

NUECES ESTUARY ADVISORY COUNCIL

July 6, 2006, 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

**Natural Resource Center
6300 Ocean Drive
Corpus Christi, TX**

Meeting Summary

On July 6, 2006, the Nueces Estuary Advisory Council (NEAC) convened a meeting to review on-going activities in and around the Coastal Bend area and to receive status reports on projects being conducted in the Nueces Delta. The meeting was called to order at 10:10 a.m. Following opening remarks, attendees introduced themselves and identified their affiliation.

Agenda item 2 consisted of a status report for the Rincon Bayou Diversion Project presented by the City of Corpus Christi (Mr. Ed Garaña, Water Director). Phase II of the project is nearing completion, with the pump station, transmission pipeline, and outlet structure all under construction. The anticipated completion date of July 21st has been extended due to weather delays. The City had applied for and received an extension in time to complete the project from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, with a new date for completion of January 31, 2007. Phase II will complete the diversion project and operators will begin operation of the pipeline, along with continued monitoring in the Delta, aimed at preparing a final operating plan to optimize the benefits of the freshwater discharges.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Ms. Marcia Hackett, Project Manager) provided and overview for Agenda item 3, the Nueces River Basin Feasibility Study. Begun in 2002, the study is designed to look primarily at opportunities for ecosystem restoration and flood damage reduction within the entire Nueces River watershed. The study consists of several stages including: feasibility and Phases I-III. The project has just entered the Phase II stage. Included in the current efforts will be a report on existing conditions, leading to a watershed report with an integrated programmatic environmental impact statement at the end of Phase II. The Corps anticipates all phases of the study will be completed by 2011 (assuming current funding levels can be sustained), with a goal of identifying a balance of projects and operating plans which will result in an environmentally sustainable watershed management plan.

Agenda item 4, presented by a representative for the City of Corpus Christi (Dr. Peggy Glass, APAI), provided an overview of the Rincon Bayou, Nueces Delta Study. With implementation of the Rincon Bayou Diversion Project, the City has undertaken a monitoring project to assess pre- and post-project conditions with a goal for assessing the benefits of the project and using “adaptive management” in an effort to fine tune operating guidelines for the project. The study components have included analysis of

aquatic vertebrates/invertebrates, avian species, vegetation, bathymetry, salinity, flow, and water elevation. While the study does not call for preparation of an interim report, contractors have suggested the continuing monitoring program could benefit by such an exercise.

Dr. Paul Montagna, UTMSI, provided the group with an overview of the recently approved National Estuarine Research Reserve (Agenda item 5). The program will focus research efforts in the Copano Bay, Mission-Aransas area, with an initial annual budget of \$465,000. Development of a coastal training program would qualify the program for an additional \$85,000 annually, and Dr. Montagna has suggested this will be one of the programs first priorities.

The NEAC members were provided with a brief overview (Bruce Moulton, TCEQ) of the Environmental Flows Advisory Committee (EFAC) establishment and on-going activities. The committee was created by a Governor's Executive Order issued in October, 2005, to continue efforts to address the issue of environmental flows for the State's riverine and estuarine systems. Following sunset of the Study Commission on Water for Environmental Flows, and failure of Senate Bill 3 to pass, the EFAC was created to continue the efforts initiated by the Flows Commission (and presented in the interim report to the legislature...) and to prepare recommendations for the next legislative session. The EFAC was also charged with preparing recommendations, to be provided to the TCEQ, regarding interim approaches for addressing environmental flow issues associated with the agency's regulatory and permitting programs. The EFAC has established a science advisory committee to assist them with deliberations and will prepare a final report for submission to the Governor, LT. Governor and Speaker of the House by the end of December 2006.

On the matter of "other business", the General Land Office representative, Mr. Tom Calnan, provided a quick overview of the Coastal Impact Assistance Program that will be administered by the Coastal Land Advisory Board. Texas will receive approximately \$60 million in annual funding for four years, with 35% of that going directly to coastal counties. Following preparation and federal approval of the program workplan (anticipated for the spring of 2007...) the State will receive its first allocation in the fall of 2007.

The Port of Corpus Christi representative, Mr. Paul Carangelo, advised attendees, the TCEQ will be holding a public meeting on July 27th, in Corpus Christi, to provide an overview of the Total Maximum Daily Load prepared for the element Zinc found in Nueces Bay. He encouraged folks to attend.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30p.m.