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GALVESTON BAY REMAINS RESILIENT EARNING A "C" IN OVERALL HEALTH
Fourth Annual Report Card Reveals the Bay Maintains Several Grades Despite Hurricane Harvey

HOUSTON (August 15, 2018) – Today, The Galveston Bay Foundation (GBF) and the Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC) released the results of the 2018 Galveston Bay Report Card, a citizen-driven, science-based grading system supported by Houston Endowment and the EPA Gulf of Mexico Program. The comprehensive report can be accessed at https://www.galvbaygrade.org/.

"We created the Report Card to communicate the health of the Bay and to empower the public through guided efforts, as they preserve the area and foster a healthy and productive environment for generations to come," said Galveston Bay Foundation President, Bob Stokes. "With the analysis of long-term monitoring data, GBF and HARC are building a strong foundation that allows us to take a closer look at issues affecting Galveston Bay watersheds and communities, and supports proactive plans of action that will ultimately result in improvement across the board."

This year, Galveston Bay was graded a "C" in overall health, which has remained consistent since the card's inception in 2015. Data and trends are evaluated by 22 indicators that describe Galveston Bay and the surrounding watersheds, which span across 24,000 square miles and includes half of Texas' population. The indicators are divided among six critical issues – Water Quality, Wildlife, Habitat, Coastal Change, Pollution Events and Sources, and Human Health risks - each graded on a scale of "A" to "F."

The 2018 grades in each of those categories were scientifically determined to be as follows:

- *Wildlife*: Galveston Bay earned an overall grade of a **D**, which is a decline from the C earned last year. Specifically, "Shellfish" received a D grade due to the steadily decreasing blue crab population, which could be a result of abandoned crab traps, low recruitment (the number of crabs that survive as juveniles and enter the fishery as adults) and habitat loss.

- *Pollution Events and Sources*: Pollution Events and Sources have continued to show incremental improvement and have maintained a **C** grade. More than 230 oil spills are reported on average every year in Galveston Bay with most being less than five gallons. The total number of spills has declined since 2003 and this year was upgraded to a B. Additionally, the total volume spilled in 2017 improved dramatically from an F grade to an A.

- *Human Health Risks*: There is evidence of continued improvement in the Human Health Risk indicator of bacteria concentrations in area bayous. Overall, the Bay received a **C**, earning an A and a B in the subcategory of "Recreation Safety" for the Bay and rivers and bayous, respectively. "Seafood Consumption Safety" earned a C and a D for the Bay and rivers and bayous.

- *Habitat*: An overall grade of a **D** was assigned and the subcategory of underwater grasses earned a C. Subcategories "Wetlands," "Seagrass" and "Oyster Reefs" received incomplete grades due to a lack of updated data. The latest federal information available on wetland coverage in the region is dated from 2010, which is problematic after an event like Hurricane Harvey since freshwater wetlands play such a large role in floodwater infiltration and retention.

- *Water Quality*: The Bay continues to maintain its overall **A** grade, which has remained consistent since the 2016 Report Card. However, many sub-watersheds of Galveston Bay (Addicks Reservoir, Barker Reservoir, Spring Creek, Buffalo Bayou, Cedar Bayou, West Fork San Jacinto) saw declines in "Phosphorus" grades (most likely due to non-point source pollution). Sims Bayou was an exception, improving its grade from a D to a C. Phosphorus is especially troublesome in freshwater systems because it can lead to algae blooms, nuisance species and other water quality issues. To learn more about your watershed, click here.

- *Coastal Change*: While the overall grade remained a **C**, it should be noted that the sub-category of "Sea Level Rise" remained an F, while "Water Temperature" and "Water pH" each received an A. As more people are moving to the Houston-Galveston region each year, issues such as sea level rise not only affect the Bay ecosystem, but public safety and property.

Galveston Bay is among the most productive ecosystems on the Gulf Coast and a vital natural resource for recreation, tourism and industry. The area houses three ports and two major cities while serving as a hub for the manufacturing and refining of chemicals and petroleum products, making a significant economic impact on the state of Texas. Over the years, GBF and HARC have partnered to collect input from thousands of community members to ultimately bring awareness to the issues plaguing Galveston Bay and inspire action to evoke change.

"Our research establishes an information framework to communicate and improve the health of the Bay," said the Houston Advanced Research Center's President and CEO, Lisa Gonzalez. "The 2018 Report Card is a summary of indicator data representing the last year. The Report Card gives the public a way to look at long term change and acute stressors such as hurricanes and droughts. The Report Card is not necessarily representative of the conditions during Hurricane Harvey because of monitoring data gaps in the days and weeks after the storm, but rather it provides context for these large events."

In addition to the grades, the Report Card encourages the public to contribute to the improvement of the health of the Bay through conservation activities such as properly disposing of pet waste,

reducing plastic usage by utilizing reusable bags and straws, and installing rain barrels to conserve water. Another way to get involved is through the various clean-up efforts held throughout the year including an upcoming clean-up hosted by Galveston Bay Foundation and Adopt-A-Beach at Morgan's Point on September 15th. Last year's Adopt-A-Beach clean-up was attended by over one hundred volunteers who managed to remove 2,540 pounds of trash.

About Galveston Bay Foundation:
The mission of the Galveston Bay Foundation is to preserve, protect and enhance the natural resources of the Galveston Bay estuarine system and its tributaries for present users and for posterity. Its programs in advocacy, conservation, education and research strive to ensure that Galveston Bay remains a beautiful and productive place for generations to come. Established in 1987, the Galveston Bay Foundation is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. For further information, contact the Foundation at (281) 332-3381, visit www.galvbay.org, like us on Facebook or follow us on Twitter.

About the Houston Advanced Research Center
HARC is a nonprofit research hub providing independent analysis on energy, air, and water issues to people seeking scientific answers. Its research activities support the implementation of policies and technologies that promote sustainability based on scientific principles. HARC is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization building a sustainable future in which people thrive and nature flourishes. For further information, contact HARC at (281) 364-6000 or visit www.HARCresearch.org. You can also connect with us via Facebook or Twitter. Like or follow @HARCresearch.