

**Buffalo Bayou & Lower White Oak Bayou  
Federal Flood Damage Reduction and Ecosystem Restoration Study  
INITIAL STAKEHOLDER GROUP (ISG) MEETING NOTES**

Wednesday, April 11, 2007

TCB, 5757 Woodway, Conference Room 1<sup>st</sup> Floor

**Introductions and Welcome**

Wayne Crull, study manager, welcomed the members of the stakeholder group as well as special guests from the Environmental Protection Agency, Texas Parks and Wildlife, U.S Fish & Wildlife Services and representatives from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE).

**Study Goals & Objectives**

Wayne briefly reviewed the study goals and objectives. The hand out dated April 10, 2007 reflects minor changes from the email distribution from March 29, 2007. The edits included:

- There are now two objectives under Ecosystem Restoration and two “possible ideas” for Ecosystem Restoration.
- Given that the majority of the ISG has had no further comments or questions on the objectives, Wayne suggested we have reached a consensus on the Goals and Objectives. Wayne offered to speak to anyone off-line or after the meeting to discuss thoughts or input.
- Moving forward, the Goals and Objectives provided today will be included in briefings internally within HCFCFCD as well as in upcoming meetings with individuals outside HCFCFCD.

**Ecosystem Restoration (ER) – Presentation**

The remainder of the meeting agenda focused on Ecosystem Restoration..

Jennifer Dyke then presented an overview of Ecosystem Restoration. (A hand out was distributed.)

**Summary of Presentation:**

- What is an Ecosystem? Generally means the plants and animals interacting with the non-living environment. For the purpose of this study, it is important to understand how the USACE defines ER.
- USACE defines ER as restoring habitat to increase the quantity or quality of ecosystem resources. For example, this may mean restoring a wetland by increasing the number of acres or removing invasive species. It is a separate project purpose than recreation.

The point is to restore the function, and process. USACE also looks at sustainability. The sponsor should not have to keep coming back year after year to maintain. Human activity and disturbance should be considered when restoring habitat. Restoring to a higher habitat value than what previously existed (enhancement) is not allowed. For

example, if a wetland formerly was a 0.8 HSI value and had degraded to a 0.2 HSI value, it may be able to be restored to a 0.7 or 0.8 HSI value, but not higher.

- Significance, according to USACE, is important. If a scarce or unique resource to restore is not identified, the opportunity for a project does not exist. Scarcity and uniqueness is defined on a national, state and local level. For example, wildflowers along the bayou may be important on a local level but it may not be on a national level.
- There are three sources of significance including institution, public and technical. Institution significance means a resource is recognized by a law. For example, something identified by the Endangered Species Act. Public significance can mean some section of the general public has a specific interest in a resource and advocates for it, like Save the Whales. Technical significance is defined by scientific, scholarly or literary journals that identify such resource as significant.
- Keep in mind scarcity and uniqueness are specific to the study area and that the appropriate habitat and available land needs to be necessary to develop a sustainable project.

### **Ecosystem Restoration (ER) – Discussion**

Susan Elmore facilitated the discussion of Ecosystem Restoration and began with a brainstorm. She asked the group to review the historical maps of Buffalo Bayou and Lower White Oak Bayou (large printed maps available to the group to get up and review). She acknowledged that the HCFCD, with USACE's support, has the opportunity to identify and perhaps get funding for an ecosystem restoration project. This is new territory for the HCFCD; however, we are planning to include an ecosystem restoration component in our study and eventually in plans for Buffalo Bayou and/or Lower White Oak Bayou.

The combination of people in the room is the right one to brainstorm ideas to investigate for ER.

(Group spent time reviewing maps and writing down ideas for ER.)

See notes on list of Significant Resources – ISG Brainstorming.

The next discussion topic was the importance of a local partner. Why does the HCFCD want a local partner for Ecosystem Restoration? The HCFCD was created for implementing flood damage reduction efforts so this is its budget priority. However, there is a shared vision by HCFCD, the ISG representatives and the resource agencies present that flood damage reduction efforts can be complementary to efforts to repair or enhance the environment.

Brainstorm Questions/Comments:

- Can there be more than one local partner? Yes  
Must the local sponsor be a taxing entity? Yes. \*\*There was some discussion on this point. USACE recognizes HCFCD to be the local sponsor who makes agreements with *any* other entities (partners) at their discretion.

- Some possible taxing authorities that were discussed:
  - City of Houston
  - Port Authority
  - Management Districts (Downtown District, East End, Buffalo Bayou Partnership-?)
  - TIRZs
- There may have been past examples of a non-profit receiving special recognition to become a local sponsor. For example, Ducks Unlimited.
- What is the general range of financial participation? It is very early in the discussion for exact details. An example was given for a city-wide restoration where the city's cost share was \$9 million. It is too early at this stage to determine a cost because it would depend on the type of project developed.
- USACE commented that the HCFCD is operating under Section 211 authority to carry out the study. Consequently, the HCFCD mimics USACE procedures.
- Clear Creek is an example of the importance of a local sponsor. No local sponsor was identified and the scope of the project was reduced. Also, some consider the potential for getting funding for construction is lower without a local sponsor.
- New USACE requirement is that ER must be related to the water or must be aquatic.
- The resource agencies expressed interest in seeing the City of Houston property, former waste water treatment plant for a potential ER area.
- Need a COH Parks Department representative at next meeting.
- Jim Herrington mentioned replacing bulkheads along the bayou with natural erosion control mechanisms. Benches could be created instead of using bulkheads which would also increase the flow through the channel.
- Jaime Schubert discussed how habitat modeling would be required for a USACE ER project.
- A "ground up" project – a wanted plan -- with a local support is considered to have the best opportunity for success.

#### ACTION ITEMS:

- Confirm that a local partner/sponsor for ER must be a taxing authority
- Follow up with City of Houston Parks Department to secure representative for follow up discussion.
- Bring forward examples in other cities/projects that have been or are working at becoming successful
- Review and prepare a short list from the brainstorming list of items that meet the federal ER guidelines.
- Schedule a meeting with ISG and RA in May 2007.

#### **Next Meeting**

To be determined in May 2007.