

Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC)

FY 2022-2023 Q2 Meeting Notes

December 16, 2022, 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

The University of Texas, Marine Science Institute, Bay Education Center, Rockport, Texas

Virtual option available

EAC Attendees:	EAC Absent:
Wilfred Korth	Jason Katcsmorak
Janis Bush	Joe Baker
Glynis Strause	Stephen Lucke
James Dodson	Annalisa Peace
Heather Hansen	Joedy Yglesias
Connie Waters	
John Hooker	San Antonio River Authority staff attendees:
Bree Jameson (virtual)	Steve Graham
	Carrie Merson
	Rebecca Reeves (virtual)
	Melissa Bryant(virtual)
	Shaun Donovan
	Erin Cavazos (virtual)
	Citizens to Be Heard & Guests
	Claire Barnhart
	Norman McClure

1. Welcome

Wilfred Korth (WK) called the meeting order and started introduction, followed by San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) staff, committee members, and guests.

2. Approval of September 16, 2022, Q1 Minutes

Carrie Merson (CM) provided meeting notes, updated with small edits by **Heather Hansen (HH)**.

WK calls for approval of minutes as amended.

HH motioned to approve the minutes, **Glynis Strause (GS)** seconded motion; **WK** calls for vote, minutes approved by consensus.

3. Solar Farm Impacts - Steve Graham (SG)

Questions/Advice/Feedback Summary (notes are not verbatim):

WK and SG discussed microclimates over panels, that they are not unlike heat island effects, which are problematic in cities, but would not be able to expertly relay complete answer regarding panel issues.

JG - Was there research seen that describes any contaminants that may be washing off of the panel? **SG** – Not really, but there are chemicals involved in production. Fairly benign installation. There may be a concern for erosion though not found in literature research conducted.

Panel lifetimes were discussed. **WK** noted that their lifetime is about 20 years. Not certain what happens to them once the panels expire, and it is a concern. Similar issues to wind turbines. **WK** noted a concern for airborne pollutants accumulating on the panels and then flushing off at one time. Also, facilities will need to have batteries, and concern for battery leaks and lack of staff monitoring. In Three Rivers area, brush is overtaking panels. Discussed the frequency of best practices for operations and maintenance (BMPs). Texas does not have guide for solar panel BMPs once the area is constructed, thus has to be monitored by land owner. San Antonio River Authority (SARA) does do fly overs annually across some solar farms as part of their environmental investigations. Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) would be the regulatory agency that would have to follow up on possible issues. **WK** noted concern that the 3 proposed solar farms in Goliad, are from Australian companies, who may lack experience building in South Texas land and don't have to do a public process start construction. Just requires landowner signature. Reaching out to state legislature was suggested. **WK** might leverage tax abatement timeline, though there have been some pitfalls in the past. **SG** would like EAC and SARA to monitor the situation over time.

4. Floodplain Mapping Updates – Erin Cavazos (EC)

Questions/Advice/Feedback Summary (notes are not verbatim):

JH inquired if anyone has gone back into the modeling to address changes in the stream flow patterns due to the pace of development over time. **SG** noted no, for now, due to so many variables, and it was extensive effort when we first modeled these factors 6 years ago, but certainly models could be changing. **HH**-inquired about how engineers, etc. acquire the data set so they can make better choices. **EC, SG** – noted it is available online and outreach is continuously conducted to share it out. SARA has the most robust system of pulling and using data, and we do it in half the time FEMA does, with a small staff, because its automated. **JH** asked when considering storm damage, public safety perspective, is the speed of flood water what causes the damage? **SG** – it can, so we want to make practices that slow down and spread out the rainwater.

5. Seasonal Ecological Assessment in the Upper Guadalupe Estuary – Shaun Donovan (SD)

Questions/Advice/Feedback Summary (notes are not verbatim):

James Dodson (JD) – Comment: Cranes need freshwater, therefore teamed up with Texas Water Trade and purchased about 200-acre feet of water from the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority delivered into wildlife management areas for freshwater, and plan to put more into other bay, estuary areas. **SG** – SARA is robust in its monitoring of the basin/bay areas, and the future is going to need to manage that freshwater resource especially in the estuary. **SD** – The difference between our monitoring of SAR/GB bays is because SARA sees the value of preserving the environment versus Galveston where the monitoring is due to the industrialization of the area. **Claire Barnhart (CB)** - noted that citizens of the SAR and GBR basins appreciate what SARA is doing and leading with. **SG**- Habitat conservation plan to identify how endangered species manage water so that they can reintroduce

6. Education and Engagement Programming – Carrie Merson

- a. **CM** recommended postponing this presentation to Q3 in the interest of time. EAC concurred.

7. Water for Wildlife – James Dodson (JD)

Questions/Advice/Feedback Summary (notes are not verbatim):

GS, SG, JD – Discussed the performers. Do the performers do only historical writing or do they do hybrid fiction/historical writing, or both? **JD** – Historical but uses a character to move through the writing. **JH** – Thanks for picking up the litter. Litter in SA seems to be dominated by beverages. **JD** – Yes. The impacts of plastic from the watershed can even be seen in turtle bites in the bottle (looks like triangle cut outs). **GS** – multiple oil/energy companies that **GS** has worked with has had a trash truck program that has picked up half a million pounds of trash and it cost 1.5 million. Number one trash item currently is corn sacks from deer season. **SG** – Significant litter problem in San Antonio. SARA has had an anti-litter initiative for over a year now to educate citizens. **JD** – As a previous stormwater superintendent for Corpus Christi, nonpoint source pollution has a source...and it's people and reluctance to do the right thing. **SG** – Bulk of litter does come from Bexar, but we are learning that there are other types of pollutants coming from Wilson, Karnes, and Goliad counties. It's tires, larger objects, so to help, SARA conducts Household Hazardous Waste events throughout the 3 counties. **GS** – Where should people take large trash, like furniture, to be disposed of? **SG** – Rural areas are challenged to have a resource area to dispose of large trash items, but urban areas, like Bexar, have a range of disposal resources. **HH** – Concerning wells and pumping water for ponds, is there a flow-limiters on them? **JD** – there is a solar pump, low volume wells. Also, the water is creating aquatic habitat for aquatic plants/animals, which is beneficial.

8. Future meeting dates and items for future consideration. – WK & JB

WK/SG – Discussed the next meeting is March 17th. Due to better attendance to the virtual meeting, a hybrid model can be considered where feasible, as southern basin counties may be challenged for Wi-Fi. **GS** noted that her offices may be able to assist with that. We try to rotate through the counties, and March would be held in Bexar.

CM – Reminding the members that the group will wear the hat of the Steering Committee for the Clean River's Program (CRP) which is a key function of the group, and the meeting will be held to learn about the 5-year Basin Summary Report, which the members will need to review once TCEQ approves the draft to do so. The draft will be most likely provided digitally for review. **Rebecca Reeves (RR)** – Noted that there will be members of outside organizations that will also be invited to the meeting, as required by the CRP. The meeting will spend time about the CRP and Basin Summary Report. We cannot provide a timeline, but March 15 is when we submit the draft report to TCEQ and then TCEQ will let us know when we can get it to the members. **SG** – Reminded the members that the EAC is formed as the official and essential facet of the CRP. We recognize how much expertise is in the EAC membership and we want the member's thoughts captured, and that our SARA board appointed the members to provide advice, advocacy, and expertise so we want to make certain that EAC members are comfortable while being engaged in their job. **SG** commitment to you is that we want the members' input because their input is valuable. **SD** – The timing of the EAC Steering Meeting in March is done purposefully because this is when ESD enters their quarterly monitoring process, in April we go through a process to work with TCEQ on identifying places to monitor. Members may have knowledge of locations that we don't that would be valuable to monitor/samples. Because the Basin Summary Report and the monitoring schedule processes are going on at the same time, SARA wishes to establish Legacy Sites. 96 sites in the basin that we do some form monitoring. 50 are those we may not touch. There may be 30 or 40 sites that we may want to move on from. So, if the EAC members know of opportunistic locations like: water quality concerns, community developments, pollution observations then please let us know, as we may look at those sites for monitoring consideration because now is the time as we are putting the plan together with TCEQ.

WK – Noted items for considerations: Litter Initiative Update (**SG** – yes, we can provide data and our success through secondary indicators and trends), Education & Engagement Program. **SG** then noted that the education team is recognized state and nationwide, and the education is an investment in our future. **CM** noted that some of the students she taught are now voters, Beaver Dams (was previously requested and will

be noted Q3), Rewilding (**WK** can be sometime in the future). **SG** – means ecological lift so that areas are ‘wild again’, **WK** noted that he heard on NPR that the Mission Reach was noted as rewilded. **SD** noted there is a San Antonio author who wrote about rewilding on Mission. **SG** – noted that it is children in nature is an important facet of educating students about water cycles, food productions, symbiotic relationships, etc., and it important that people have access to green space, and more importantly more wild space. Though it seems like it would be mostly an urban issue, more isolated agricultural community children may not know those important processes either, because Texas does not have much public land. **SG/GS** – discussion around using Escondido Creek as an education center. There have been 20,000 cars since it opened that have entered showing that even if you grow up ‘in the country’, access to parks is important. **JD** – noted that a creek under the highway, from Victoria to Rockport. He saw a River Otter which lends to the importance of rewilding, **SD** – SARA and TPWD crew saw otters, as well. **JD** – Beavers are historically in the areas, too. **SG** – nature is resilient if you support it. **CW** - Porcupine sightings as well as badger sightings in Goliad have increased. **SG** – Alligators sightings are more frequent because of a strong foundational food web.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:14pm.