

## MEETING SUMMARY

### Seagrass Conservation Plan of Texas Review Meeting

Education & Outreach Subcommittee

**Date:** July 29, 2008  
**Time:** 10:00am to 3:00pm  
**Location:** CBBEP Conference Room, Corpus Christi, TX  
**Participants:** Jace Tunnell (CBBEP), Karen Meador (TPWD), Sonia Najera (TNC), Liz Smith (TAMUCC), Pat Bacak-Clements (USFWS), Chad Leister (MA-NERR), Ann Bracher Vaughan (Chamber of Commerce), Nathan Kuhn (TPWD)

#### I. Agenda Followed:

10:00 – 10:05am	Welcome & Introductions
10:05 – 10:15am	Overview
10:15 – 11:15am	Discuss <b>Objective 1</b> accomplishments, non-accomplishments, new issues, and future focus
11:15 – 12:15pm	Discuss <b>Objective 2</b> accomplishments, non-accomplishments, new issues, and future focus
12:15 – 12:30pm	WORKING LUNCH (will be provided)
12:30 – 12:45pm	Broad view of Future Focus for Seagrass E&O
12:45 – 1:30pm	Key seagrass issues to focus on and how to present the info at the June 2009 Workshop
1:30 – 2:00pm	Possible inclusion of the Texas Seagrass Monitoring Plan into the Seagrass Conservation Plan.
2:00 – 2:45pm	Volunteers for active participants in the June 2009 Workshop (presenters, organizers, etc.) and discuss roles
2:45 – 3:30pm	Next steps in planning process. Any other issues?
3:30pm	Adjourn

#### II. Overview:

Jace Tunnell gave a brief overview on the background of the Seagrass Conservation Plan of Texas, reason for the review, the process to implement the review, expected outcomes, and what would be accomplished in today's meeting.

#### III. Discussion:

Everyone contributed to a detailed discussion for each action item within the education and outreach section of the Seagrass Conservation Plan on what had been accomplished, not accomplished and why, any new issues, and where the focus should be concentrated in future years. Below is the list of objectives, strategies, and actions taken from the Education and Outreach chapter of the Seagrass Conservation Plan. Also included are the summary notes produced from the review meeting that show accomplishments and possible new focus for seagrass education and outreach along the Texas coast.

**Objective 1:** To educate the public on the status, values, ecology and conservation of seagrasses in Texas.

• **Strategy 1.** Develop and deliver messages for targeted audiences  
Suggested Actions:

1. Printed material will be created to supplement current educational programs or delivery systems, e.g., the Ethical Angler program.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** Multiple educational handouts created by TPWD, CBBEP, TNC, and TGLO and distributed to various groups over the past 10 years. These educational handouts continue to be distributed.

**Future Focus:** Continue creating and distributing the handouts as well as develop a new brochure that includes seagrasses along the entire state of Texas coastline and could be distributed to everyone, including inland stakeholders that visit the coast. The brochures should also be available in Spanish, especially for the southern region of Texas.

2. Handouts could be produced for Chambers of Commerce in coastal municipalities.

**Accomplished:** YES, however not explicitly produced for Chambers.

**Accomplishments:** TPWD has distributed and currently distributes RBSSA seagrass brochures to the Chambers of Commerce in Aransas Pass, Port Aransas, and Rockport. TNC currently distributes education seagrass brochures to the Corpus Christi Chamber of Commerce.

**Future Focus:** Continue to supply educational material about seagrass to Chamber of Commerce and expand the distribution to all Chamber of Commerce along the Texas coast and some inland areas, including: Port Mansfield, Port O'Connor, Bay City, Kingsville, Brownsville, San Antonio, Austin, South Padre Island, Port Lavaca, Port Isabel, Riviera Beach, Naval Air Station Corpus Christi (they have a department called MWR - Moral Recreation & Welfare - that distributes fliers etc. to personnel & their families),...

3. Provide a supplement to the AquaSmart education program.

**Accomplished:** NO

**Accomplishments:** TPWD has been utilizing and will continue to show an educational video about boating in seagrasses in the adult Boater Ed course. The classroom text includes a component about seagrasses in Texas.

**Future Focus:** The AquaSmart program is primarily geared towards children, so an expansion of this action item to also include adult educational programs would prove to be beneficial in educating a larger spectrum of bay users.

**Other Comments:** This action item should be modified to read: Provide a supplement to the AquaSmart education program and the Adult Boaters Education Program which consists of brochures and a class curriculum.

4. Provide materials for informal education groups, e.g., Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, 4-H.

**Accomplished:** YES, but can be more consistent and improved.

**Accomplishments:** TPWD includes seagrasses as a portion of a Boy Scout course to earn a Conservation Patch, but is infrequently taught.

**Future Focus:** Create a package of educational material on seagrasses to distribute at these various groups during summer camps and other outings.

• **Strategy 2.** Develop and deliver messages for the general public through various media  
Suggested Actions:

1. Provide press releases and public information messages on current research and restoration projects.

**Accomplished:** YES, but only in the Coastal Bend.

**Accomplishments:** TPWD, CBBEP, and TNC have all participated in and will continue to participate in promoting research and completed restoration projects as they become available.

**Future Focus:** Seek out and build relationships with individuals within the TV, newspaper, and magazine community in order to promote seagrass projects as they occur. Utilize the relationships built to have articles written or TV stories aired about seagrasses during heavy bay use times such as the beginning of summer or holidays. Expand promotional area to include San Antonio and the rest of Texas coastal residents.

2. Generate and distribute press releases, radio public service announcements.

**Accomplished:** YES, but mainly in the Coastal Bend.

**Accomplishments:** TPWD, CBBEP, and TNC have performed and will continue to perform as opportunities arise.

**Future Focus:** Similar to the above action item, seagrass education and outreach advocates need to utilize relationships built to create opportunities for more frequent press releases and radio public service announcements. When these tools are used consistently, they can be very effective in educating large groups of bay users. Expand to inland users as well.

3. Hold media events associated with seagrass conservation activities.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** TPWD, TNC, and CBBEP have all held media events during or after seagrass restoration or conservation activities have been performed. For example, CBBEP and TNC on Shamrock Island seagrass restoration project, TNC on Seagrass Channel Markers project in the Upper Laguna Madre, and TPWD on the Redfish Bay State Scientific Area signage and prop scar study after the enactment of the no uprooting regulation.

**Future Focus:** Continue to hold media events as opportunities arise.

4. Create a seagrass conservation website.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** TPWD ([www.tpwd.state.tx.us/seagrass](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/seagrass)) and TNC ([www.saveourseagrass.org](http://www.saveourseagrass.org)) both have dedicated web pages for educating people about Texas coastal seagrasses.

**Future Focus:** Improve links within the web pages to go to other outside sources for seagrass information, update electronic resources on the web pages (videos, links, downloadable reports, etc.) and utilize tracking tools on the web page to see how many people are viewing what topics in order to find out what the public is most interested.

5. Distribute informational inserts to be included with voter registration, utility bills, etc.

**Accomplished:** NO

**Why Not Accomplished:** Possibly funding or lack of coordination with correct entities.

**Future Focus:** Contact utility companies for inclusion of educational material about seagrasses as a flyer along with the bill. Possibly piggy back with other informative inserts that are commonly found with the bills such as the hurricane preparedness guide. Should also have the information available in Spanish as well as English.

6. Add seagrass conservation messages to Conservation Passports.

**Accomplished:** NO

**Accomplishments:** No message has been add to the Conservation Passport. Although, an audio recording about seagrass importance is available on the [www.passporttotexas.com](http://www.passporttotexas.com) website. Seagrass information is found under the “visit the listening library” link; then click “Conservation”; there are multiple audio recordings about seagrasses.

**Future Focus:** Might should reword this action item to include Passport to Texas. Maintain current audio recording on Passport to Texas as well as additional educational seagrass material. Try to get the information in a better location on the website so it is easier for people to find.

7. Make an educational video to inform organizations.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** TPWD created a 20 minute DVD in 2003 about boating and seagrasses that is currently available upon request.

**Future Focus:** The current DVD is geared more towards adults and boating, so the future focus could be to keep utilizing the existing DVD and then also create an educational DVD developed for children from K through 12 about Texas seagrasses could be distributed to schools and used in science class. Could look at other states (i.e. Florida) to see if this type of video already exists and if so then distribute that video to Texas schools in coastal communities.

• **Strategy 3.** Develop and deliver messages for formal education

Suggested Actions:

1. Make supplemental materials for K-12 curricula such as Project WILD, Project WET, Project Aquatic WILD.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** TPWD packages up educational seagrass material into a “Coastal Trunk” to distribute to programs. CBBEP packages environmental pamphlets and books together, which include seagrass education, and gives to schools around the Coastal Bend

area. TNC developed a curriculum that they use for teaching science and a component of it is seagrass related.

**Future Focus:** Add a K-12 seagrass DVD and reading materials about seagrasses to the packages already developed.

2. Obtain coverage of seagrass conservation activities on the school channel (Channel One).

**Accomplished:** NO

**Why Not Accomplished:** This was not attempted.

**Future Focus:** Should try to get seagrass educational material on the Channel One website (<http://www.channelone.com/>) and onto TV in the classrooms that have Channel One.

3. Train seagrass conservation experts to deliver a grade appropriate lessons.

**Accomplished:** NO

**Why Not Accomplished:** Never attempted.

**Future Focus:** Host workshops to train conservation experts and have seagrass educational packages available for the desired grade level to be learned and then taught.

**Objective 2:** To convince the public to take action to conserve and restore Texas seagrasses.

• **Strategy 1.** Develop skills through demonstration programs and workshops.

Suggested Actions:

1. Provide shallow water boating demonstrations.

**Accomplished:** YES, but not live demonstrations.

**Accomplishments:** TPWD and CBBEP currently have commercials airing in the Coastal Bend area about lift, drift, pole and troll when entering the Redfish Bay State Scientific Area where areas of regulation are in effect.

**Future Focus:** Get airtime for other bay users that live in non-coastal areas (i.e. San Antonio). This is currently being attempted by TPWD, CCA, and SEA but airtime in major cities is expensive. Could also add electronic screens into displays at boat shows and other events that show how to boat in shallow areas where seagrasses are present.

2. Deliver boater education seminars on seagrass protection skills at boat shows and fishing shows.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** TPWD currently has educational material about seagrasses available at their annual EXPO in Austin and at several boat shows and other boating/fishing related events.

**Future Focus:** Continue providing educational material at these shows and events and expand to inland areas to educate boaters where feasible.

**Other Comments:** Reword action item to include the action item from Objective 2, Strategy 2, Action Item 5 and it should state: Deliver boater education seminars on seagrass protection skills at boat shows and fishing shows and use visual learning tools

such as aerial photographs of undamaged vs. prop-scarred seagrass beds as illustrations to how damaging boats can be.

3. Provide detailed information on seagrass protection methods in Corps of Engineers permit applications.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** TPWD, TGLO, USFWS, and NMFS review permits and give reasons why it is required to mitigate for seagrass when it is impacted. The reviewing agencies also provide how the seagrass will be impacted based on what project type is being proposed. The Permitting Assistance Program gives detailed information regarding seagrass for all permit applicants.

**Future Focus:** Continue this practice.

4. Provide a workshop on seagrass conservation for Corps personnel who review and process applications.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** The USACE provides a seagrass conservation course to all new employees.

**Future Focus:** Continue this practice.

5. TPW/TGLO/Sea Grant/NMFS seagrass restoration extension program.

**Accomplished:** NO

**Why Not Accomplished:** Never attempted.

**Future Focus:** Discuss the possibility of developing a seagrass restoration program.

• **Strategy 2.** Provide supplemental material and aids which support responsible behavior.  
Suggested Actions:

1. Put up signs about seagrass protection at boat ramps.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** TPWD, USFWS, and CBBEP have worked together to post signs since 1998 at boat ramps around the Coastal Bend area with seagrass information and education, pictures and maps.

**Future Focus:** Maintain existing signs and add signs to the entire coast of Texas at heavily used boat ramps that do not currently have signs or newly constructed boat ramps.

**Other Comments:** Reword this action item to state: Put up boat ramp signs regarding the location of seagrass and their protection.

2. Mark seagrass areas with buoys or signage.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** Since 2000, TPWD has posted numerous boundary and informational signs in the Redfish Bay State Scientific Area. TNC has channel markers in the Upper Laguna Madre in order to keep boaters in the channel rather than in the seagrass beds. South Bay also has signs marking channels.

**Future Focus:** Maintain existing channel markers and signage and create new signs for sensitive or heavily used seagrass areas along other parts of the Texas coast. Need to set up a mechanism to fund the maintenance of these signs over the long term.

3. Get mapmakers to designate seagrass habitats on fishing maps as areas to avoid.

**Accomplished:** NO

**Why Not Accomplished:** Avoiding entire areas from use is not realistic and needs to be termed as an “avoid damaging seagrass areas”.

**Future Focus:** Repword action item to state: Designate seagrass habitats on boating/fishing maps as areas to use extreme caution. Identify these areas on maps and distribute to bay users.

**Other Comments:** Several boating/fishing maps exist (Hot Spot Fishing Maps, Shoreline Publishing Maps, etc.) that include seagrass beds. By educating people where seagrasses are, their importance, and how to avoid uprooting them, maybe less damage to seagrass will occur.

4. Designate “no wake” zones in seagrass areas.

**Accomplished:** NO

**Why Not Accomplished:** Not realistic and not that damaging in most areas.

**Future Focus:** Delete this action item from the Seagrass Conservation Plan.

5. Provide “before and after” aerial photographs of damaged seagrasses to boating organizations or dealers.

**Accomplished:** YES, but could be improved since most educational material really only have the “after” shots.

**Accomplishments:** TPWD has before and after photos of prop scarred areas that they present to boaters at boat shows and other boating/fishing events.

**Future Focus:** Merge this action item in with Objective 2, Strategy 1, Action Item 2. So delete this action item from the Seagrass Conservation Plan.

• **Strategy 3.** Provide opportunities for conserving and restoring seagrasses  
Suggested Actions:

1. Establish seagrass conservation demonstration projects.

**Accomplished:** YES

**Accomplishments:** TPWD has created several State Scientific areas along the Texas coast including: Redfish Bay, Christmas Bay, and South Bay.

**Future Focus:** Like Redfish Bay, concentrate more seagrass education efforts into Christmas Bay and South Bay and then try to establish other large areas for conservation.

The Action Items listed below (2-5) should be merged together in order to create a realistic and achievable goal for getting volunteers involved in seagrass projects and conservation.

2. Create an “Adopt-A-Seagrass-Bed” program.

**Accomplished:** NO. **Reason:** Difficult to identify what responsibility the “adopter” (funding party) would have.

3. Develop volunteer restoration projects.

**Accomplished:** NO. **Reason:** Takes a specific technique to plant seagrass in order for it to be successful.

4. Initiate conservation plantings for public service projects.

**Accomplished:** NO. **Reason:** Takes a specific technique to plant seagrass in order for it to be successful.

5. Include seagrass conservation efforts in elder hostel and other retiree programs.

**Accomplished:** NO. **Reason:** Not attempted.

The “new” action item (from merging 2-5) should state the following:

2. Develop community involvement in planning, funding, creating, educating, and implementing seagrass conservation projects.

#### **IV. Text Updates:**

The group overall felt that the text within the Seagrass Conservation Plan in the Education and Outreach Chapter was written well and in such general terms that it can apply over the years. However, on page 61 there are percentages of acreages of seagrass found along the Texas coast that might have changed since 1994 when the percentages were calculated originally. The group suggested updating the percentages to the latest data available.

#### **V. Key Issues:**

One of the objectives of the E & O Committee was to come up with key issues that would be important to concentrate on during the larger June 11-12, 2009 Workshop. It is hoped that these key issues would be analyzed in detail at the workshop and hopefully influence the future seagrass education and outreach work in Texas. Through this review process the following key issues were identified:

- Expand education and outreach beyond the current areas, moving inland since a large percentage of bay users live away from the coast. Also distribute seagrass educational materials to smaller coastal communities outside of Nueces, San Patricio, and Aransas counties where the majority of work is currently being conducted.
- Keep up with internet technology, by enhancing websites with educational videos, downloadable seagrass project reports, and update links on existing Texas seagrass websites to other seagrass information pages.
- Add a strategy about climate change that discusses ways to educate the public on possible changes it may have on seagrasses, including: sea level rise, invasive species, extreme weather events, water chemistry changes, increase in water temperatures.
- Add an action item under Objective 1, Strategy 2 that addressed the 2008-2009 TPWD Outdoor Annual that is currently being published. This would be a good place to add general seagrass information. Anglers look at this to get the current regulations, they could see a well-placed message.

- Educate local governments and NGO's about the importance of seagrasses and how that can be incorporated into planning and development.
- Convert existing seagrass educational materials into Spanish in order to reach that segment of bay users.
- Work on translating technical reports into easy to understand documents for the general public.

#### **VI. Texas Seagrass Monitoring Plan:**

The group discussed the possibility of including the Texas Seagrass Monitoring Plan as part of the appendices that will be written during this review process and adding it to the back of the Seagrass Conservation Plan.

The group unanimously voted against adding the Monitoring Plan to the back of the Seagrass Conservation Plan for a couple of reasons:

- 1) The Monitoring Plan was written as a separate document called for by the Seagrass Conservation Plan.
- 2) The Monitoring Plan might need to be updated more often, possibly every 5 years (or after a milestone project is completed and it determines that there is another issue to be monitored that was not originally discussed in the Monitoring Plan). The Seagrass Conservation Plan will be possibly updated every 10 years. The group agreed that there should be a summary of the Monitoring Plan within the review appendices being developed and a location (website) in the text of the summary that states where a copy of the Monitoring Plan can be retrieved.

#### **VII. Volunteers:**

Several people from the E&O Subcommittee volunteered their time to help with the organization of the June 2009 Workshop. So far the list includes Pat Clements (non-presenter), Liz Smith (non-presenter), Chad Leister (organizer/facilitator/presenter), Jaimie Ingold (general volunteer), Karen Meador (general volunteer or presenter), Jace Tunnell (general volunteer or presenter).

#### **VIII. Next Step in Planning Process:**

Jace Tunnell and Nathan Kuhn explained that the next steps to take in planning for the June 2009 Seagrass Workshop are to write up a meeting summary of this E&O Subcommittee Meeting and send out to all participants to review. After all comments are received, we will concentrate on Key Issues to present at the June 2009 Workshop. Other information gathered throughout the review process will be written up and considered in setting the workshop agenda. The Steering Committee will meet several times throughout the next few months in order to figure out logistics of the workshop and plan out how the information gathered from the subcommittees should be presented. Volunteers from the various subcommittees will probably be contacted closer to the workshop date in 2009 in order to figure out their role in helping out. The E&O Subcommittee Chairs will keep the subcommittee members up to date with how the workshop planning and organization is progressing and may sometimes ask the members for technical assistance.

## **IX. New Ideas:**

As the E&O Subcommittee went through the Seagrass Conservation Plan, several ideas for what could be done in trying to educate bay users about seagrasses were talked about. Below is a list of ideas that were discussed:

- Prioritize the audience that should be targeted first so that available resources are spent on the group of bay users that have the largest impact on seagrasses. Utilize the list that has already been created in the Seagrass Conservation Plan on page 65, but prioritize in an order that has the primary users listed first and so on.
- Create a new Strategy under Objective 1 that states: Create a database clearing house for Education and Outreach items that have been achieved. This has already been done in-house at TPWD but could be expanded to include works from CBBEP, TNC, USFWS, and other organizations promoting seagrasses.
- In the “proceedings” that are being developed from the 2009 Workshop there should be a summary within it that has what each entity has accomplished and is currently working on that have anything to do with promoting seagrasses.
- Add locations, pictures, and any relevant information about boat ramps to the TPWD website, especially the ones near seagrass beds. Could have educational information associated with each boat ramp on the website. Also add prop scar information and photos about Redfish Bay State Scientific Area on the TPWD website.
- Need to target boat dealers for educating public about seagrasses. TPWD initially visited with Coastal Bend dealers and provided a poster visually describing running depths versus seagrass depths.
- Have the governor of Texas create a Seagrass Awareness Month or at least a day where seagrasses are recognized and can be highlighted throughout the media to educate people about their importance.
- Add seagrasses as a layer onto GPS units.

## **XI. Other Topics:**

Nathan Kuhn mentioned that Carter Smith might be signing the letter of support that would be going out in order to seek funding support for the June 2009 Workshop.