
INTRODUCTION

By all measures, Galveston Bay ranks high among the nation's significant estuaries. As a result of its abundant living resources, Galveston Bay is the nation's second most productive estuary. The commercial value of fish and shellfish harvest attributable to Galveston Bay in 1986 totaled 63 million dollars, with 1,196 full-time job equivalents and some 7 million dollars in taxes. From this estuary, an additional 1.1 million pounds of fish were landed in 1986 by recreational fishermen, accounting for about half of all sport fishing expenditures on the Texas Coast and resulting in nearly 600 million dollars in gross Texas business, the equivalent of more than 10,000 full-time jobs, and about 20 million in taxes. Seventy-one percent of all pleasure craft registered in Texas coastal counties come from the four counties surrounding Galveston Bay, and gross business from additional tourism and non-fishing recreation in the Bay amounts to another 425 million dollars yearly, with 7,726 full-time job equivalents and more than 15 million dollars in taxes.

And yet, despite its productivity, Galveston Bay is among the most urban and industrial of the nation's estuaries. The more than 3.5 million people residing in the four surrounding counties (1990 projection) depend on more than 600 utility, water, and drainage districts that affect the Bay, with half of all permitted wastewater dischargers in Texas occurring in just these four counties. Fully, half of the nation's chemical production occurs on the Bay's shoreline, and 30 percent of the nation's petroleum refining. These and other industries heavily depend on shipping in the estuary, and the Port of Houston is now the third largest U. S. port in tonnage.

All told, Galveston Bay provides some 2.74 billion dollars in direct and indirect economic benefit annually. The benefits provided by this natural resource fall to industry, shipping, commercial and recreational fishermen, and the public at large. And the benefits extend far beyond Texas, as Congress recognized in designating the Bay as an Estuary of National Significance. As a major deep water port and petroleum and chemical producing center, Galveston Bay represents billions of dollars in impact on the world economy. Biologically, more than 90% of all commercial and recreational fishing dollars derived from the entire Gulf of Mexico depend on species that require estuaries like Galveston Bay for one or more critical life stages.

Historically, the surprising natural resilience of the Galveston Bay System has allowed these greatly contrasting uses to occur with relatively small losses in productivity of its living resources. In the past, this resilience has allowed the various governmental agencies involved in planning and management of Galveston Bay to proceed in diverse directions with incomplete coordination. But the capacity of the Bay to sustain current uses under existing management strategies is limited, and has already been exceeded in some cases. The Bay cannot sustain further population growth, industrial uses, and commercial and recreational harvests without an integration of management efforts to effectively target emerging problems. Without a coordinated effort among users, regulators, and the public, the value of the Bay as a natural resource will decline.

The need to more effectively manage nationally significant estuaries like Galveston Bay has been recognized by Congress in the creation of the National Estuary Program (NEP). The need to convene an NEP Management Conference for Galveston Bay has been documented in the Governor's Supplemental Nomination of May 1988, resulting in an initial cooperative agreement signed in October 1988. Work under this initial agreement between Texas and the U.S. EPA has consisted of developmental activities to initiate and establish the GBNEP, with the goal of producing a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) in September 1994.

This Five-year Management Conference Agreement sets forth the work to be accomplished during the Management Conference itself (October 1, 1989 - September 30, 1994). The negotiated work activities and timeline presented in this workplan will be the general guide to GBNEP activities, while annual workplans (the first of which is submitted concurrently with this document) will lay out detailed projects and associated budgets.

The overall framework for the five years of work outlined here consists of seven purposes put forth in the Water Quality Act of 1987 and directly quoted here:

- Purpose 1. Assess trends in water quality, natural resources, and uses of the estuary.
- Purpose 2. Collect, characterize, and assess data on toxics, nutrients, and natural resources within the estuarine zone to identify the causes of environmental problems.
- Purpose 3. Develop the relationship between the in place loads and point and nonpoint loadings of pollutants to the estuarine zone and the potential uses of the zone, water quality, and natural resources.
- Purpose 4. Develop a comprehensive conservation and management plan that recommends priority corrective actions and compliance schedules addressing point and nonpoint sources of pollution to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the estuary, including restoration and maintenance of water quality, a balanced indigenous population of shellfish, fish and wildlife, and recreational activities in the estuary, and assure that the designated uses of the estuary are protected.
- Purpose 5. Develop plans for the coordinated implementation of the plan by the States as well as Federal and local agencies participating in the conference.
- Purpose 6. Monitor the effectiveness of actions taken pursuant to the plan.
- Purpose 7. Review all Federal financial assistance programs and Federal development projects in accordance with the requirements of Executive Order 12372, as in effect on September 17, 1983, to determine whether such assistance program or project would be consistent with and further the purposes and objectives of the plan(s) prepared under this section.

Because this agreement is based on the above Legislation, any future legislative changes could entail a re-evaluation and possible revision of this agreement. Also, the EPA OMEP has provided additional specific guidance designed to ensure that the seven purposes of the WQA will be met. This guidance provides that the State:

1. Establish and support a Program Office to support the activities of the Conference and its participants.
2. Improve base programs in the protection of water quality and living resources.
3. Establish an "action now agenda" to implement critical needed actions prior to implementation of a CCMP.
4. Educate and involve the public.
5. Develop a comprehensive plan supported by a financing strategy.

The guidance provided by OMEP further enumerates eight key activities and major products to be part of the state commitment:

1. Priority problem identification with public involvement.
2. An inventory of federal programs applicable to the priority problems in the estuary.
3. A base program analysis and "action now agenda".

This is consistent with the Administrator's determination to convene the Conference and the guidance on the "Contents of Governor's Nominations" as well as Chapter 3 of the Primer. A base program analysis would entail the review, evaluation, and potential for redirecting existing regional, state, and local resources and programs to address the priority problems in the estuary. This "targeting" should be accomplished during the five years provided for development of the CCMP.

4. A financing plan.

This program requirement was introduced in the guidance on the "Contents of Governor's Nominations" and commitments were obtained to develop these plans in the nominations. The financial plan should be developed to: provide the Conference information on the costs of pollution control options to assist in determining what actions will be identified in the CCMP; and second, to describe how the CCMP will be financed. The strategy should include state and public involvement.

5. A final status and trends report.

6. A final "probable causes and pollutant loadings" report.
7. A draft CCMP.

The CCMP must include a federal consistency report and plans for coordinated implementation with monitoring.

8. A final CCMP including the state strategy to finance implementation.

This, then, is the guidance utilized in preparing this State/EPA Management Conference Agreement. The signing of this Agreement represents the commitment and direction established for the five years of the Conference, and ultimately, for the protection and enhancement of Galveston Bay as a vital national resource.