



**Gulf of Mexico Alliance - Upper Texas Coast Community Workshop
Texas A&M University at Galveston - September 20, 2005
Habitat Loss Breakout Session Summary**

Question 1: How do you define this issue with respect to the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

Breakout session participants identified the magnitude and rate of wetland loss, particularly isolated wetland loss, the fact that habitat loss is integral with other environmental issues (i.e. water quality, etc.), the loss of important non-wetland habitats (coastal prairie, dunes, riparian forest, etc.), fragmentations, loss of essential fish habitat (aquatic) habitat, biodiversity loss, disruption of migratory bird flyways, deterioration of the human environment, and water quality degradation as important elements that define the overarching issue of habitat conservation.

Question 2: Where do you go for information and assistance on this issue?

Participants identified state and federal resource agencies, scientists, the mainstream media, published literature, the internet, local government officials, conservation non-profit organizations, conservation-oriented list serves, the UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the National Coastal Condition Report, recreational and commercial fishermen and organizations (Coastal Conservation Association, PISCES) as important sources of information.

Question 3: What constraints have kept you from helping to resolve this issue?

Participants identified funding, reliance on voluntary versus regulatory programs, lack of regulation, particularly on “isolated” wetlands, lack of mandatory buffers surrounding water bodies, rapid land development and consequent high price of land, lack of regional planning, poor economic valuation studies supporting value of conservation, externalization of true cost of impacts of development, lack of icons of geographic endearment (i.e. beautiful seascapes, mountains, etc.) socioeconomic disconnect, lack of political interest and awareness, lack of coordination among active organizations, lack of compelling information on health benefits of outdoors and open spaces, too many groups involved resulting in dilution of message as major constraints in addressing habitat conservation. It was stated that there are some examples of active voluntary industry involvement and support of conservation, for example Reliant Energy.

Question 4: What role should the public play in helping to resolve this issue?

Participants stated the public should apply political pressure to elected officials to support planning and conservation, try to speak with a more unified voice, support responsible consumer practices, support bond elections to support conservation and open space preservation, more effectively communicate successes, engage family and friends in dialogue, recognize contributions of industry and businesses in conservation efforts as incentives for others, lead by example, create more demand for quality educational TV programming, more actively engage civic organizations, and support youth organizations such as girl and boy scouts that feature a strong conservation message.

Question 5: What role should the government play at the local, state, and/or federal level in helping to resolve this issue?

Participants suggested that government organizations should more effectively enforce existing laws, establish new regulations and ensure that they are reasonable and effective, promote greater role of local governments, provide for consistency of existing rules and regulations, increase funding for conservation, more effectively incorporate good science, practice government more openly and honestly, overcome inertia of status quo, promote leadership and creative solutions at all levels, increase its members' expertise, encourage more citizen involvement.



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Land Use Planning Breakout Session Summary**

Question 1: How do you define this issue with respect to the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

- There are more people moving to the coast.
- We haven't planned on saving what needs to be saved.
- Katrina and other hurricanes need to be considered.
- Environmental changes are occurring.
- A lot of the planning is reactive and not proactive.
- Developer's interests.
- The insurance industry is an important issue as is developer's greed.
- The national flood insurance program is part of the problem. If I buy a house, I am subsidizing a 3 million dollar home in Galveston.
- Non-use planning is a dirty word in TX.
- The culture is against planning.
- Indiscriminate use of permits. Promiscuous behavior.
- Tax hungry municipalities/government.
- The hypocrisy in the free market enterprise. There are inconsistencies. Selective subsidization exists.
- Lack of awareness of the public on coastline issues and impacts of development. The people buying the houses are not aware of what can happen.
- Lack of awareness of land use planning.
- "It's my property and I can do what I want."
- People don't know what they are giving up.
- Federally subsidized growth with the federal flood insurance programs

Question 2: Where do you go for information and assistance on this issue?

- Go to the urban land institute.
- Use internet; Google "land use planning."
- American Institute of Architects.
- Drive around and use my eyes.
- Go to the local COG.
- Local universities.
- John Jacob.
- The county extension agents.

- The Galveston Bay Information Center.
- Could go to the land commission, go to a public meeting: planning commission or city council, parks and recs, public meetings giving information on projects.
- Houston has a big planning department.
- Part of the problem is that the city council doesn't have a clue. If they go to a meeting, the developers don't get the information they need. We have not done a good job of teaching them.
- Coastal coordination council.
- State Coastal Management Program.
- Email newsletter
- Public radio such as KPFT (radio station) occasionally has a talk show on land.
- Federal, state and local agencies. EPA and NOAA have to be included in the list.
- The only other thing I can think of is other state planning activities; go to other places to see what others have done. Other states or cities.
- The Corps keeps a database of all flood maps. The problem is that we build a levy and supposedly it's taken from flood map. So the maps aren't technically correct.

Question 3: What constraints have kept you from helping to resolve this issue?

- National flood insurance program.
- Lack of political will.
- The government lobbies, self interests.
- Tragedy of the Commons.
- If the council or government is not educated or have a clue, how can they make a decision?
- Lack of knowledge at the local government level.
- Insufficient value given to large tracks of open space, even small spaces need to be considered.
- General lack of knowledge of the public.
- Local culture. For example-New Orleans has been flooded out many times, but they continue to build there.
- Government isn't the answer to everything.
- Homeowners association.
- Lack of time and money.
- Society is based on 'time is money.'
- Ineffective use of federal planning tools, such as fema flood maps and coastal barriers resources act (CBRA).
- Inability at all levels of government for adaptive management. For example-In my city they are still doing community plans using old technology. They don't look beyond. No one looks at the past to see if it works. People get their cultures within agencies. Environment is moving quickly and we are not keeping up with it.
- Lawyers and their liability issues prevent people from being accountable. Fear based. For example during Katrina, maybe school buses were not moved in New Orleans because of liability issues.
- Lack of coordination between existing groups.

- Regional government issues, habitat issues, road issues. Meaning interjurisdictional issues. Regional issues, don't plan for roads growth between regions. Each city does its thing.
- Do not have a structure that matches our needs. Also not enough devolved down. Many counties have drainage plans; but they don't get authority, just go out and independently dig. No coordinated planning, no overarching authority. Also need authority to spend money on things. TX counties have no ordinance making authority. Are just able to provide advice. Galveston Bay is a watershed, but each area deals with our water issues differently. Watershed authority may be more appropriate than county. But watersheds cannot be given authority to do anything. Some of the rural counties would like to have ordinance making authorities. To not look at everything from water perspective is also a constraint. Watershed and political issues are not same. Lack of incentives or money. Tax breaks.
- One thing has gotten in the way. There is no identifiable thing that resonates that public can unify behind or get excited about. Kids know about the Everglades, but not about the Gulf. No killer whales, no warm and fuzzy animals, no identifiable icon. The Gulf is an acquired taste. You learn to love a salt marsh, but it takes time. WE have to deal with it. "I had a contest and needed a symbol. We ended up choosing a sand dollar even though LA doesn't have any."

Question 4: What role should the public play in helping to resolve this issue?

- They should stop being so stupid.
- They should rise up en masse.
- They should influence their local officials.
- A group has published a TX water plan, Texas Water Matters. People are involved with the National Wildlife Fund and Sierra Club. They talk about water conservation and also want to save water for fresh water inflow. Maybe the idea of the public being concerned about water conservation can be used as a tool to get them thinking about water in general. Use special interest groups to promote preservation and restoration of Gulf resources. More citizens groups have been springing up.
- Look at results of public surveys and the public wants more opportunities to do something, but the public officials don't seem to pay attention. The surveys don't matter to them. There is a disconnect between the two groups. The public doesn't always put the environment as a voting issue. The public doesn't vote as they support in polls. Public should vote their conscience on this issue. They should vote on their self-interest. We need to fashion a political platform to speak to what they are saying. At a local level we need a coalition of people to espouse those values. It should not be a partisan issue. But partisan issues do exist. People who have something to gain promote it. The public needs to communicate this to their officials. Somehow we need to translate these things to things the local officials understand is important.
- Involvement in nonprofits that espouse green space and planning in general. Liveable coalitions to bring together green space and development in local areas.

Coalition can build on things we all agree on. Coalitions to support planning for quality of life.

- Politicians need to care more about their community and get involved. Need to eliminate the fortress mentality.
- We need to have realistic expectations of what the public can do. People that are in organizations can get the word out. Part of it is that we are waiting for the masses to come up to what we need, but we also may need to pull them up.
- People won't do anything that inconveniences them. People won't bother to recycle. "It's not in my back yard, so therefore I am not going to do anything about it." It should be a personal responsibility.
- The role of public is that it needs to be willing to sacrifice individual gains for the public good.

Question 5: What role should the government play at the local, state, and/or federal level in helping to resolve this issue?

- They are really the ones responsible for screwing things up.
- There is a role for government to play in land use. It's a commitment. They have to recognize it.
- Need to distinguish between local and federal.
- There are unfunded mandates that come down to the local municipalities to implement. Clean water was passed, but took 25 yrs to get down to local level. Local government won't risk angering their funding sources by preserving land unless they knew what was in it for them. Some recognition at local level that smart land use planning has a bigger benefit than as a revenue source. The local government needs to look past the next election and for the long term. Green space is beginning to be acknowledged for having huge benefits/value over development. How you make city government own it is difficult. Economic incentive needs to be transferred over from developers. Local government should be a visionary leader. Make rules and enforce them. The government should realize common interest and create a level playing field so no one builds in a flood plain.
- To create some uniformity of standards so there can be collaboration between jurisdictions.
- Some flexibility needs to be around guidelines since each habitat is slightly different. Don't reinvent the wheel each time. Needs to be a match of flexibility and consistency.
- Governments need to look at where they are spending their money. Mowing is an example. Look at budgets for recurring costs as they may be throwing their money away on things they don't need to.
- Government has a role to consider social costs. Under NEPA we have to look at the bigger picture.
- Governments need to be able to actively engage in adaptive government.
- Local government doesn't have the expertise of the federal government, so that information needs to be made available.

- Just plan. We have an aversion to planning. We wait until the last minute to plan.
- Semantics is a problem. Planning has a bad reputation so we use other words. Culture infringes on property rights. Plus people make plans then drop it and not follow through. Needs to be able to follow it through.
- Local governments need to realize that they have effects on resources that will have impacts on other governments. It could have a domino effect on the resources. Look beyond your own borders when you have shared resources.
- Coastal coordination council concept is very good, but they need to use their existing authority more effectively. They are supposed to coordinate oversight of other agencies. It has gotten agencies around table to talk. Opportunity for oversight and federal actions. Private citizens can come in and address Gulf issues. It has been very effective.
- Needs more coordination between programs, federal and states. The programs are good but communication is currently lacking.
- State agencies need to be everything to everyone. Each department has a land program, but they are not the same.
- Government at all levels needs to increase involvement, educate public. There are growth areas for non-funded things to educate people to be volunteers, ex beach cleanup.
- Eliminate congressionally earmarked funding.
- Developed a horizontal coordination, but there needs to be someone in charge to get everyone to table. On a watershed or political basis, whatever is needed for the collaboration



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Water Quality Breakout Session Summary**

Question 1: How do you define this issue with respect to the health of the Gulf of Mexico?

Anthropogenic changes on water quality
Excessive impacts on survival and reproduction: toxicity
Definition includes seafood that is safe to eat; healthy shellfish beds and reproduction
Fate and transport of pollutants
 Amount and location through the system
 Understand where pollution is and where it goes, where it comes from
 Also when it got there (when was the pollution created)
 Address pollution at source
Baseline for comparison
Sustainable
Recreation – pleasure, social, swimmable/fishable/safe
Economic value for tourism and ecotourism

Question 2: Where do you go for information and assistance on this issue?

TCEQ, EPA., NMFS
Newspapers (NY Times, Wall St. Journal), scientific articles
Regulatory information
County
GBIC
[discussion of evaluation economic policy and GBEP, Status and trends project]
TNRIS, Corp of Engineers, Gulf Restoration web site
GIS layers (e.g., land use changes)
HGAC
Texas Dept. of Health Services
TPWD
USFWS
Pesticide use data, USDA
Web for data & research
TGLO
Scientific journals
Galveston Bay NEP and GBEP/Status and Trends Project
USGS

Local academic experts (call them on the phone, email)
Network with colleagues (all got to meetings)
Harte Institute network
Gulf Restoration Network

Question 3: What constraints have kept you from helping to resolve this issue?

Funding

- Manpower – personnel limitation on government jobs
- Other resources, e.g. matching monies

Scientific uncertainty

- What does the data mean – how much is enough?

Fighting polluters in the interest of enforcing/preserving water quality

- More resources/funding for data and staff for enforcement

Nonpoint source controls

- Reliance on voluntary compliance

- Inability to locate sources and their impact, clearly showing cause and effect

- Unsure of identify of connection of pollution sources (scientific connectivity of

 - Sources/Status and trends data – difficult to show causality

No planning or inadequate planning

Lack of public education and perception

Inadequate protection/enforcement

Public apathy and education

Lack of political will

[discussion of apathy of people or lack of interest in what happens in their own environment]

Personal involvement with the environment

- Lack of personal experience

- Feel issues are remote and not important locally

“silo mentality” of agencies and programs

- have to think between programs – partnering, coordinating, communicating

- on boards: lack of holistic view between agencies (and even between jobs within agencies)

- communication and coordination as obstacles

Fragmentation of local government authority

Lack of regionalization

- Water-sewer planning as an example

- MUDs, OSSFs

- Large numbers of sewage treatment stations

Inability to protect isolated wetlands

Question 4: What role should the public play in helping to resolve this issue?

Wake up! – turn off the TV. [go see the natural world around you]

“Extreme wetland makeover” reality TV show

Stronger scientific education/literacy through the schools

Demand environmental accountability from politicians

Be better informed

Active participation through tours; see things and vote

Not forget; don't only pay attention [to environmental issues] during a crisis

Question 5: What role should the government play at the local, state, and/or federal level in helping to resolve this issue?

Provide additional funding

Enforce existing regulations

Ensure proper planning

Better inform the public of early planning opportunities and land use discussions/early notices and information

Correct their mistakes and Accept accountability for poor decisions

Pass laws and establish framework to protect resources, even private land.

Set higher priorities for environmental issues

Better management of existing information

Share and coordinate information/data between agencies

Better job of disseminating information to the public

Provide incentives for environmental stewardship/protection

Includes incentives to private land owners and developer to "build green"