



GBF GAZETTE

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The Galveston Bay Foundation is intimately involved in the environmental flows process. We are developing outreach materials and will facilitate the involvement of local citizens and stakeholders groups with the Trinity and San Jacinto Rivers and Galveston Bay Stakeholders Committee process over the next two years. We invite you to be a part of the process by keeping abreast of the developments and findings of the Trinity and San Jacinto Rivers and Galveston Bay BBAS and BBEST at:

www.texaswatermatters.org
For more information about environmental flows and how you can become involved, contact:

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Genesis of Environmental Flows and Public Involvement

Right now, in meetings being held across the state that are attended by leading scientists and stakeholders representing just about every type of interest, **environmental flows** are the subject of intense scrutiny.

Environmental flows refer to the amount and the timing of water flows necessary to ensure that our rivers and bays are ecologically healthy and productive. The term incorporates two terms that have been used for decades: *instream flows* necessary for river ecosystem health and *freshwater inflows* critical for estuaries, like Galveston Bay.

This is the result of recent legislation, Senate Bill 3, passed in 2007 that calls for the development of environmental flow standards for every major river system and bay system in the state. As you'll find out below, the process of determining environmental flows represents an opportunity for experts to use the best science available to address the environment's need for water and for stakeholders to recommend to our regulatory agencies and elected officials how we can actually implement and safeguard these flows. For our bay, this is a critically important development since human demands for water flowing in the Trinity and San Jacinto Rivers and bay tributaries will only increase.

While the science behind environmental

flows is evolving, it is not new. Studies to determine how much water needs to flow in our rivers and into bays have been conducted for decades. In fact, the Galveston Bay Foundation has long been a proponent and active player in water planning efforts by participating in the Galveston Bay Freshwater Inflows Group since 1996 and the Region H Water Planning Group, established as a result of the passage of Senate Bill 1 by the 75th Legislature in 1997, to provide local input on the State's Water Plan. So what is new in the world of Texas water planning?

Beginning this decade, there has been a flurry of legislative activity regarding the flow of water for purely environmental needs. As Senate Bill 1 focused on making sure that we have enough water for human needs – for municipal, industrial and agricultural uses – and did not recognize the environment as a specific use, legislative mandates set in motion studies on the provision and protection of environmental flows.

In 2003, the 78th Legislature established the Study Commission on Water for Environmental Flows (Study Commission). The Study Commission was charged to "... study public policy implications for balancing the demands on the water resources of the state resulting from a growing population with the requirements

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By now many of you may have seen or read about a concept called the “Ike Dike.” Right now, the Ike Dike is more concept than specific plan, but the concept would be to build a wall across the entire Galveston County seashore, coupled with a series of floodgates across Bolivar Roads and San Luis Pass. The seawall and floodgates would be designed to keep all storm surge out of Galveston Bay during a hurricane. In this way, the Ike Dike would protect places from Galveston to Anahuac to the Ship Channel from any flood damage during a hurricane. Proponents of the Ike Dike contend that we narrowly escaped an environmental catastrophe with Hurricane Ike. They claim that if the storm had hit farther west, a devastating storm surge would have traveled up the Houston Ship Channel and caused significant damage to industry there, resulting in great harm to the environment. They assert that building the Ike Dike will not only keep people out of harm’s way, it will also protect our local environment. Proponents also argue that there is an equivalent structure in Rotterdam in the Netherlands and that the concept is technically feasible.

As this project is truly only a concept at the moment, it is hard to make specific comments on it. We do know that something like this could change Galveston Bay forever. For instance, the Texas City Dike is a large physical structure that was designed to keep the Texas City Channel from being filled in with silt. It has worked as intended, but it has also changed tidal flow in Galveston Bay forever. West Bay simply does not get the freshwater it once received from Upper Galveston Bay because it is physically blocked. The Texas City Dike also caused salinity levels in West Bay to increase and the oyster population to decrease because the predators of oysters prosper in higher salinity.

Would the Ike Dike have a similar impact on Galveston Bay? The initial concepts I reviewed showed Bolivar Roads being reduced permanently from a 10,000-foot-wide pass to a 1,000-foot-wide pass and San Luis Pass being reduced dramatically to a 200-foot-wide pass. Clearly, as

initially envisioned, the Ike Dike would cause significant tidal flow restriction. Salinity levels in the Bay could be changed, as could patterns for creatures that migrate in and out of the Bay. The Ike Dike proponents have already revised the initial plan in an effort to address these concerns. They claim that the revisions will prevent any restriction of tidal flow and in fact, allow more water to flow in and out of the Bay than would flow without the Ike Dike. If this project moves forward, it will be critical to verify these claims.

The other big concern that has been raised is whether or not such a structure would actually encourage further development in sensitive areas and increase the vulnerabilities of people living near the coast because of a false sense of security. For instance, if a new seawall extended the length of the Bolivar Peninsula, would it remain a lightly developed, quaint place to visit or would it become heavily developed with subdivisions gobbling up any remaining wetlands in the area? Of course, market forces were already moving the Peninsula in the latter direction before Hurricane Ike, but clearly an Ike Dike could speed the process.

The issues related to such a structure are too numerous to discuss in this short column. But my initial worry is that when something seems too good to be true, it often is. Would the Ike Dike really keep all storm surge out of Galveston Bay and protect our coastal infrastructure from damage from a large hurricane? Could this type of structure really be built without damaging or destroying the resources it is intended to protect in the first place? I simply cannot say at this point. It is a bold concept that could theoretically be an asset to this region. But it could also wind up as an extremely costly morass that harms the Bay in significant ways we simply don’t understand yet. It is my understanding that the Governor’s Commission on Hurricane Damage has recommended that millions be spent to study the concept. If that is the case, both its feasibility and projected impacts need to be studied thoroughly by a group who is impartial to the construction of such a struc-

(Continued on page 3)

Galveston Bay DRIVE & DISCOVER Galveston Island State Park Now Open!



The Galveston Bay Foundation has updated the Drive & Discover Galveston Bay Trail with 22 new interpretive signs bay-wide! Look for these signs as you explore the trail, and don't forget to watch future issues of the Gazette for

In September 2008, Galveston Island State Park was in the direct path of Hurricane Ike and, like in much of the Bay Area, the damage was extensive. No one knew when the park would be opened to the public again. Thanks to the efforts of hundreds of volunteers, staff and local agencies, barely six months later GISP celebrated a grand re-opening on March 21. The park will be open weekends only throughout 2009.

Galveston Island is actually named after Bernardo de Galvez, a Spanish colonial governor and general, but it was at one time known as "Campeche," so named by French-born pirates Pierre and Jean Lafitte, who arrived in Galveston in 1817 and made it their base of operations. In fact, the island is rich in history. Cabeza de Vaca visited the area in the mid-1500s, and encountered the Akokisa tribe of Indians that inhabited the island at that time. Later, the Karankawas, who called Galveston "Auia," inhabited the island until they were depleted by European-introduced disease (and attacked by the Lafitte brothers!) in the 1830s.

The island also boasts valuable places for wildlife, including the Galveston Island State Park, located between Jumbile Cove and Delehide Cove, adjacent to West Bay. The park provides very important habitat, including seagrass meadows, salt marsh, and coastal prairie with valuable freshwater "swale" wetlands, that provides nursery and forage space for resident and migratory wildlife of many varieties. This variety of habitat, or "mosaic," is a very important feature of the park; the greater the number and continuity of habitats, the richer the ecology. By re-

taining all of these features, it functions as a complete coastal habitat and an increasingly important site for wildlife on West Bay and Galveston Island as other sites nearby continue to develop for housing and other uses.

The Galveston Island State Park has benefited from numerous cordgrass, salt marsh and seagrass restoration efforts, which attract numerous species of animals and fish, including red drum, Southern flounder, Gulf saltmarsh snake, and numerous migratory birds. The park receives support from the Friends of Galveston Island State Park, which regularly hosts birding excursions and often staffs the popular nature center. More information about the park, including park hours and a map of the trails, can be found at:

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/galveston/>



GBF staff and volunteers took part in a massive clean-up project at the park in October 2008.

News From the President

(Continued from page 2)

ture. The review should involve stakeholders from the outset to ensure that all issues germane to the building of such a structure are covered.

Advocates for such a structure insist that we need to get it built as quickly as possible because the next killer hurricane could be right around the corner. I hope that is not the case, but recognize our continued vulnerability living on the coast. However, if this

concept is to move forward, it is imperative that we take our time and thoroughly study all these issues and more, so that we can truly understand the Ike Dike's potential consequences and weigh the potential positives against the potential negatives. In the meantime, we should also be considering other alternatives for coastal protection and not simply putting all our eggs in the Ike Dike basket.

Environmental Flows

Continued from page 1

of the riverine, bay and estuary systems including granting permits for instream flow dedicated to environmental needs of bay and estuary inflows...” In other words, they had to recommend ways that environmental flows could be protected in the state’s water permitting process, a system in which water for environmental needs were not generally considered until 1985, after most of the water rights permits had been issued and leaving little or no water for fish and wildlife in drier years.

In 2004, the Study Commission issued the Joint Committee’s Interim Report to the 79th Legislature. That report, which summed up the environmental flows issue with the statement that “The question is not whether environmental flows are important and should be protected, but rather, how, when, and where, and in what quantities should flows be reserved for environmental purposes...”, became the basis for the environmental flows provisions in Senate Bill 3 in 2005. That bill did not pass, but Governor Perry issued an executive order in October 2005 which established the Environmental Flows Advisory Committee (EFAC).

The EFAC was charged with providing recommendations to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, which administers water rights permits, and to the legislature to ensure that environmental flows are protected and integrated with human needs in a consensus-based, regional approach, using the Study Commission’s 2004 report as a starting point. The committee’s final report, provided to the 80th Legislature in 2007, served as the basis for environmental flows provisions in a Senate Bill 3, a landmark water bill, which was passed in September 2007. What is so special about Senate Bill 3?

Senate Bill 3 calls for comprehensive management of environmental flows through an allocation process that addresses two key issues: (1) how much water needs to flow in our rivers and into bays to maintain a healthy ecological environment, and (2) how to ensure that the environmental flows are protected. The bill has resulted in the aforementioned meetings of expert scientists, called Basin and Bay Area Expert Science Teams (BBEST), and stakeholders, called Basin and Bay Area Stakeholder Committees (BBAS). As the studies and recommendations of the Study Commission and EFAC recognized that “one size does not fit all” in that each river and bay system is unique,

the allocation is done on a regional basis. In the case of Galveston Bay and its main sources of fresh water, the Trinity and San Jacinto Rivers, the BBAS has met four times since August and the BBEST has met twice, their inaugural meeting being held in December.

Time is of the essence with these groups. The BBEST must develop an *environmental flow regime* (a specific schedule of flow quantities that are adequate to support a sound ecological environment and to maintain the productivity, extent, and persistence of key aquatic habitats in and along the affected water bodies) by November 1 of this year. The BBAS then has until June 1, 2010 to review the findings of the BBEST and submit recommendations for environmental flows standards and implementation strategies to a new statewide Environmental Flows Advisory Group, a new oversight committee created by Senate Bill 3, and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the state agency that administers water rights permits. The TCEQ will then review the recommendations of the BBAS and adopt environmental flow standards for the Trinity and San Jacinto Rivers and Galveston Bay Basin by June 1, 2011.

Throughout this whole process, the science and policy of environmental flows has evolved; there has been a collective realization by scientists and policy makers that we need to better define what we are trying to protect. Namely, that in the case of Galveston Bay and other estuaries, instead of determining adequate inflows of freshwater based on optimizing the harvest of certain commercial fish and shellfish species, we need to determine how much water is needed to protect the Bay’s whole ecological environment – it’s physical, chemical and biological components and the natural interaction among them.



Aerial view of Galveston Bay Shows freshwater inflows from its main sources of fresh water, the Trinity and San Jacinto Rivers.

Spotlight on . . . GBF Corporate Supporter NRG Energy



Our spotlight with this edition of the GBF Gazette falls on GBF corporate supporter NRG Energy. Founded in 1989, NRG is a wholesale power generation company, primarily engaged in the ownership and operation of power generation facilities and the sale of energy, capacity and related products in the United States and internationally. Its Texas roots can be traced back through Texas Genco and before that to Houston Lighting & Power. NRG Texas is home to more than 11,000 megawatts of electric generation, powered by nuclear, wind, gas and coal. Texas represents almost half of NRG's U.S. generating capacity. In the very near future, NRG will be closing on the acquisition of a portion of another long time GBF supporter, Reliant Energy. NRG will be acquiring the retail power side of Reliant, giving it a retail presence and its first venture beyond power generation.

NRG has a number of environmental initiatives it is pursuing. To begin with, it is a member of the U.S. Climate Action Partnership (USCAP), a group of business and environmental organizations calling for mandatory legislation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, it has created [econrg](#), an ongoing and extensive environmental business effort targeted at reducing NRG's environmental footprint and encouraging employee and financial support for the communities and environment around their plants. It represents NRG's commitment to environmentally responsible power generation. Through [econrg](#), NRG seeks ways to meet the challenges of climate change, clean air and the protection of our natural resources. And of course at the heart of NRG's conservation ethic is their "EcoCenter," a multi-use facility at NRG's Cedar Bayou Station near Baytown, Texas.

The EcoCenter provides infrastructure for conser-

vation activities such as growing plants used for wetland and dune restoration. The center provides crucial components for restoration activities in and around Galveston Bay, and in fact has served as the primary source of smooth cordgrass for GBF restoration activities for years. On top of donating plants to nearly all of GBF's restoration projects, NRG also provides staff help and technical assistance on most GBF restoration projects.

"Whether working to bring new emission-free advanced nuclear, solar or wind generation online or restoring local wetlands, NRG believes in enhancing our environment for the near- and long-term," said Kevin Howell, President, NRG Texas. "By partnering with groups like the Galveston Bay Foundation, we can greatly increase the positive effect of our [econrg](#) efforts."

NRG is a valued GBF partner and a true supporter of Galveston Bay. GBF salutes NRG and looks forward to a long term continued partnership with NRG, working together for the best long term interests of Galveston Bay.



Marsh Mania Registration

Marsh Mania registration is now open!

Join us on April 25 or May 30 for the 11th annual Marsh Mania as volunteers restore valuable wetlands at five different locations around the Bay!



Register now to participate in GBF's nationally-recognized, signature community-based wetlands restoration and education event!

Visit our website at www.galvbay.org or call 281-332-3381 x207 for details and registration information!

Thank You, Trash Bash Volunteers!

One hundred fifty volunteers of all ages spent the morning of Saturday, March 28, 2009, cleaning up the banks of Sims Bayou! The dedicated volunteers worked enthusiastically at Glenbrook Park, Reveille Park, and Sims Woods. Following the clean-up, volunteers gathered at Glenbrook Park for lunch, door prizes, and entertainment by the Big Lizard Boys. Over a ton of trash was gathered by the volunteers!



Ninth Biennial State of the Bay Symposium

Highlights from GBF Staff

The ninth biennial State of the Bay Symposium was held January 12-14, 2009, at the Galveston Island Convention Center at the San Luis Resort. The theme of this year's symposium was "What is Needed to Sustain Our Estuary?" This question was addressed by a number of quality workshops, session presentations, panel discussions, posters and exhibits.

A new feature of the symposium this year was the opportunity to attend one of two workshops held on Monday, January 12. The workshops offered this year were "Best Management Practices That Sustain Our Estuary" and "Creating a Stewardship Campaign." Best Management Practices (BMPs) are tools that help address the regulatory requirements for water quality set forth by the US EPA and the TCEQ. The BMP workshop offered a wide variety of presentations from a number of speakers on topics ranging from implementation, education and outreach, and funding. An excellent tool to learn more about this topic is the International Stormwater BMP Database, which can be accessed at www.bmpdatabase.org.

Symposium presentations kicked off on Tuesday, January 13. The opening plenary session featured remarks from Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas of Galveston, who welcomed the symposium to Galveston and encouraged all attendees to do two things: visit any of the Galveston Island businesses now reopened following Hurricane Ike, and walk across Seawall and bury their toes in the newly refurbished beaches! Dr. Jim Lester of the Houston Advanced Research Center presented his biennial report on the State of the Bay, including status and trends of habitats, living resources, water quality, etc. A panel discussion focused on the impacts of Hurricane Ike touched on the impacts the storm had on the Galveston Bay ecosystem, what is being done to help, and what needs to be done.

Twelve concurrent sessions were offered throughout Tuesday and Wednesday ranging over a wide variety of topics including sustainable conservation practices, water quality, environmental flows, invasive species, education, and human behaviors and impacts, among others.

GBF staff attended but also participated in the symposium in a number of ways. Bob Stokes presented GBF's "Pump It Don't Dump It" Boater Waste Education Campaign in one of the concurrent sessions, spoke on the Human, Economic and Market Value of Estuaries in a plenary session, and participated in a panel discussion on strategies and approaches for moving towards sustainability. Della Barbato participated in a panel discussion on the efforts to measure and build sustainable behavior changes among Galveston Bay watershed citizens. Courtney Miller provided a poster titled, "Marsh Mania: 10 Years of Community-based Habitat Restoration in Galveston Bay," during the Ralph Rayburn Commemorative Poster Session.



State of the Bay Symposium attendees viewed posters and exhibits during the Ralph Rayburn Commemorative Poster Session.

Bay Day 2009 is Here!



11 a.m.
to
5 p.m.

Festival at Kemah Boardwalk

Presented by the Galveston Bay Foundation



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Visit www.galvbay.org for more information

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GBF Staff and Members Visit the State Capitol

Galveston Bay Foundation Board members Bill King and Glenda Callaway teamed with GBF President Bob Stokes, and staff members Scott Jones and Vanessa Mintzer to make legislative visits at the State Capitol on February 25, 2009.

The Foundation representatives met with members of the local Texas House and Senate delegations as well as legislators serving on the natural resources committees, urging them to support funding for the Galveston Bay Estuary Program, full funding for Texas parks, funding for Texas General Land Office efforts to locate and remove Hurricane Ike debris and to support efforts to strengthen boater sewage waste regulations. The Foundation met with approximately fifty legislators and distributed close to seventy informational packets.



Pictured from left:
Vanessa Mintzer, GBF; Glenda Callaway, Board Member; Bill King, GBF Board Chair; Senator Mike Jackson; Bob Stokes, GBF President and Scott Jones, GBF

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