

**Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council
Public Meeting for Draft Comprehensive Plan Update**

Galveston, TX– Sept. 29, 2016

Principals:

Justin Ehrenwerth (RESTORE Council) , Toby Baker (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality), Ann Mills (Department of Agriculture), John Huffman (Department of the Interior), John Bowie (Environmental Protection Agency), Jessica Kondel (Department of Commerce), Gib Owen (Army Corps of Engineers)

Additional Support: Buck Sutter, Ann Weaver, Alyssa Dausman, Heather Young, Sarah Bernhardt, Cynthia Clevenger, Michelle Krause

The meeting started at 6:00 p.m. and lasted approximately one hour. There were approximately 30 people in attendance, not including Council representatives, staff and support.

Introductory remarks:

Commissioner Toby Baker

Principals each introduced themselves.

Justin Ehrenwerth provided a PPTX overview of the draft Comprehensive Plan Update.

The public comment began at approximately 6:30 p.m. and lasted about 25 minutes. Toby Baker then gave closing remarks.

Public comments (7 speakers):

Amanda Fuller, National Wildlife Federation: Good evening, thank you. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity. The Initial Comprehensive Plan didn't capture that tone, however this update does capture that and we thank you for that. There are things we are happy about including the proposed update to submission guidelines, the commitment to large-scale projects, conservation financing and leveraging, as well as the commitment to science-based decision making and using external experts and a panel approach. We're very pleased with the coordination and leveraging commitment. We think project sequencing and synergies is important as well. Because we're in Texas, we are happy about the meaningful addition of water quantity as it is an ecological stressor on our coast. Thank you to Commissioner Baker on your commitment to RESTORE. And thank you to Commissioner Baker for going to New Orleans and attending a meeting outside of Texas. We ask you Justin, that we have an opportunity to speak to other council members from other states as

well in the future and encourage other state Council Members to attend meetings in other states.

Karla Klay, Artist Boat: We are glad you're here and that the Comprehensive Plan is being revised. We have a saying that we never paddle faster than the weakest paddler. So when you implement this plan you need to pull the weakest paddlers along with you. However, I'm heartbroken and disappointed that Bayou Greenways got approved prior to projects supporting barrier islands in this watershed. Small barrier island communities (such as this one) need to come forward with you. We are the frontlines of defense against oil spills and hurricanes, we are the key to ecosystem integrity, we are the doorway to the coast for ~\$6 million visitors. Unless you help support small barrier island communities to coordinate and submit their projects and then fund these projects you'll never achieve coastal resiliency. And please commit 3% of all your buckets of funding to environmental education programs, including ocean literacy, and place-based education. And keep in mind there are also species in the Gulf that can't speak for themselves. Marine mammal species in the Gulf are amazing. Many of them listed in NRDAR were damaged greatly. You should develop a sperm whale marine sanctuary that will benefit not only sperm whales, but also other species of marine mammals and other non-mammal species in the Gulf. Invest dollars in the marine environments.

Jordan Macha, Gulf Restoration Network: Thank you for this updated Comprehensive Plan. The strides made here are great steps for restoration. We appreciate the commitment to public engagement and transparency and the commitment to communities. Please continue to adopt community engagement and transparency. We're excited about collaboration and support consistency across all funding streams. We look forward to assisting to make this an achievable reality. We appreciate the Council releasing a full Vietnamese translation at the same time the English version was released. This is important and is a critical community in the Gulf to reach.

Sarah Campbell, Texas Conservation Corps-Coastal Program: Four months ago, we started a new program that focuses on gulf coast ecosystem restoration. This program is looking at different restoration projects, and we work with young adults, college age adults, and workforce development to get young adults engaged in restoration and train them to help implement restoration. Looking forward to hopefully working with you in years to come and developing working partnerships.

Marcia Towns, Student Conservation Association: Your reflecting got me reflecting. I was at the first Council session in Texas and talked to Justin and others to please consider what young adults can do to help provide solutions towards resiliency in the Gulf. Thank you for listening. Since that time I was able to first share my input with Council members, over the past 3 years I have seen partners all over the Houston-Galveston area start coordinating and sharing their ideas. These people are not forgetting that young people should be involved in restoration. My high

school students will be involved in the restoration you all are doing now in the near future. Some of them will likely work on the new electronic rigs in the Gulf. I feel really good about what is happening. I tell folks, let's not forget our young people. I am pleased to see people are not forgetting the young people, but instead people are acting and including young people. YAY for the Gulf Coast Conservation Corps project! I didn't want this night to go by without saying how much I appreciate you, all of you, and all young people have to offer. This is their Gulf, and they care about it.

Sharon Stuart, Environmental & public: I am on the board of the Galveston Bay Foundation and associated with Galveston Bay Keeper, but I am speaking for myself as a private citizen. I would like to support what Jordan said and what Karla said. What Karla said is we have unique resources in the Gulf. The first EIS I ever read was about the Gulf in the 70's written by NOAA when they were going to put an ocean incineration site in the Gulf. They said there were no endangered species in the Gulf. No whales, no sea turtles, etc. After many years working with sea turtles, we all know that this is not true. During Exxon Valdez I was asked to go help, because I recognized what oil and oil sprayed with dispersant looks like. During the deepwater horizon oil spill, I went out on a flyover flight from the Sabine to the San Bernard River. I took pictures. We saw Texas had oil that had been hit with dispersants. We saw it and so we know it went at least as far as the San Bernard. We know Texas was hit. But we know LA, MS, and AL were hit harder. However, oil that's been hit with dispersants breaks up, fine particles are dispersed all the way throughout the entire water column affecting all living organisms in addition to the oil that goes straight to the bottom of the ocean. So please consider an offshore marine sanctuary. Statistics since Exxon Valdez show species have dropped dramatically and will not ever fully recover. We will face the same thing in the Gulf.

Kimberly Miller, Allen Engineering and Science: Thanks to Commissioner Baker for the reminder at the beginning of this meeting that people lost their lives and that's so important to remember. To that point, one thing that's effective is working at the local level to transform processes that lead to better stewardship. Please look at projects to include local, county, and regional projects in how they can improve watershed management and the data that can help support them. Please invest in our working waterfronts so they can provide a source of income and economic development (ports, marinas, tourism, and attracting people to the coast to invest in economic development). Looking long-term to build on environmental resources, then to build the economic resources from that, to continue to restore the Gulf.

6:55pm, public comment ends

Commissioner Toby Baker: Between Criminal penalties and Early Restoration we have committed millions to Galveston Bay Estuary Complex. I've got a list in the back so people can see the funding coming to the area. Also, on Bayou Greenways, I appreciate the comments raised earlier. We are looking at the water quality in the

bayous coming to Galveston Bay. The bay water quality is directly affected by the water coming into the system. To improve water quality in Galveston Bay, we need to invest in some areas in Houston. We don't want there to be disagreements between cities and barrier island communities, we want to all work together. We've worked hard to do work on barrier islands. We've done multiple outreach sessions with smaller communities on these islands. We will continue to reach out to all these smaller communities and work with you. I also want to address Bucket 1. The application window closed in April of 2016. We received over 200 applications. We have about \$57 million in funding, and we have about \$3.4 billion in applications. We have a review team involving staff from five state agencies (TCEQ, TPWD, TGLO, Governor's office, Texas Department of Transportation). They all reviewed and scored applications based on our published scoring criteria. Those reviews were given to me last week. I'm going through all of the projects and the reviews. I will then give my recommendations to the Governor's office. The Governor's office has some discretion. The Governor's office will review and then select and draft a Multiyear Implementation Plan list to publish in the register for a 45-day public comment. During that public comment period, you can tell us what we got wrong or right. We will respond to those comments and hope to send a draft to Treasury for review by the end of the year. It could take Treasury awhile to go through and provide funding to Texas as this is a new program for Treasury. We also have some great projects that we are trying to move forward. We are moving forward with Bucket 2 projects and getting applications done and out the door. Two Center's of Excellence are up and running. We are excited to put more money into academia. We are doing the best we can to move forward with you and the public to get projects out the door. Please go to our website (<https://www.restorethetexascoast.org/>) to find anything you need. I'm happy to entertain questions offline after this. We are happy you're here with us. Thank you for coming.

Justin Ehrenwerth- Thanked all for coming. Pointed out RESTORE Council staff and TCEQ staff in attendance.

Meeting concluded officially at approximately 7:00 pm.