

**Clean Water for Armand Bayou:
A Watershed Partnership**

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Clean Water for Armand Bayou is building a multi-stakeholder watershed partnership in a mid-sized watershed within the Lower Galveston Bay watershed to address runoff pollution. Runoff pollution is much more difficult to address than point-source pollution because it physically flows from a variety of sources, many not easily quantifiable. In addition, many different institutional and non-institutional entities are involved, both in terms of agency turf and in terms of who contributes the runoff. Single-focus programs are thus not likely to have much success in mitigating and abating runoff. Rather than a single focus on nonpoint-source pollution, we are building partnerships that cross the major water and ecology issues in the region: water supply and conservation, flooding and drainage, habitat, and of course, water quality. Activities in all of these areas have the potential to impact runoff water quality. Low maintenance landscapes, for example, that have a direct impact on water conservation issues also have a positive impact on nonpoint source pollution because of less runoff.

The main partnership vehicle to date is the Armand Bayou Watershed Working Group. The main goal of this working group is to serve as a template on which to explore and forge alliances that cross agency and stakeholder boundaries. To date, this group consists mainly of agency groups and a few NGO's. It was felt that establishing cooperation at this level would be important before bringing in a broader spectrum of stakeholders.

The Bush School of Government at Texas A&M University mediated a "Collaborative Learning" process where presentations were made to bring everyone up-to-date on watershed activities. The group explored the major issues affecting water quality and watershed health in the watershed, and then examined vehicles for collaboration that would maximize the benefits of any specific project by incorporating parameters from overlapping areas. For example, we are exploring how to incorporate water quality and wildlife aspects into a flood detention facility, which must meet its designated purpose, but could easily address other areas with minimal design effort. One of the most important conclusions to come out of this process was the relative insignificance of agency impacts on water quality in the watershed. The next phase of work will involve outreach to those areas that have greater impact (e.g., industry and developers).

Clean Water for Armand Bayou is using the partnership approach at smaller scales as well. For example, a Landscape Conservation Alliance advises on the best use of grant funds for establishing conservationscape demonstrations and other educational opportunities within the watershed.

One of the most important overall conclusions to come to light so far in this project is that partnerships add a lot of time to the implementation of any enterprise. Unilaterally

putting conservation demonstrations on the ground is without a doubt the most efficient way to go. Obtaining agreement and occasionally consensus among partners slows the process down considerably. Partnerships and broad participation, however, may be the only way to insure the long-term viability of any conservation program.