

Galveston Bay Foundation's Wetland Permit Review Program

Collaborating to Improve Section 404 Permit Projects

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Wetland Permit Review Committee

The Foundation's Wetland Permit Review Committee (WPRC) meets monthly to review US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Public Notices regarding projects in Galveston Bay and its watershed. The WPRC consists of volunteers representing a wide variety of professional/personal backgrounds and interests, all having the common goal of protecting and preserving Galveston Bay. The USACE publishes permit applications for public review regarding projects that might impact jurisdictional water or wetlands. After reviewing these applications, the committee will often provide comments regarding project impacts to the Bay or adjacent wetlands, providing alternative suggestions as appropriate. Additionally, the committee cooperates with numerous public agencies and the public in regard to projects reviewed by the committee. Our efforts are designed to offer a non-agency position as an advocate for the Bay, and engage decision makers in meaningful dialog regarding not just individual projects, but also the "big picture" of the health of the Bay. Our goal is to affect change at the individual permit and the programmatic levels of the USACE, in addition to providing public education and increasing stewardship of Galveston Bay.

Committee Members

Timothy Love and Sharron Stewart, Committee Co-Chairs
Gary Bell Jim Dobberstine Scott Jones Victoria Jones
Chris McCarthy Bob Stokes Evan Watkins
Charlotte Wells Erin Wiedower Lee Anne Wilde
The Late Ellyn Roof



Photos courtesy of Jim Dobberstine

Wetland Permit Review Database

We are in the process of improving our permit/project tracking database. The objective of this database is to develop a "big picture" sense of trends in the project activity around the Bay. This will allow us to monitor "hotspots" of activity around the Bay, particularly once the database is merged with a Geographic Information System (GIS). Our goal is to use this information to help focus our response efforts, particularly those comments geared toward issues at the programmatic level, such as cumulative impacts. Additionally, this information may allow us to focus some of our restoration efforts toward those regions of the Bay suffering the greatest impacts, and thus benefiting the most from planting efforts.



Above: Aerial photographs (1995 & 2005) of a site depicting development along a bayou in Galveston County; the wooded and riparian wetland within the yellow circle is under pressure as residential development expands toward the bayou. We frequently include aerial photography as a component of our comments as they help illustrate impacts, site resources, and patterns of development. (Aerial photographs sourced from the USGS [1995] and the Houston Galveston Area Council [2004]; preparation of materials aided by AECOM)

Assessing Our Effectiveness

The Wetland Permit Review Committee (WPRC) recently undertook a project to review the impact of our work in an effort to continue to improve our effectiveness and ability to help carry out the Foundation's mission.

We compared our comment letters for projects reviewed from July 2004 through June 2009 to the USACE Statement of Findings (SOF; part of the decision document for a permit application) for each, looking for changes to the projects as proposed by GBF and detailed in each project's SOF. The results of the assessment of this 5-year period indicate our comments are having an acceptable level of effectiveness:

- The committee reviewed 258 of the 332 permits within in our program area posted for public review (78%) and chose to comment on 175 of the 258 permits reviewed during that period (68%).
- Of the 175 projects upon which we commented in this period, we had no objection to 4 (2%), were opposed to the issuance of 47 (27%), and had concerns about 124 (71%).
- We were able to acquire SOFs for 85 of the projects to which we were opposed or for which we had concerns. **Of those 85 projects, a review of the findings indicated that most or all of our comments were incorporated into 48 of the projects (56%), while another 18 projects (21%) incorporated some of our comments. Our comments were not incorporated into 14 of the permitted projects (16%).**

It is important to note that our comments are weighed along with other comments from the public, local government, and representatives of our natural resource agencies. Our comments were often most effective when they were weighed among similar comments from other parties, particularly when they are bolstered with the regulatory weight and mandate carried by many agencies.

We would like to thank the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – Clear Lake for assisting us in completing this assessment!

For more information please contact Jim at the Galveston Bay Foundation: (281)332-3381 ext. 209 or sjones@galvbay.org.