

ARMAND BAYOU WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

2012-2016 STRATEGIC PLAN

Background

Since 1998, a group of dedicated citizens – representatives from civic groups, cities, state and federal government agencies, nonprofit organizations, utilities, business groups, and academic institutions – has met together periodically, because of their shared interest in preserving and enhancing the natural integrity of the Armand Bayou watershed. Their efforts have come somewhat in fits and starts, based on availability of funding for one or the other lead organization to provide the “glue and follow-through” for this voluntary association – the Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership. Still, they produced the *Armand Bayou Watershed Plan* and the *Armand Bayou Watershed Greenprint* in 2006, in addition to bringing greater attention to the watershed and greater cooperation within the partner groups.

With new funding in 2010, the Armand Bayou Nature Center took the lead in bringing the group to a new level of sustainability – its own nonprofit organization. In 2011, the Steering Committee of the Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership (“ABWP”) was reconstituted and met monthly for a year to define that organization and its strategic plan. This document is the result of that effort.

The active members of the ABWP 2011 Steering Committee during this organizing phase are listed below, with their affiliations:

Linda Broach, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
Diane Humes, Lower Watershed Citizen
George Guillen, Environmental Institute of Houston, UH/CL
Steven Johnston, Lindsey Lippert, and Cynthia Brum, Galveston Bay Estuary Program
Scott Jones, Galveston Bay Foundation
Tom Kartrude and Mark Kramer, Armand Bayou Nature Center
Glenn Laird and Catherine Elliott, Harris County Flood Control District
Eloy Mendoza and Eloy Balboa, Clear Lake City Water Authority
Steven Mitchell and Jamie Schubert, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
Tim Tietjens, City of La Porte
Woody Woodrow, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Charriss York, Texas Coastal Watershed Program, Texas A&M

The organization was formed as a nonprofit corporation in Texas in November 2011, with twenty organizers signing on. The initial board was comprised of Tim Tietjens, Diane Humes, and Tom Kartrude. In February of 2012, the Partnership held its first Kick-Off Meeting as an organization, to: adopt bylaws, elect officers, and plan for board expansion. In April 2012, with the assistance of the Texas Association of Nonprofit Organizations, application was made to the IRS for 501(c)(3) nonprofit status.

This Strategic Plan is intended to guide the activities of the Partnership for the next three to five years. It will remain a living document, however, to be informed by new information and changing conditions.

Defining the Vision, Mission, Values, and Goals

The 2011 Steering Committee reviewed previous versions of the group's vision, mission, and goals, and updated these, with a new understanding of how they could best be understood and be used to guide the organization into the future. They also defined values – the beliefs or the basic philosophy of the organization – which can be used as a tool when the organization is faced with a dilemma on which way to go.

Vision: Take care of the bayou and the watershed and make this area a great place to live, work, and play.

Mission: To improve the quality of life in our communities by protecting, enhancing, and restoring the ecological integrity and natural benefits of the Armand Bayou watershed.

Values:

Inclusiveness. The ABWP will operate in a manner that is mindful, inclusive, and respectful of the diverse character of its community. Inclusiveness is essential to achieving the shared vision of the future health of the watershed.

Trustworthiness. The ABWP will demonstrate its trustworthiness by operating openly with integrity and transparency.

Positive Interaction. The ABWP will operate with the 3 C's – cooperation, collaboration, and consensus – in a manner that supports a fun and positive approach to working together within the organization and with the community.

Problem-Solving. The ABWP will be a problem solver rather than being a naysayer or assigning blame. It will seek creative and resourceful solutions to problems identified in the watershed.

Environmental Stewardship. The ABWP will promote a culture of environmental stewardship through example and leadership, starting with its partners. The ABWP will work to educate citizens that responsible environmental stewardship includes every home and business within the watershed, because daily activities have an impact on the local environment and quality of life.

Goals:

1. Improve awareness and understanding to promote stewardship.
2. Protect and improve water quality
3. Reduce flood damages.
4. Protect and restore valuable habitat.
5. Support coordinated decision-making.
6. Provide public access and recreation.

Developing Objectives and Strategies

The 2011 Steering Committee recognized that earlier plans were not specific enough in objectives and strategies to guide activities and ensure measurable success. Furthermore, both internal and external conditions – including capacity, urgency, achievability, and authority – means that not every goal can be targeted for action during the next few years of the Partnership’s new organization.

These considerations led to the development of objectives and strategies that would meet the “SMART” criteria: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based.

The following lists the objectives, with their associated strategies/projects, for the four goals that are to be targeted during this next phase of the organization.

Goal: Protect and restore valuable habitat.

Objective: Protect habitat through acquisition (purchase, donation, mitigation credits), or by policy.

- Protect ten percent of stream miles of floodways of the main stem and major tributaries, identifying specific targets within 5 years.
- Protect 100 acres of coastal prairie habitat, identifying specific targets within 5 years.

Objective: Avoid degradation of habitat.

- Research agency habitat management plans.
- Pick one planning process to target every two years, and work to incorporate alternatives into local decisions (e.g., improved stream maintenance practices, use of natives, and control of invasive species).

Objective: Restore habitat.

- Work with Harris County Flood Control District on restoration of previous drainage projects, within five years.
- Implement riparian restoration demonstration projects in the upper watershed, within five years.
- Create wildlife corridors at roadway crossings, within five years.

Goal: Protect and improve water quality.

Objective: Protect water quality.

- Implement three demonstration projects within five years, such as: decreased use of fertilizers and pesticides, decreased use of impervious materials, and increased use of median swales.
- Implement three policy changes within five years, such as: modifying parking lot design and changing from raised median design to swales.

- See also: *Harris County Low Impact Development & Green Infrastructure Design Criteria for Storm Water Management*, which may be found at: http://www.hcfcd.org/dl_dcmanual.html.

Objective: Restore water quality.

- Implement three demonstration projects within five years, such as: living shorelines, using native vegetation in stream corridors, stormwater treatment wetlands, and modifying bank slopes.
- Implement three policy changes within five years, such as: identifying elements of the Bacteria TMDL I-Plan to help implement.
- Track BMPs, within five years.
- Analyze impediments to changing codes, within five years.

Goal: Improve awareness and understanding to promote stewardship.

Objective: Increase membership and involvement in the Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership.

- Increase membership to 100 within one year.
- Develop tools for communicating with members and partners.

Objective: Increase community outreach.

- Make presentations to each local government in the watershed, plus large landowners, at least once per year.
- Develop an interactive booth/exhibit to target families & teachers at two events (such as: school carnivals) each year, within two years.
- Develop posters / static exhibits for public areas, to be used at 12 locations per year in locations such as: libraries, city halls, Department of Motor Vehicles, and other government buildings.
- Increase signage, such as: marking watershed boundaries along roadways, labeling waterways at bridges, and utilizing existing billboard space as may be appropriate.
- Update and maintain the website, starting in year one.
- Integrate with GBEP's "Back the Bay," using the logo on publicity items, and incorporating Armand Bayou – such as "Back the Bay, and the Bayou, too" – for at least ten venues and one city proclamation per year.

Objective: Track effectiveness of community outreach.

- Increase, by 10% within five years, the number of people who know that they live, work and/or play in the watershed, using polling and QR codes to assess success.
- Set and track use of a website and QR codes, within five years.

Goal: Support coordinated decision-making.

Objective: Update and expand the existing watershed plan to meeting the 9-element requirements for an approved watershed protection plan, by January 1, 2015.

Objective: Participate in local planning processes, including the golf course project of the Clear Lake City Water Authority.

The Steering Committee recognized that several of the identified specific strategies / projects accomplish more than one objective. For example, implementing riparian demonstration projects in the upper watershed serves to restore habitat, plus water quality, plus increase community outreach and awareness. Furthermore, the strategies / projects generally fall into four categories:

- On-the-Ground Projects for Habitat and Water Quality
- Policy Changes through Participation in Local Planning Processes
- Outreach Projects for Increased Community Commitment
- Overarching Projects for a Comprehensive Approach

The overarching projects are two:

1. Updating and expanding the existing watershed plan to meet the EPL 9-element requirements of a Watershed Protection Plan, and other goals, can help achieve all the other objectives, plus increase access to funding for plan implementation projects.
2. Researching grant resources will serve to increase the Partnership's capacity to accomplish multiple objectives.

Additional investigations and more organizational capacity are needed before the Partnership can define "SMART" objectives and effective strategies for its other two goals – Reduce Flood Damages and Increase Public Access & Recreation.

Current Conditions Assessment

The Steering Committee engaged in an assessment of current conditions – internal strengths and weaknesses of the Partnership organization, plus external threats and opportunities in the watershed and beyond – to help highlight where resources could be most effectively engaged.

~ The Partnership's greatest weaknesses that could lead to missed external opportunities are its:

- Lack of communication to watershed citizens that would help link with Back the Bay; address an educated watershed population; increase citizen stewardship, awareness, and involvement; and increase access and recreation
- Lack of sustainable funding that would help increase access and recreation
- Lack of awareness of development plans that could influence land use practices and could help conserve open land with large landowners
- Low existing business involvement that could influence land use practices

~ The Partnership's greatest weaknesses that could make it vulnerable to external threats are its:

- Lack of communication to watershed citizens to help promote a sustainability perspective.
- Lack of an icon/logo to increase community awareness, support, and involvement
- Lack of sustainable funding to increase community awareness, support, and involvement
- Low existing business involvement to address development, increase business involvement, improve business practices, and influence the business perspective on suitable land use.

Additionally, the Partnership's lack of authority means that it may not be able to take advantage of temporarily slowed development to increase conservation, and it cannot directly change business practices that threaten the health of the watershed.

~ The Partnership's greatest strengths to be capitalized on with external opportunities are its:

- Grant opportunities and grant-writing resources for helping to conserve land with large landowners
- Multi-jurisdictional partners for influencing local government policies and accessing resources for the emphasis on watershed planning
- Knowledge base for working with the educated watershed population; and relatively high existing profile within the community for increasing ecotourism

~ The Partnership's greatest strength to address external threats is its grant opportunities and grant-writing resources in competing for resources in the world of increased focus on watershed planning.

Conclusion

All in all, this Strategic Plan will position the Armand Bayou Watershed Partnership to take advantage of its collective strengths and new funding support to advance shared goals with "SMART" objectives and targeted strategies/projects, and to demonstrate success in both the short and longer terms.

Fulfillment of this potential will require that the ABWP implement the following within the next six months:

- Complete the structure of the new organization, with a full Watershed Council that meets regularly, workgroups that also meet regularly, and a permanent, full-time Watershed Coordinator.
- Assist the workgroups in selecting strategies / projects in this plan to recommend for immediate implementation, including developing specific tasks, timelines, outcomes / deliverables, and resources needed for completion (both financial and people).
- Take advantage of upcoming public grant opportunities (e.g., 319 and CMP) to apply for funding support for the organization and its projects.