

Strategies For Future Hurricane Mitigation
A Galveston Bay Foundation Position Paper
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Hurricane Ike caused terrible loss of life, injuries, property destruction and environmental harm to Galveston Island, Bolivar Peninsula and the Galveston Bay system. In response to this devastation, several proposals have been made which seek to limit damage from a future storm. These proposals are in the conceptual stage at this time and range from heavily engineered structures such as the "Ike Dike" to "softer" options such as those that emphasize increasing protected wetlands, increasing public and private open spaces on coastal barriers, and planning for sustainable development. Further study and review of all these concepts doubtless will take place over the next few years.

The Galveston Bay Foundation urges that any solutions proposed to limit damage from future storms recognize the importance of the natural environment, including our bay marshes, seagrasses and oyster reefs. GBF has worked hard with its partners on a number of restoration and shoreline protection projects across Galveston Bay. These projects were designed to restore lost wetlands and seagrasses, and to protect nearby shorelines from erosion. We are pleased to say that the vast majority of these projects weathered the storm and undoubtedly provided buffers from Ike's waves.

It is imperative that the potential environmental impacts of any proposed solution be adequately evaluated and incorporated into the decision making process before moving forward with that solution. The Galveston Bay Foundation urges caution about a proposed solution that may create adverse long-term, and perhaps, unintended environmental and economic consequences. We would be concerned about a solution that alters the water exchange between the Bay and the Gulf, and about the effects the altered water exchange would have on both bay salinity and the ingress and egress of marine species between the Bay and the Gulf.

The review of environmental impacts must also address the full range of effects that a proposed solution would have on Texas beaches and barriers, including short term construction impacts and long term cumulative impacts. The entire evaluation process must address these considerations with scientific integrity.

Proposed solutions also should include non-structural approaches and address sustainable development concepts. Making these concepts the focus of any plan will help to make the Galveston Bay area safer for residents, the economy and the environment, and preserve the aesthetics that attract so many visitors to this area.

It is the mission of the Galveston Bay Foundation to preserve, protect and enhance the natural resources of the Galveston Bay estuarine system and its tributaries, for present users and for posterity. A hurricane protection plan, if any, should similarly adhere to these concepts.