



## Public Meeting on Bacteria in the Upper Gulf Coast

January 18th, 2012

5:30 - 7:30 P.M.

Armand Bayou Nature Center

**Introduction:** Charlene Bohanon introduced Chip Morris who outlined the main goals and talking points of the meeting and addressed the audience to voice what they would like to get out of the meeting.

**Watershed Tour and Project Background:** Bohanon went through a presentation that outlined: 1) The overall mission of GBF, 2) Water quality concerns and sources, 3) Affected areas in Galveston Bay, 4) Why this problem needs to be addressed and how it will be done.

**What Matters to You:** Audience members were given 4 stickers to place on a board with 3 categories (economics, environmental health, and public health) as a way to show which areas they were most concerned about. The exact count was not taken but it was clear that environmental health was the area that most people were concerned about, followed by public health and economics. Participants expressed that they felt that environmental health and public health are inherently tied together, and that they both affect economic health. Bohanon explained that this was an important fact because leaving any one of these concerns out of the equation will prevent the plan from being sustainable. The workgroup looked at all of these concerns throughout the development of the I-Plan.

**Implementation Plan:** Bohanon prefaced the Implementation Plan (I-Plan) process. The steps that TCEQ and partners will take to achieve the pollutant reductions identified in the TMDL Steps include: identifying causes of impairment, management measures, estimated load reductions, education components, schedule, indicators to measure progress, responsible parties. Bohanon introduced members of the I-Plan team. Ray Mayo (City of La Porte), who is part of the wastewater treatment facility component of the plan, emphasized that education was a key factor in reducing bacteria levels. Ryan Gerlich (Texas AgriLife Extension Service), who is part of the on-site sewage facilities component, explained that he would be working with GBF to bring workshops to the Galveston Bay project area. Scott Tuma (City of League City), who is part of the boater waste workgroup, explained his connection to the Bay and the boating community and why he thinks the project is especially important. Bohanon then described the various sources (point and non-point) that contribute to increased bacteria levels in the bay.

**Non-Point Source Pollution Demo:** Bohanon began the non-point source pollution demo using an Enviroscope watershed model in order to show participants one outreach tool that can be used to foster awareness of water quality issues around the Bay. Bohanon asked the participants for sources of pollution and simulated a rain event to demonstrate how these sources can accumulate and

contribute to the pollution in the bay.

**Proposed Actions:** Bohanon outlined the steps that the I-Plan will take to address each source of concern (wastewater treatment facilities, on-site sewage facilities, and boater waste) to reduce the load and improve the environmental health of the Bay. A comment was made regarding the inspection of septic systems that there is not a set protocol for inspecting a septic system nor is there a system in place that ensures that the inspectors are thoroughly trained. Attention was brought to a flyer and workshop that gives information about septic systems and details about inspecting them. Bohanon covered things that the general public can do to make a difference and get involved. Bohanon requested feedback and future involvement of the participants with the I-Plan process. She also announced important dates for upcoming events (TX Watershed Stewards – February 22nd, World Water Day – March 22nd, Texas AgriLife Extension homeowner workshop on septic system maintenance – March 29th).

#### **Q and A:**

- A question was asked regarding the difficulty of addressing point sources and non-point sources in that there is a problem in politics with crafting new legislation to control these (people don't like their liberties to be infringed upon. Wanted to know how the plan is taking this into consideration. Scott Tuma brought up that often there are already many laws in place and that the focus now is to encourage that these are properly enforced (especially true of boater waste issues).

- A comment was made that educating real estate officials about septic systems is a good idea. This person emphasized that real estate agents/home owners don't always know the capacity of their septic systems.

- A question was asked about septic systems regarding the distance that they must be built from bodies of water, public/private wells, buildings. Answer: There are set distances but these only apply to systems that are known/permitted. Older systems that are grandfathered in and not permitted are usually the ones with a higher percentage of problems.

- A comment was made about stormwater permits and that they are increasing people's knowledge and raising awareness of these non-point sources. The permits are causing people to pay more attention to these problems and causing others to investigate those that may not be adhering to permits/regulations.

- Another question was asked regarding sampling during the drought period and if the bacteria levels were different (lower) because there was less run-off. The speaker shared that in Chesapeake Bay, the drought period usually yields lower levels of bacteria and he wanted to know if this was true here. Linda Broach (TCEQ) explained that the data for this year has not yet been analyzed, but that historically bacteria is lower when the salinities are higher (less precipitation) and that everyone is excited to see if data during this drought period will show a decrease in the bacteria levels in Galveston Bay.