

Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land's Galveston Bay Natural Area Acquisition and Conservation Program

Project Description:

The Trust for Public Land's ("TPL") Galveston Bay Natural Area Acquisition and Conservation Program utilizes funds from the Supplemental Environmental Program to provide for acquisitions that will preserve open space in the Galveston Bay watershed, thereby contributing to improved water quality, conserving wetlands and other special habitats, and increasing public access to the Bay, its tributaries, and their habitats. TPL's professional staff (a) works with local interest to identify acquisition projects, (b) purchases the land to remove it from the market, and (c) transfers the land to a public agency or nonprofit organization, which will be the ultimate fee title holder and permanent steward of the property. TPL will ensure that each property is encumbered with a conservation easement that will preserve the property into perpetuity. SEP Funds will be used for the purchase of land.

Environmental Benefit:

The preservation of open space in the Galveston Bay watershed provides substantial environmental, economic, and community benefits for the region. Open space contributes free ecological services, services that society must pay for otherwise. A key environmental benefit for acquisitions along Galveston Bay system waterways will be maintaining/restoring stream buffers that will help filter contaminants before they reach the water, while providing wildlife habitat. Forested buffers provide the additional benefit of improving air quality through the removal of carbon dioxide, ozone, and sulfur dioxide. Acquiring habitat along the bay front or along streams would also provide a buffer for coastal wetlands, preventing their further degradation, and ensuring greater protection of uplands from storm surge and other erosional forces.

The habitats of the Galveston Bay system-barrier islands, oak and riparian woodlands, coastal prairies, cypress swamps, seagrass meadows, saltgrass marshes, and oyster reefs - host an astounding cornucopia of wildlife, including 95 percent of the recreationally and commercially important fish species of the Bay and Gulf systems, and 75 percent of North America's bird species. Yet, these habitats have suffered substantial losses and changes: Increases in open water, losses of seagrass beds, loss of coastal prairie uplands, conversion of freshwater wetlands to brackish wetlands or agricultural lands, and degradation of estuarine marshes. Some of the habitats are seriously threatened with prairies being the most threatened habitat along the Texas coast: Only one percent of these prairies remain in a somewhat natural state. Wetlands, one of the most biologically productive habitats on the planet, have experienced a loss around Galveston Bay during the past 50 years that is estimated at 35,000 acres.

With the habitat losses have come increased stresses on the water quality of the area's streams and bayous, on the remaining wildlife, and on the human inhabitants of the region. The water quality has deteriorated such that 29 of the stream segments in the region are on the State's 303(d) list for water quality impairment for one or more parameters.

Approximately half of those impairments are linked to industrial uses and half to municipal development and nonpoint source pollution. The banks of the Bay and its tributary streams are often eroding and have frequently been stripped of their native vegetation, increasing erosion potential and reducing wildlife habitat. Open space for human enjoyment, relaxation, and health is at a premium, with the Houston-Galveston area having, on average, less than one-half of the recommended local park acreage of 25 acres per 1,000 residents.

Additionally, local communities benefit from open space by the increased quality of life, which is one of the greatest lures for the new knowledge-based workforce, and for retirees as well. Open space can be linked through greenways to provide enhanced recreational opportunities and alternative transportation opportunities. Increased open space can also reduce the heat island effect of cities, lowering energy consumption.

Eligible Areas and Counties:

This project may receive contributions from the following:

Brazoria, Chambers, Galveston, and Harris

Minimum Contribution Amount:

\$10,000