and wildlife was focused under EQIP. Additionally, a five-year Conservation Stewardship Plan was added. Also, several easement programs were combined together into one agricultural easement program. That program probably will not apply for this particular watershed, but it is good to know about it. To implement the WPP, people can use WQMP (state dollars) and EQUIP or the Conservation Stewardship Plan (federal dollars). There isn't a lot to tell yet about the Farm Bill and its implications. The practices always offered are still there, and the rates per acre, etc., are still mostly the same.

Question: If someone is going to participate in the farm program, will you have to have a conservation plan? Answer: Yes, to get the premium crop insurance rate and to participate in the farm programs, you have to be compliant with the Food Security Act Provisions. For 2014, things may change and being compliant with the Food Security Act Provisions may mean something different. Also, the new Farm Bill allows the government to charge a fee for coming out and doing a conservation plan, though they are not currently using this right.

Question: Do you do conservation plans now? Answer: Yes, to update a WQMP, NRCS will go out, check things out, update the plan, and leave most of the original plan's language the same. Farmers do not need to have a conservation plan immediately (have 5 years to complete) to participate in farm programs, but will not be paid the premium rate for the crop insurance without the plan.

The bill primarily reduced the number of programs by consolidating them, but all the details are not available yet, since the Farm Bill just passed a couple of weeks ago.

5. Announcements

There will be a feral hog workshop in June and a riparian workshop in September. More information on both workshops will be provided in the future.

6. Discussion of Solutions for Double Bayou Watershed – Linda Shead

Linda started a discussion on how to reduce the bacteria that gets into Double Bayou from each of the sources that were identified during the last meeting.

For *waterfowl*, reductions in the numbers (such as through hunting) would reduce the bacteria load, but that is not an acceptable practice, from environmental or agency perspectives. Alternatively, more plants could be added along the stream to filter out the bacteria before it reaches the stream, and/or the wildlife could be spread out over more of the landscape, such as via more rice farming with the fields spaced out and using a gradual slope on the banks to allow for different types of vegetation to grow and filter out the bacteria. EQIP has a migratory and shorebird improvement program through which they might help with setting areas up for more bird habitat, with a little bit higher payment rates. The purpose of dispersing the suitable habitat for these animals is to decrease the bacteria load concentration, not to decrease the number of animals. Again, buffering with vegetation could also help reduce the bacteria load concentration from birds/wildlife.

Question: Are there any practices on draining rice fields to improve water quality?

Answer: It is not a problem, because rice fields are basically constructed wetlands. The only problem might come up when the field is first planted, if a hard rain happens. Otherwise, the water coming out of the field tends to be cleaner than the water going in, even right after the field has been treated with herbicide and fertilizer.

Feral Hogs: Hunting, other forms of removal, and sterilization were suggested, though there has been no luck with putting anything in the food, but maybe tranquilizers would work. Others noted that the only way to control them here is by controlling them in the state, because they migrate and move around the state. A bounty could help (usually only bring in the tail for the bounty, and the hunter deals with the carcass), but the dollars aren't sufficient to make this economically viable for the large numbers needed. The best incentive would be a commercial processing plant that is subsidized by the state.

Question: Can hogs be transported? Answer: Only live hogs can be sold, and they can be transported, but it is illegal to re-release them. There will be more information on this matter at the upcoming workshop.

Confined Goats/Horses: Education on grazing management was noted as the best practice, through workshops, publications, local extension agent, and AgriLife Extension in College Station. The practices for horses should also apply to goats.

Question: What about manure management programs for small landowners? Perhaps through selling for fertilizer.

Nesting birds: These fall under the same category as waterfowl, and increasing the habitat should help.

Livestock(goats, cattle, horses): Suggested practices included: prescribed grazing via rotation (height of grass can make a huge difference in the grass filtering the water), more enrollment in conservation programs, fencing to keep them out of the stream (may not be viable because the fence might not last in this area), maintaining the vegetative buffer along the stream as an alternative to fencing, offering a trough to discourage the cattle from going down to the stream, keeping the cattle away from the water when it is really hot (July-September) because they will be more inclined to go into the water to cool off, and making extra efforts for certain breeds that are more inclined to get in the water. A lot of the better practices will be covered under the conservation plan.

Deer: Deer are not a big issue as a bacteria source in this watershed because the numbers are low. Additionally, there isn't much you can do in the particular areas where they have habitat.

Small Mammals: same practices as for waterfowl

Carcasses: People throw dead animals, crawfish, and intestines off bridges, causing high bacteria. Methods by which to address this include: education, alternate disposal areas, and possibly enforcement, as it may be classified as dumping, and thus against the law to throw them into the bayou.

Scavenger Roosts: same as for waterfowl

Coyotes: Coyotes are wildlife and native predators, with the pros and cons of that. They can help reduce the small mammal and feral hog population. If they become a problem, a bounty could be used to control the population.

Other Watershed Issues (also from previous meeting):

Fish Kills: Fish kills are generally the result of low dissolved oxygen, and nutrients typically drive the low oxygen levels. Also, those practices that control bacteria will often also help control nutrients. Thus, possible solutions could include: improving grazing practices, using alternate water sources, improving buffer zones, having riparian areas on farms, educating the public, nutrient management, proper amounts of herbicides and fertilizer (more an issue for residential use), controlling algae growth, and maintaining the vegetation that prevents erosion. Removal of the vegetation on the banks, and including trees, can contribute to increased algae that cause low dissolved oxygen or can even result in harmful algal blooms.

A rhetorical question was posed: What does a healthy bayou look like? It doesn't look like a park, though many of us may enjoy that. It's a matter of seeking a coexistence that allows for people activities, and preventing flooding, while still having water quality and a healthy bayou.

Collections of Vegetation and Flood Debris: Practices could be careful use of herbicide and integrated pest management, by coordination with TBCD (as the watershed's drainage district). If vegetation is thick, have to be careful not to clear the bank.

Red Tide: Probably not controllable.

Invasive Species (alligator weed, water hyacinth, Chinese tallow, saw grass): physical removal (possibly beetles used on water hyacinths in some places).

7. Wrap-Up and Next Steps

At the March 18 meeting, we will report on these potential solutions (management measures). Next week, the other two workgroups will be meeting. There will also be presentations at the March meeting on other solutions: septic systems, Lone Star Healthy Streams, and TCEQ small business resources. Hopefully, we will have new land cover information soon, to have preliminary ground-truthing with some local expertise. Then, this workgroup's next task will be to take the numbers for the sources (researched by HARC) and help apply them at the appropriate areas in the watershed. The next workgroup meeting will be the third Tuesday in April (April 15) at Tony's again.

8. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:30 p.m.