

**Themes from interviews
of Bay and Basin Stakeholder Committee
of the Trinity & San Jacinto Rivers and Galveston Bay & Estuary**

These themes were developed as a way to categorize related comments from the interviews and written comments provided to facilitators. This document focuses on major themes developed from our interviews with 15 stakeholders.

Goal

Consensus recommendation on environmental flow standards and strategies to meet those flow recommendations that allows sufficient water for people, protection for the environment, and certainty to everyone.

- That are recognized as fair and just by all parties
- That are meaningful and that work operationally

Science

- Is science sufficient for stakeholder group to move forward?
 - Some think it possible to move forward; that science is the culmination of many years of work and is never perfect. Move forward knowing that adaptive management anticipates future tweaking.
 - Others do not think science is sufficient to make decisions.
- Most stakeholders acknowledged that the divided recommendation has made this task more difficult. Do we need to reconcile the BBEST recommendations to move forward?
 - Some concerned that BBEST is written in stone and cannot be modified
 - Others feel that the stakeholder group can use the BBEST recommendations as a starting point, from which to craft its own recommendation to TCEQ, taking into account other issues such as economic, social, and water needs
 - Stakeholders differed on which BBEST recommendation was an appropriate starting point
 - Simplify the regime approach with the help of the SAC. No need to live with either BBEST recommendation in its entirety.
 - Pursue more flexibility and less specificity in the regime approach.
- How to deal with the issue that the regime recommendations cannot be met each year:
 - Why should we meet a flow regime each year that has never occurred naturally, given that the systems are currently sound.
 - Determine frequency which environmental flow standards should be met
- Desire to improve science for future.
 - Develop work plan with BBEST for data collection and studies to improve future decisions
- Scientists agree that the stream and estuary are generally in good health

Data and information needs

- How the BBEST recommendations impact the regional water plans
- Can regional water plan science recommendations be useful to this process?
- How to get people comfortable with large amounts of science and data.

- SAC liaison will be important
 - Mentoring approach could help stakeholders new to the group
- How to integrate and assure continuity between instream flows and freshwater inflow recommendations

Relationships/structures

- Stakeholders generally feel there has been a great deal of trust and ability to work together.
- There was sentiment, however, that the group had not really engaged in serious discussions. There was an eagerness to do so, and to do so in an open way.
- There was concern that discussion of difficult issues could surface greater conflict that may divide the group.
- Some concerns surfaced about whether there were efforts to delay this process.
- Many felt differences are bridgeable.
- Others expressed concerns that environmental and water supply groups are polarized.
- Will people be open to change?
- Enable people to consider more flexible approaches, even after they have strongly defended an approach or position.

Other Issues & Concerns

Process

- Will the process grind to a halt because of a split like that of the BBEST?
- Need to develop a plan on moving forward
- What does the final product look like?
- Time
 - Concern that there is not enough time
 - Need to start on strategies for meeting flow needs as soon as possible.
- Begin writing report as soon as possible
 - Subcommittees: Some stakeholders wanted to use subcommittees to work between meetings. Others were concerned that the group needed to work together as a whole, to maintain trust, or at least make sure any subcommittee work was done in a transparent way.
- Support
 - Is there enough support from agencies to get answers quickly?
 - Can stakeholders devote sufficient time and resources?
- Use consensus
- Hear all voices; people need to feel secure to talk.

Impacts of recommendations

- On water rights and water supply: How will recommendations impact existing water rights, and amendments to existing water rights? Will water allocations be cut? How will water management strategies be impacted? How will environmental flow shortages be satisfied? What will be the financial implications on cities of a water set-aside for the environment? What will be the impact on groundwater availability?

- On environment: Is the water supply community willing to give water to the environment, do they value the environment? Consider that depleting and degrading the environment may not be easily fixed.
- On groundwater: What impact of low flows on groundwater availability? What relationship of return flows that originated as groundwater?
- Adaptive management:
 - May ease the need for solutions to be perfect.
 - However, there are fears that once a solution is developed and adopted in rule, it will be hard to move away from – either to reduce environmental flows or to reduce water deemed available for appropriation.
- Concern that divided stakeholder recommendations (similar to the split in the BBEST analyses and regime), would have much less weight with the TCEQ than a consensus recommendation.

Solutions

- Creative strategies exist, including demand management, dedication of some wastewater discharge, drought management.
 - But how can voluntary conservation practices be used to produce predictable reduction in municipal water use?
- Need to come up with pragmatic solutions.
- Simplify solutions to provide a system that can be operated.
- Can there be a range in the recommendations?
- Concerns about ability to really make a worthwhile recommendation when rest of the state has not been evaluated, and decisions in other parts of the state relating to environmental flows impact water supply strategies in this system.