

Public Participation Plan for the Lower Laguna Madre/Brownsville Ship Channel Watershed Protection Plan (Revised November 2018)



Photos: Jacobson,

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

An initial Watershed Characterization for LLM/BSC watershed was completed in 2018. Through stakeholder outreach the LLM/BSC Steering Committee voted to develop a WPP. The Steering Committee selected UTRGV as the lead agency to develop the WPP. This PPP documents how UTRGV will engage stakeholders and develop the WPP.

The Lower Laguna Madre/Brownsville Ship Channel (LLM/BSC) watershed is the area south of the Arroyo Colorado watershed and north of the Rio Grande watershed. It is fully within Cameron County and includes the cities of Brownsville, Port Isabel, South Padre, Laguna Vista, Bayview, Los Fresnos, Rancho Viejo, and La Paloma. This watershed has a population of approximately 350,000 and is expected to increase over the next 20 years. The watershed is part of the Rio Grande delta but its hydrologic connection to the Rio Grande River has been highly modified due to artificial impoundments of the Rio Grande River upstream of the watershed for flooding and irrigation purposes. The Rio Grande River has natural levees which form the southern boundary of the LLM/BSC watershed and the northern boundary of the Rio Grande watershed. The natural drainage of the watershed has been highly modified by the excavating of the Brownsville Ship Channel, development of a drainage ditch network, and redistribution of water from the Rio Grande River via canals and resacas for irrigation purposes. Significant land uses in the watershed include wetlands, urban, crop and pasture land.

The watershed includes several TCEQ segments (Figure 1-1): Brownsville Ship Channel (2494), Port Isabel Fishing Harbor (2494A), Main drainage ditches flowing into 2494(2494B_01), Minor drainage ditches flowing into 2494, San Martin Lakes (2494C), minor drainage ditches draining directly to the Lower Laguna Madre (2491C), and South Bay (2493). According to the Draft 2016 Texas Integrated Report, the Brownsville Ship Channel and Port Isabel Fishing Harbor are currently listed as having bacteria impairments. The Lower Laguna Madre assessment unit (AU) 2491_03 has concerns for low dissolved oxygen and high bacteria levels. The Lower Laguna Madre AU 2491_02 directly north of the area that the Arroyo Colorado flows into is impaired for low DO and bacteria.

The drainage network of the watershed flows into three main receiving water bodies: 1) San Martin Lake, 2) Brownsville Ship Channel, and 3) Lower Laguna Madre. Two of the three main drains flow into San Martin Lake system and then into the Ship Channel. The 3rd main drain, comprised of runoff from the downtown and Southmost areas of Brownsville, flows directly into the southwestern end of the Brownsville Ship Channel. The Ship Channel is hydraulically connected to the Lower Laguna Madre near Port Isabel and the southern end of South Padre Island. A freshwater inflow modeling effort conducted in 2012 showed that between 15-25% of surface runoff inflows come from the LLM/BSC watershed (BBEST, 2012). Bahia Grande and South Bay receive limited overland drainage but do receive tidal inflows from Lower Laguna Madre and the Brownsville Ship Channel. Resacas, ancient distributary channels of the Rio Grande River, are numerous in the watershed and are important for wildlife habitat, recreation, flood protection, water supply storage, and irrigation. Resacas receive some drainage runoff and many are used as a distribution network for Rio Grande water for irrigation and other water uses. However, they generally only contribute to the drainage network during high flow events, with the exception of Town Resaca.

Very limited data has been collected to assess instream water quality in the watershed. There is notably a lack of detailed water quality information on San Martin Lake, the various drainage networks, and resacas; however, there are growing efforts by stakeholders (researchers, local government, and citizen scientists) to more closely monitor these important water resources.

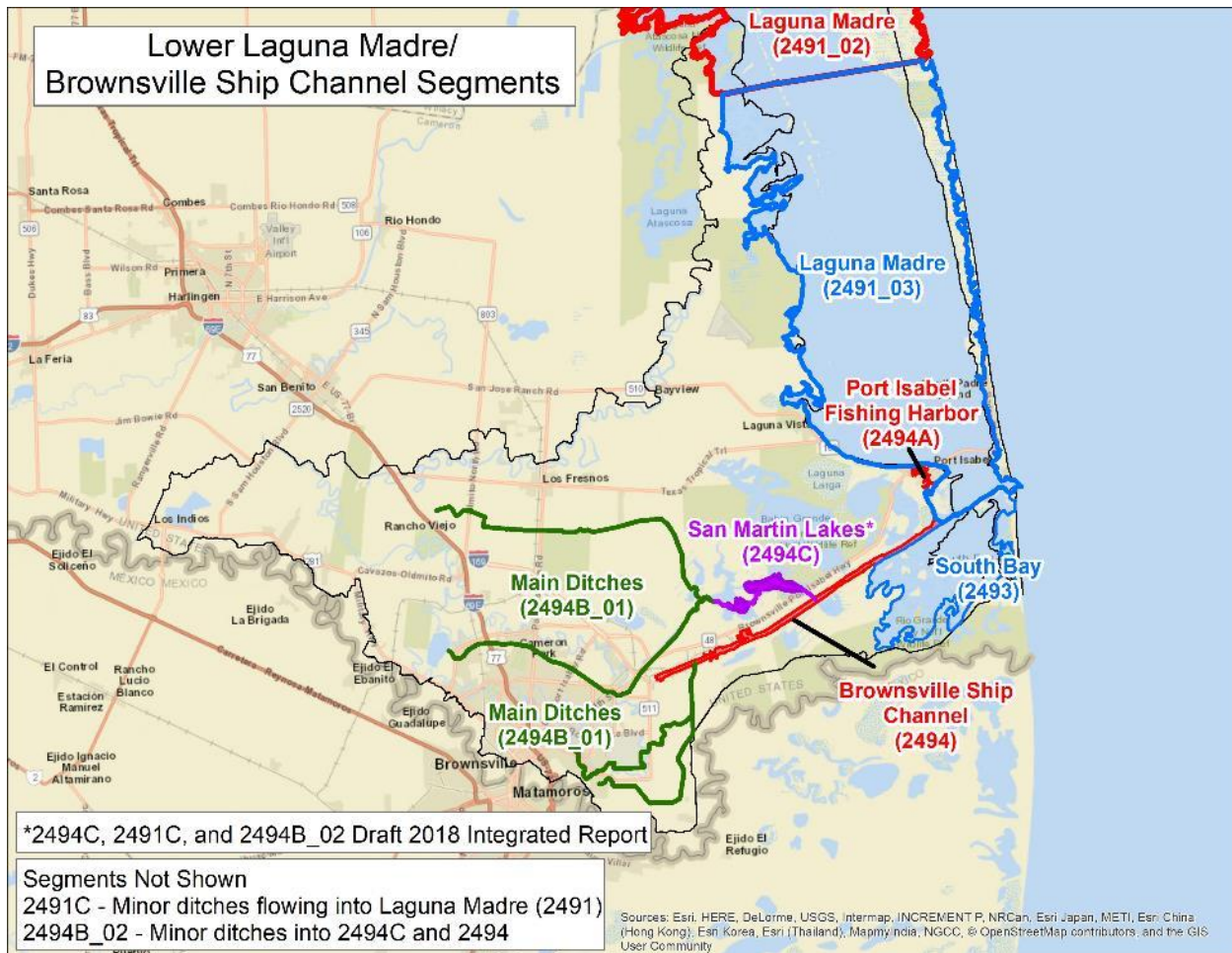


Figure 1-1. TCEQ Segments Lower Laguna Madre (2491) and Brownsville Ship Channel (2494) and tributary segments.

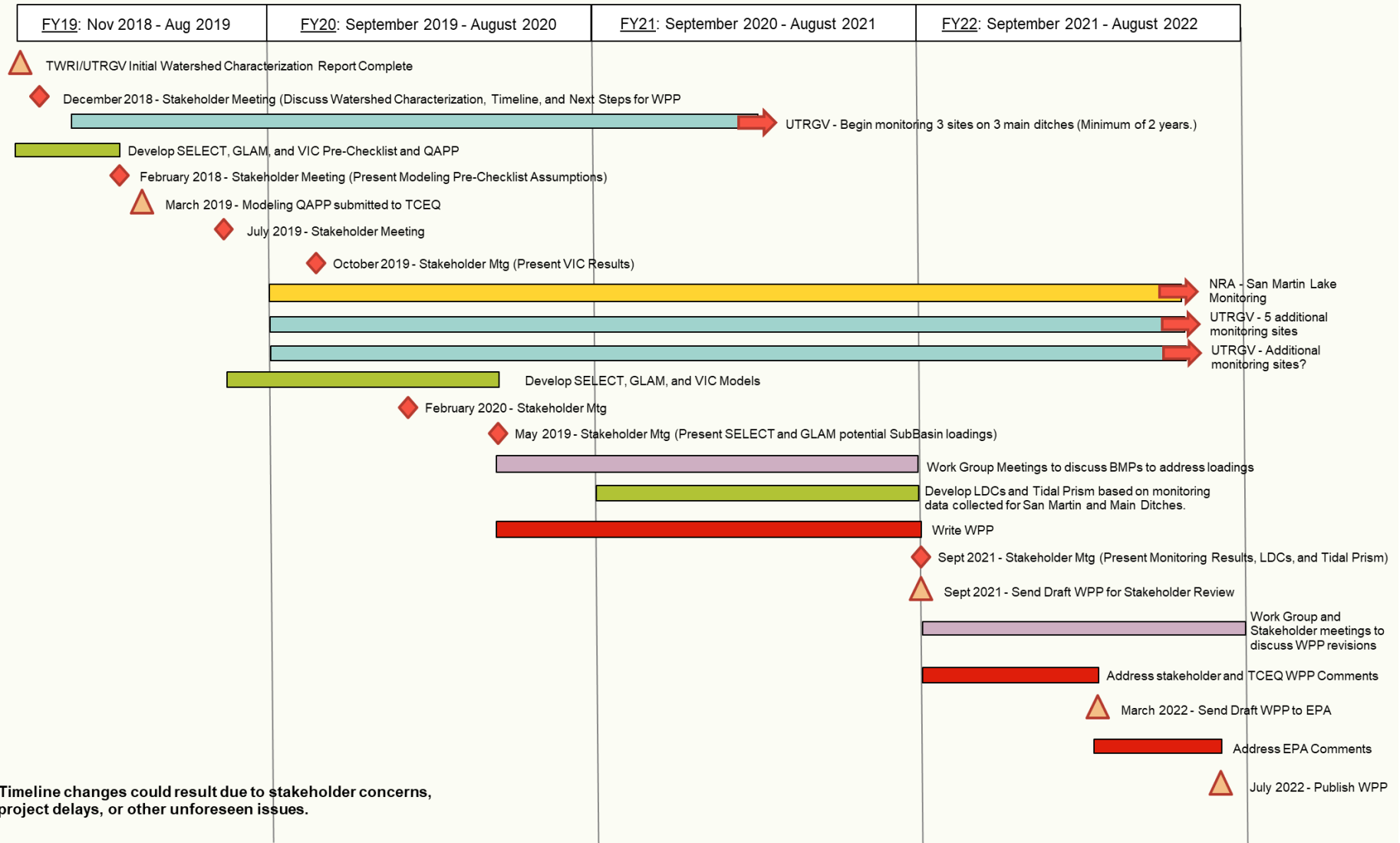
1.4 Public Participation Plan (PPP) Purpose

This PPP has several important purposes for the project. It identifies key stakeholders in the watershed and provides a format for their participation in the Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) process. The PPP also helps raise public awareness and outreach for the project. Finally, it develops a structure for continued input and interaction with the public and stakeholders for this project.

Increasingly, public participation in decision making is vital to the success of community projects. This PPP shows how the LLM/BSC Watershed Partnership will communicate and engage the community in an ongoing effort to develop a WPP. Stakeholder input during this project will be gathered on the LLM/BSC watershed and its potential pollutant sources. As part of the collaborative process, the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) will work with stakeholders and partners to create a vision, goals, and action items that incorporate the environmental, economic, and social values of stakeholders and partners. The UTRGV will also work with stakeholders and partners to reconcile different values and viewpoints of the various participants in order to arrive at mutually acceptable management recommendations.

1.5 Project Time Frame

Lower Laguna Madre 9-Element WPP Timeline (December 2018)



2.0 Lead Agencies Roles & Responsibilities

2.1 Stakeholder Facilitation

UTRGV will continue to recruit a diverse group of stakeholders, both ideologically and geographically throughout the watershed, that are representative of the people that live in the watershed and have an interest in improving the water quality. UTRGV will engage stakeholders from many different groups including urban stormwater, wastewater, infrastructure, agricultural, habitat, and economic. The project team will select stakeholders from existing groups as well additional stakeholders that have roles and interest in the watershed.

UTRGV will facilitate the stakeholder meetings and activities. UTRGV's Project Manager will function as the facilitator and primary point of contact with the stakeholder group. UTRGV will set up meetings, create awareness about the project throughout the community, and maintain working relationships with stakeholders.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

UTRGV will be responsible for data collection and analysis to include:

- Assemble existing data and information
- Analyze existing data and information
- Collect additional data
- Provide final delineation of subbasins
- Estimate potential pollutant loadings per subbasin
-
- Estimate load reductions needed per subbasin
- Write WPP
- Water Quality and Flow monitoring Coordination – UTRGV will measure flows and water quality parameters to fill in data gaps and assist with coordination of water quality monitoring. Remaining major data gaps to fill are shown below.

Major Data Gaps to Fill

- No daily flow measurements anywhere in watershed
- No bacteria samples since 2008 for coordinated monitoring
- No long-term sampling of San Martin Lake
- No long-term sampling of drainage network of the receiving water bodies
- Unsure how much freshwater flow actually making it out of San Martin Lake and into Brownsville Ship Channel
- Flow and sampling at same time needed for load duration curves at ditches and San Martin Lake

2.3 Report Writing

UTRGV with input from the Stakeholder Group will write the WPP and other associated reports. The WPP and reports will be written in such a manner that all stakeholders will easily be able to understand the information and be able to use the reports in order to provide feedback and implement the management measures of the WPP. The WPP will satisfy portions of the EPA's 9 Elements of Watershed-Based Plans, as laid out in EPA's, "[Handbook for Developing Watershed Plans to Restore and](#)

[Protect Our Waters](#)". Nine-element WPPs are required for all TCEQ 319-funded WPPs. Additional water quality and flow data collection is necessary in this watershed in order to develop a nine-element WPP.

3.0 Project Partners

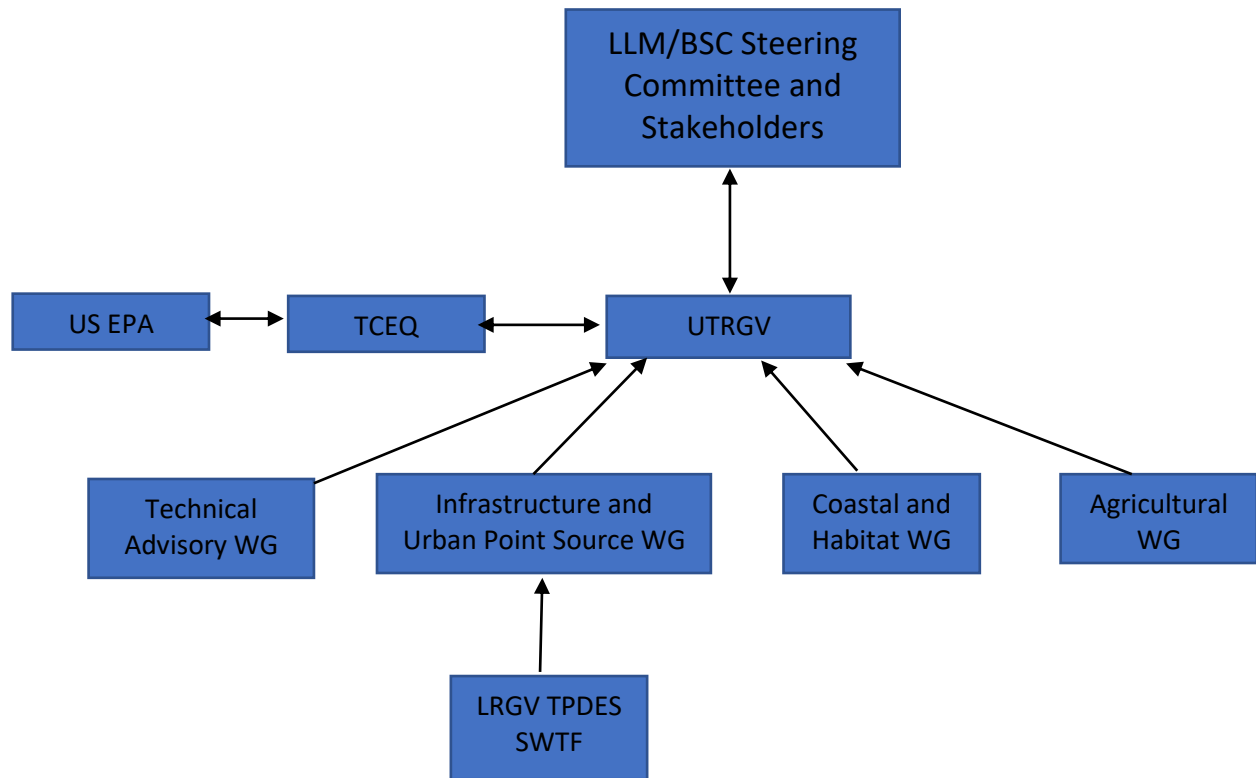
3.1 Partners List

- UTRGV (Lead Agency)
- LRGV TPDS Stormwater TaskForce (Assists with Stakeholder Group Facilitation)
- Texas A&M University-Kingsville (Assist with Technical Assistance)
- TCEQ
- Texas State and Soil Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB)

EPA3.2 Project Organization Chart

The LLM/BSC Stakeholder Group is a coalition of organizations and stakeholders committed to restoring and/or protecting the aquatic resources of the waterbodies in the LLM/BSC watershed including San Martin Lake, Bahia Grande, South Bay, Lower Laguna Madre, and the Brownsville Ship Channel. The Stakeholder Group consists of funding agencies, project partners, stakeholders and technical advisors as outlined below.

Partnership organization chart



3.3 Partners Roles & Responsibilities

All partners involved agree to cooperate and work beside all other agencies to reach the goals of the project. Each partner should work to accomplish each responsibility it took upon itself to assure the success of the project.

3.4 Partners Communication Protocol

Individuals are not permitted to speak on behalf of the Watershed Partnership or Stakeholder Committee as a whole unless authorized by the Partnership or Committee to do so. Members of the Partnership do not speak for UTRGV, TCEQ, TSSWCB, or other Partnership members. If a Partnership/Committee spokesperson is needed, they will be selected by the Partnership.

An open line of communication will exist between members of the Partnership and the UTRGV Project Manager. In order to keep partners informed, all press releases, public notices, and any media communications that may relate to the project will be distributed electronically and placed on the project webpage.

4.0 Watershed Stakeholder Group

4.1 Stakeholder Group Structure

All stakeholders involved in the planning process will fall under the structure of the Watershed Partnership. There are two types of committees with the following roles and responsibilities.

- **Steering/Stakeholder Committee:** The Steering/Stakeholder Committee will be responsible for making decisions and approving the final WPP. Input from the Work Groups, UTRGV, and state and federal partners will be taken into consideration for decisions. UTRGV facilitates the Steering/Stakeholder Committee.
- **Work Groups:** The Steering Committee established 4 Work Groups to facilitate discussion and receive input from local stakeholders. These Work Groups are 1) Technical Advisory Committee, Agriculture, Habitat/Coastal, and Infrastructure/Urban Point and NPS. UTRGV facilitates the Work Groups.

4.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Each Stakeholder Group member should attend meetings and is expected to participate fully in all group deliberations. Members will offer insights, suggestions, and concerns from a community, environmental, or public interest perspective. Committee members are expected to work together to achieve a consensus. The decision making process is further described in Section 4.8.

4.3 Agencies involved as Stakeholders

Agencies and organizations that are considered potential stakeholders are listed below.

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Arroyo Colorado Watershed Partnership
Cameron County
City of Brownsville
City of Port Isabel
City of Bayview
City of Los Fresnos
City of Laguna Vista
City of Rancho Viejo
City of South Padre
Los Indios
Nueces River Authority
Laguna Atascosa Wildlife Refuge
LRGV Stormwater Task Force
Port of Brownsville
Brownsville Public Utilities Board
Brownsville Chamber of Commerce
Port Isabel Chamber of Commerce
Bayview Chamber of Commerce

Los Fresnos Chamber of Commerce
San Benito Chamber of Commerce
Brownsville Independent School District
Port Isabel Independent School District
Los Fresnos Independent School District
San Benito Independent School District
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Texas Water Development Board
Texas Department of Transportation
Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board
United States Department of Agriculture
Sierra Club – Rio Grande Valley Chapter
Keep Brownsville Beautiful
Cameron County Texas Master Naturalists
Cameron County Master Gardeners
University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley

Texas A&M-Kingsville

4.4 Citizens (by interest type) involved as Stakeholders

The project partners have identified major land uses and business types in the watershed for inclusion in the stakeholder process as listed below.

Rural landowners, ranchers, and producers
City Residents
Local Land Developers
Local Homebuilders
Local Home Owners Associations
Local Engineering Associations/Local Engineering Consultants
Major Business Owners (represented by area Chamber of Commerce)

4.5 Steering/Stakeholder Committee and Work Group Membership

Stakeholders are defined as those who make and implement decisions, those who are affected by decisions made or those who have the ability to assist with the implementation of decisions. Anyone who falls within these broad categories or has an interest in improving water quality within the LLM/BSC watershed can become a stakeholder in the Watershed Partnership. The Steering/Stakeholder Committee is composed of representatives from a diversity of interests and geographic locations in the watershed. The members represent stakeholders groups who are most affected by this project. Steering Committee

Steering Committee Members

Chair-Commissioner David Garza
Tony Reisinger -TX Sea Grant
Carol Bosques-City of Brownsville
Joe Hinojosa-Santa Cruz I.D./Stakeholder
Celina Gonzales-City of Los Fresnos
Joe Vega-Cameron Co Parks and Recreation
Brownsville Public Utilities Board
Dr. Kim Jones and Tushar Sinha-TAMUK

Dr. Andrew Ernest-UTRGV
Paulina Vega-Cameron Co. Engineering
Boyd Bilihovde- USFW Laguna Atascosa NWR
Elisa Velador- Texas Wildlife Association
Willy Cupit- TPWD
Albert Barreda- Cameron County Drainage Dct. #1
Marcie Oviedo- LRGVDC
Ronnie Ramirez – TSSWCB Harlingen

Proposed Partnership Workgroups based on the original SOW and SC meeting held on October 11, 2017.
(Elements and participants)

1. Technical Advisory Committee
 - a. LRGVSWTF
 - b. TCEQ
 - c. EPA
 - d. TSSWCB
 - e. Hydrologic Modeling (UTRGV, TAMUK)
 - f. Water Quality Modeling (UTRGV, TAMUK)
 - g. Nueces River Authority
2. Agriculture
 - a. Irrigation Districts
 - b. Growers
 - c. TSSWCB
 - d. TDA
 - e. USDA
3. Habitat/Coastal
 - a. USFWS
 - b. TPWD
 - c. Texas GLO
 - d. Audubon Society
 - e. TNC
 - f. VPEC
4. Infrastructure and Urban point and non-point source
 - a. MS4 Operators
 - b. TCEQ
 - c. Port of Brownsville
 - d. Brownsville PUB
 - e. Drainage Districts
 - f. WWTP Operators
 - g. TxDOT
 - h. OSSFs

Elements that may be included in each workgroup scope

- A. Funding Sources (grants, corporate partners, etc.)
- B. Economic Development

- C. Education and Outreach
- D. Coastal issues
- E. Regulatory issues
- F. Modeling
- G. Sources and Quantification of Pollutant Loading
- H. Available Data and Data Gaps
- I. Monitoring of Water Quantity and Water Quality
- J. Load Reductions, Management Measures and Best Management Practices
- K. Habitat Preservation

4.5.1 Replacements and Additions

The Steering/Stakeholder Committee may add new members if (1) a member is unable to continue serving and a vacancy is created or (2) important stakeholder interests are identified that are not represented by the existing membership.

4.5.2 Alternates

Members unable to attend Steering/Stakeholder Committee meetings (an absentee) may send an alternate. Absentees may also provide input via another committee member or send input via the UTRGV Project Manager, as the facilitator for these meetings. The facilitator will present such information to the committee.

4.5.3 Absences

All Steering/Stakeholder Committee members agree to make a good faith effort to attend all meetings. However, the members recognize that situations may arise necessitating the absence of a member. Please notify the facilitator of planned absences or alternates attending for your interest group.

4.6 Goals and Management Measure Development

The LLM/BSC Partnership will assist with developing the goals and Management Measures for the WPP. The Partnership will also identify and prioritize programs and practices to achieve the goals. The stakeholders are ultimately responsible for the implementation of the project. The ultimate goal of this project is to develop a nine-element WPP and then implement the management measures.

4.7 Decision Making

The Steering/Stakeholder Committee is the decision making body for the Partnership. The Committee will strive for consensus when making decisions and recommendations. Consensus is defined as everyone being able to live with the decisions being made that will have an impact on the watershed. It is understood that to reach a consensus in such a diverse group of stakeholders will require compromise and negotiation from the project partners.

4.7.1 Stakeholder Input

Topics, ideas, and opinions of stakeholders regarding the WPP will be welcomed at stakeholder meetings. Additionally, UTRGV will have an open door policy to information, opinions and feedback from stakeholders throughout the project. However, stakeholders are encouraged to provide constructive input during meetings providing information for the benefit of the Partnership as a whole.

4.8 Meetings

As of now most are held at Cameron County Annex building in San Benito.

4.8.1 Ground Rules

All meetings are open to the public and all interested stakeholders are encouraged and welcome to participate. Participants should be able to freely express their opinions at the meeting, to get all the viewpoints onto the table. A series of guest speakers, who are experts in certain areas of the project, will be invited to present and provide information at some of the meetings to ensure all participants are fully informed on relevant topics involving the project.

1. Be open to new concepts and be respectful of other points of view.
2. There will be no audio or visual recording of meetings: minutes of meetings will be a brief overview of topics discussed and will be emailed to the group and placed on the LLMBSCWP website.
3. All Committee members agree to make an effort to attend all Watershed Partnership Committee meetings. We do recognize that members may have other obligations and are unable to attend. In this case:
 - a. If members are unable to attend a meeting, they should send a replacement.
4. Committee Decisions:
 - a. Committee will approve recommendations by consensus
 - b. If consensus cannot be reached, then recommendations will be decided by 2/3 majority.
5. The Committee will make recommendations based on information they have gathered and on input from stakeholders
 - a. Subcommittee recommendations will be accepted based on Watershed Committee consensus with final approval from the Watershed Committee Chair.

4.8.2 Frequency

Steering Committee will be quarterly. Work Group meetings will meet as needed but once modeling results are completed they will meet more frequently to provide input and develop BMPs for inclusion in WPP.

Meeting times will be set in an effort to accommodate the attendance of all Committee members. The UTRGV Project Manager will notify members of the Committee and Work Groups of meetings dates and times.

4.8.3 Materials Distribution

UTRGV will be responsible for the creation of documents and paperwork relevant to the project. UTRGV will be responsible for the distribution of materials via email and/or United States Postal Service (USPS). Electronic or email will be used preferentially, although if requested, participants will receive documents via USPS. UTRGV will be responsible for posting the materials to the project webpage. The project webpage is located at this address: <http://www.co.cameron.tx.us/llmbc/>. Materials will include meeting agendas, education materials and PowerPoint presentation handouts to be distributed prior to each meeting and meeting summaries to be distributed following each meeting.

Distribution will occur via mail (as requested), email and the project webpage. To encourage equal sharing of information, materials will be made available to any interested party or stakeholder that wishes

to receive the materials. Those who wish to distribute materials to the Steering/Stakeholder Committee and/or Work Groups will ask the UTRGV Project Manager to do so on their behalf.

All meeting minutes will be documented and posted on the project webpage. The documentation of topics, ideas and opinions discussed at meetings will allow stakeholders to see how their involvement has affected the planning process over time.

4.8.4 Meeting Notifications

Future meeting dates will be discussed at each stakeholder meeting to give stakeholders an opportunity to provide input on scheduling. Meeting notifications will be sent out at least two weeks prior to the meeting date to ensure all stakeholders and citizens are aware and had appropriate notice. Notification methods will include:

- Email
- Letters (to stakeholders that do not use email)
- Phone calls to Committee Members
- Project Web Page
- Media

4.9 Media Protocol

The UTRGV Project Manager, will be responsible for communications with the media.

If Partnership or Stakeholder Committee members have an issue regarding the watershed planning process, they will voice their concerns to the UTRGV Project Manager instead of exploiting media outlets.

5.0 Public Outreach and Education

An outreach and education campaign will be initiated to create public awareness for the Watershed Planning Project. A variety of methods will be utilized to distribute information about the project and ways in which individuals can become involved. The program will educate citizens about local water quality issues, NPS pollution, watershed functions, and how individual actions can have an effect on local water quality.

UTRGV will work closely with stakeholders to communicate project goals, activities and findings to ensure that decision-making regarding the waterbody is stakeholder-driven. To communicate project goals, activities, results and accomplishments to affected parties, UTRGV will facilitate public Steering Committee/Stakeholder meetings. The Project Team will develop and disseminate educational materials to watershed stakeholders through methods listed below.

1. Project Webpage (UTRGV responsibility)
2. Electronic mail (UTRGV responsibility)
3. Direct mail (UTRGV responsibility)
4. Local Newspapers (UTRGV responsibility)
5. Public notices (UTRGV responsibility)

As part of this project, UTRGV will create an effective plan to reach the target audiences with specific information and social marketing solutions to inform the public, garner support and change behaviors throughout the watershed. Activities may include:

- Partnerships with schools to conduct outreach water quality education;
- Campaigns to distribute water protection brochures and market the outreach plan;
- Urban growth /Low Impact Development workshops;
- Texas Watershed Steward training;
- Texas Stream Team education events and trainings;
- Septic system workshops;
- Campaigns regarding illegal dumping and litter

5.1 Media Relations

5.1.1 Proactive Media Outreach/Response

The UTRGV Project Manager in cooperation with the project partners will be responsible for identifying the proactive opportunities for media outreach. The UTRGV Project Manager may use press releases to announce partnership meetings, events, general information and opportunities for public involvement.

5.1.2 Protocol for Inquires, Misinformation

In order to ensure consistency, well informed answers will be provided to the media outlets. All media inquiries regarding the Watershed Planning Project should be directed to the UTRGV Project Manager. Members of the Partnership or Stakeholder Committee should not speak on behalf of the Partnership. Misinformation issues should be handled on a case by case basis. Members of the Partnership should stay informed of public opinion and all news regarding the Watershed Planning Project.

5.1.3 News Releases

News releases will be developed as needed to communicate key points regarding the project, announce meeting dates and times and Outreach & Education events/workshops. Press releases will be produced by

the Project Team and will be issued on the project web page. The UTRGV Project Manager will also email press releases to stakeholders.

5.2 Designated Spokespersons

The Project Team will assign a primary and secondary spokesperson to represent the Watershed Partnership. The spokespersons will share a unified message regarding the watershed planning process and issues the plan will address. They will communicate both technical and general information to interested parties.

5.3 Internet

UTRGV currently maintains a website for the LLM/BSC Partnership. The project webpage is located at this address: <http://www.co.cameron.tx.us/llmbc/> The webpage will provide an overview of water quality concerns within the watershed and links to project partners. It will also contain information regarding the project; including media coverage, maps, factsheets, photos, meeting agendas and meeting minutes. UTRGV will maintain the project webpage on its website.

5.4 Advertising

The use of advertising may be used to promote events and activities related to the project. It will be used to ensure appropriate information is being released to the public and that public participation is encouraged at every opportunity.

Times when advertising may be required include:

- Public Notices - properly inform public of upcoming notices
- Events - To raise awareness for forums or other events that offer the public an opportunity to obtain accurate info about the project and have concerns addressed.
- Education issues - To help communicate specific points that may come under particular scrutiny or be a focus of misinformation.
- Emergency Action - when crisis issues need to be addressed immediately via advertising.

6.0 Glossary

AU - Assessment Unit

BID – Brownsville Irrigation District

BMP - Best Management Practice

CCDD#1 – Cameron County Drainage District #1

LLM/BSC – Lower Laguna Madre/Brownsville Ship Channel

LRGVDC – Lower Rio Grande Valley Development Council

LRGVSTF – Lower Rio Grande Valley Stormwater Task Force

EPA - Environmental Protection Agency

GIS - Geographic Information System

LDC - Load Duration Curve

NPS - Nonpoint Source

NRA – Nueces River Authority

PPP - Public Participation Plan

QAPP - Quality Assurance Project Plan

Stakeholder - those who make and implement decisions, those who are affected by decisions made or those who have the ability to assist with the implementation of decisions.

SWMP - Storm Water Management Program

TCEQ - Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

TMDL - Total Maximum Daily Load

TPWD - Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

TSSWCB – Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board

USPS – United States Postal Service

UTRGV – University of Texas at Rio Grande Valley

WPP - Watershed Protection Plan