

STRATEGIC PLAN



BAYOU CITY
WATERKEEPER®

2019 – 2021

Adopted September 2018

Executive Summary

Bayou City Waterkeeper believes that with community engagement, science and the law, every bayou, river and stream can be swimmable and fishable within a generation. As a member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, it is the only organization in the Greater Houston-Galveston region that has the Clean Water Act (CWA) as a central focus, working collaboratively with regional and national partners to enhance the water quality of the Lower Galveston Bay Watershed.

For over 15 years, Bayou City Waterkeeper has focused its efforts in three main areas: (1) wetland protection through education, monitoring, and permit actions, (2) enhancements of regional and local stormwater permits and (3) water quality concerns and compliance under the Clean Water Act.

Our activities include a citizen wetland watch program to assist the Army Corps of Engineers in its enforcement activities, an active illicit-discharge and water quality monitoring program, including litigation to hold polluters accountable, and an initiative to educate local governments on ways that wetland mitigation and better stormwater management can be used to increase local green space and prevent or mitigate flooding.

Our watershed is over 2500 river miles long, encompasses nearly twenty major bayous, and countless acres of remaining coastal prairie wetlands to be preserved, remediated, or restored. This strategic plan was developed in partnership with national Waterkeeper Alliance staff, organizational staff, its board of directors, and volunteers to achieve measurable improvements in water quality, wetlands preservation, and community resilience over the next three years.

Bayou City Waterkeeper will:

1. Hold polluters accountable for egregious acts of contamination or pollution utilizing education, communication, legal, and policy expertise;
2. Provide policy and legal analysis on significant wetland destruction permits in our watershed, as well as those that affect water quality in our coastal bays and the Gulf of Mexico;
3. Grow a sustainable, vibrant community of members that share our values to protect our waters.

FOUNDING PRINCIPLES

During this process, the board and staff focused on refining our purpose by clarifying and strengthening our mission and vision statements.

Mission

Bayou City Waterkeeper seeks to protect and restore the integrity of our bayous, rivers, streams, and the bays through advocacy, education and action.

Vision

Bayou City Waterkeeper strives to be an effective and sustainable organization focused on making the Galveston Bay watershed a more productive and healthier ecosystem that serves our communities' natural, economic and recreational needs for generations to come. We utilize law and science in our commitment to a clean and healthy watershed. Our goal is to make our waterways fishable, swimmable, and drinkable for all.

We will know when we have succeeded when key bayous meet Texas' water quality standards, ensuring safe and swimmable waters for future generations.

OUR WATERSHED

Balancing the use of land with its ability to store and convey floodwaters is a continual challenge in what is now the nation's third most populous county (Harris County), encompassing the nation's third-largest city (Houston). Our bayous and waterways are an integral part of the local landscape. Houston is widely known as the Bayou City, and the whole of Bayou City Waterkeeper's geographic region reflects that moniker. In many places throughout the counties, our bayous offer distinctive vistas, whether in their original pristine condition, or sculpted by modernization, including vast channelized and concreted river bottoms. Unfortunately, 90% of all waterways within Bayou City Waterkeeper's geographic footprint are listed as impaired waters under the Clean Water Act - meaning that the water quality does not meet minimum public health standards for safety.

Similarly, our wetlands, known as the kidneys of the land for their ability to enhance water quality and slow flooding, have been destroyed at an alarming rate. Since 1992, the Greater Houston Metropolitan Area has lost at least 5.5 percent of its natural freshwater wetlands with some areas, including Harris County, losing wetlands at a catastrophic proportion. By some accounts, Harris County has lost 30 percent of its freshwater wetlands, including most prominently the iconic prairie pothole complexes. These freshwater wetlands provide critical ecological services to the Galveston Bay system, including water quality maintenance, and stormwater buffering. It's important to recognize that much of what is being lost now is some of the most valuable habitat remaining on the entire upper Texas Gulf Coast. Without citizen support, little can be done to preserve critical areas on the scale that is needed.



PROGRAMMATIC AND ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

Over the next three years, Bayou City Waterkeeper will focus its efforts on three primary programmatic goals:

1. Protect against the continuing loss of our wetlands;
2. Improve water quality in distinct waterways across the watershed; and,
3. Advocate for the safety, resiliency, and economic health of our coastal communities.

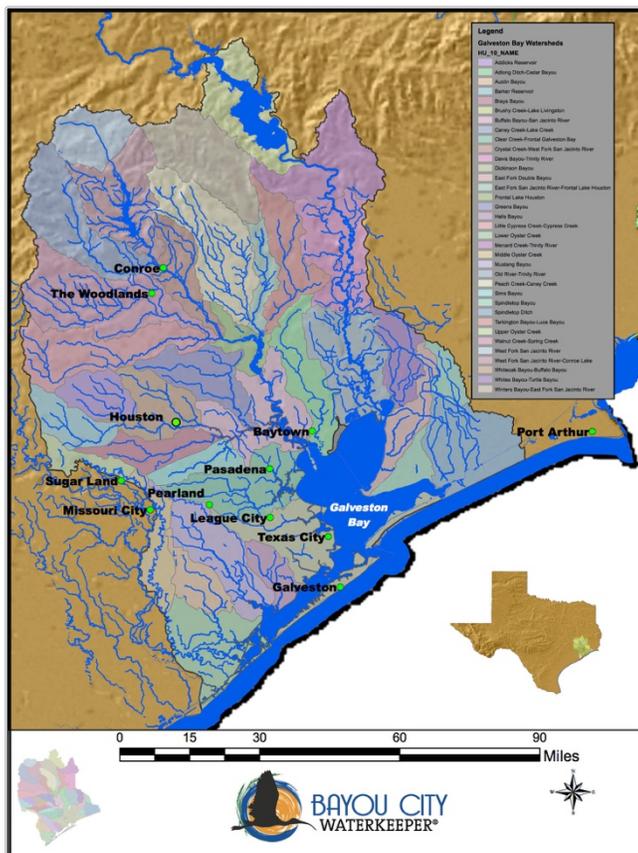
Additionally, Bayou City Waterkeeper recognizes that a strong, effective organization requires internal goal-making and governance. Over the next three years, Bayou City Waterkeeper will:

1. Work to strengthen our organization by diversifying its funding;
2. Educate, engage, and inspire our community by growing our membership; and,
3. Diversify our board leadership and staff with intention.

Strategic Vision

With guidance from Waterkeeper Alliance staff, Bayou City Waterkeeper board of directors and staff refined the purposes and mission of the organization and developed the following strategies to guide the organization as it seeks to achieve the goals outlined above.

Protecting Wetlands



The Lower Galveston Bay Watershed - made up of wetlands, rivers, and bayous - is the foundation that encompasses Houston and our surrounding cities. With approximately 120,000 acres of wetlands in the watershed, healthy swamps, fresh and brackish marshes, natural ridges, and other wetland habitats play a vital role in the integrity of our natural protections.

Despite the immense benefits that wetlands provide, the Army Corps of Engineers and our State agencies provide permission to destroy thousands of wetland acres every year through the permitting process under the Clean Water Act. Bayou City Waterkeeper aims to preserve and protect our wetlands by reviewing requests for wetland destruction permits, and monitoring new and ongoing development projects that occur in our interior wetlands. By ensuring adequate mitigation for each permit granted, Bayou City Waterkeeper aims to slow the drastic loss of wetland resources the region has seen over the last 25 years. But while mitigation and permitting is one aspect of

preservation, Bayou City Waterkeeper aims to work with other conservation entities and partners in the region, including the Galveston Bay Estuary Program, to preserve and protect remaining intact wetlands as much as possible.

Programmatic Goal #1: Protect against the loss of our wetlands and the benefits they provide.

Outcome: Ensure all wetland fill is permitted.

Outcome: Ensure all wetland loss is properly mitigated.

Outcome: Promote policy change to expand protections of our wetlands.

Clean Water

The Clean Water Act, passed in 1972, is one of the major cornerstones of environmental law. Strategic use of the law allows Bayou City Waterkeeper to hold polluters accountable and protect the waters that flow through our rivers and bayous into the Gulf of Mexico. With the help of our members and supporters, we strive to ensure that Texans and our local governments are following the law to protect the people and wildlife dependent on these waters.

Programmatic Goal #2: Achieve drinkable, swimmable, and fishable waters by holding polluters accountable.

Outcome: Provide legal, policy, and scientific support and action when egregious acts of pollution occur.

Outcome: Work with local partners and communities to develop water quality monitoring program.

Outcome: Monitor Texas' Water Quality Standards to protect existing healthy waterways and advocate for the restoration of impaired waters.



Resilient Communities

As rising seas and stronger storms increasingly threaten our coastal communities, those of us living in the Lower Galveston Bay watershed understand the challenges of living with water. In the wake of Hurricane Harvey and its devastating floods, we can no longer solely take the post-disaster management approach. Reducing the risk to our coastal communities will require significant social and economic shifts, and adaptation in these areas must be a priority.

Programmatic Goal #3: Advocate for the safety, resiliency, and economic health of our coastal communities in times of flooding and sea-level rise.

Outcome: Promote alternative approaches to “grey infrastructure” for flood and surge protection.

Outcome: Green stormwater infrastructure, and other “blue-green” adaptive measures, are implemented to provide resiliency and equitable protection for all communities.

Organizational Development

As Bayou City Waterkeeper continues to grow in staff and leadership, it is critical to maintain clarity and adaptability in its path towards a successful and stronger organization. In doing so, we strengthen the organization, increase community awareness and participation, and provide educational opportunities to amplify the voices of our waterways.

Organizational Goal #1: Bayou City Waterkeeper raises funds from diverse sources to successfully implement the strategic plan and secure its financial stability.

Organizational Goal #2: Bayou City Waterkeeper expands and enhances its engagement with supporters, allies, communities, decision-makers, and the private sector.



Organizational Goal #3: Bayou City Waterkeeper grows its relationships and membership to reflect the diversity of our region by valuing all backgrounds and experiences into our work and mission.

Organizational Goal #4: Bayou City Waterkeeper’s board of directors has the experience and perspectives needed to support the mission and vision of the organization.

Conclusion

This strategic plan takes advantage of Bayou City Waterkeeper’s natural growth and progression as an organization by enhancing and expanding existing programs. By focusing on programs that already have respect within the community, and are familiar with donors and members alike, the organization seeks to expand its fundraising and development efforts to further communicate the narrative that clean water is a fundamental right – and should be accessible to all. Hurricane Harvey’s impact on the region has created new and exciting opportunities to engage with stakeholders and decision-makers, as well as new funding streams to enhance the recovery and resiliency of the region. By assessing our strengths, and developing clear, identifiable goals and outcomes that align with Bayou City Waterkeeper’s mission and vision, the staff and board members can be held accountable to ensuring the organization’s success.