



**BAYOU CITY
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Currents of Change 2025 Impact Report

BCWK in 2025

- **7 million people** in our watershed
- **500,000+ people** living in flood-vulnerable communities
- Advanced BCWK's **first policy agenda**, *Turning the Tide*
- **Wins in national lawsuits** strengthen rules for industrial facilities and review of offshore oil and gas leasing
- Supported public education around **Texas Proposition 4** and the Texas Water Fund
- Called for a **\$20 million Private Sewer Lateral Fund**
- Engaged for the **first time** in the 89th Texas Legislative Session
- Submitted or joined **100 public comments**, letters, and sign-ons
- Partnered with **Stanford University** and community researchers on nature-based flooding solutions
- Helped push for stronger **flood bond transparency** and accountability in Harris County

100

Comments
Written

Wetland Watch

Wetland walks:

4

Investigations:

3

404 comments:

5

378 acres of
wetlands impact

56

Events +
Presentations

3 million

in city of Houston benefitting
from ongoing investments under
the city of Houston consent
decree through 2036

136,000+

People near the Ship Channel
benefiting from stronger
pollution regulations

87,000

Baytown residents who will
benefit from upcoming
infrastructure improvements

2000+

People Engaged in
our Watershed

Total amount of
sewage overflows

911,068

Gallons

Total sewage
overflow incidents

1,427



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In 2025, Bayou City Waterkeeper entered a new chapter.

We launched Turning the Tide, our first policy agenda, and used it to carry community priorities into the places where water decisions are made, from Houston City Hall and Harris County Commissioners Court to the Texas Legislature, state and federal agencies, national coalitions, and the courts.

The passage of Texas Proposition 4 marked one of the year's biggest openings for long-term water infrastructure funding. For BCWK, the work was not only to support historic investment, but to insist that implementation responds to the realities communities face across the Lower Galveston Bay Watershed: chronic sewage overflows, water loss, flooding, affordability challenges, industrial risk, disappearing wetlands, and decades of disinvestment in Black, Brown, lower-wealth, and frontline communities.

Addressing challenges woven this deeply into our region requires us to change not only our infrastructure, but also how decisions are made and who has the power to shape them.

At the heart of this work is a belief that water justice requires more than technical fixes. It requires legal accountability, public data, community science, language access, policy power, and decision-making processes that people can actually shape.

None of this work happens alone. We are deeply grateful to the community members who shared their stories, the partners who organized alongside us, the funders who invested in this work, and the staff and board members who helped move BCWK into this next chapter.



Together, we are turning the tide toward a watershed where clean water, protected wetlands, accountable infrastructure, and community power flow together.

Kristen Schlemmer
Co-Executive Director

Ayanna Jolivet Mccloud
Co-Executive Director

BCWK By the Numbers

Advocacy

Our staff and community members gave oral public testimony before officials 20 times to influence local and regional policy

Local, county, state, federal, and legal decision-making spaces engaged

100 public comments, letters, and sign-ons submitted or joined

Community

Justice in the Sewers hub and map used to connect overflow data to resident experience

Community audiograms and stories elevated sewage impacts

Stanford partnership supported research in Northeast Houston and Baytown, sharing nature-based flooding data back with residents

Wetland walks with community to educate residents about green infrastructure as a water solution and gather input on their priorities

Visibility

21 press contacts, interviews, briefings, or media hits tracked

Topics included sewage overflows, Prop 4, flood bond prioritization, PFAS/WOTUS, the Ike Dike, groundwater pollution, nature-based flood mitigation, and water disinvestment

Watershed

Water Justice Zones: Northeast Houston, Port Communities, Southeast Houston, Brazoria

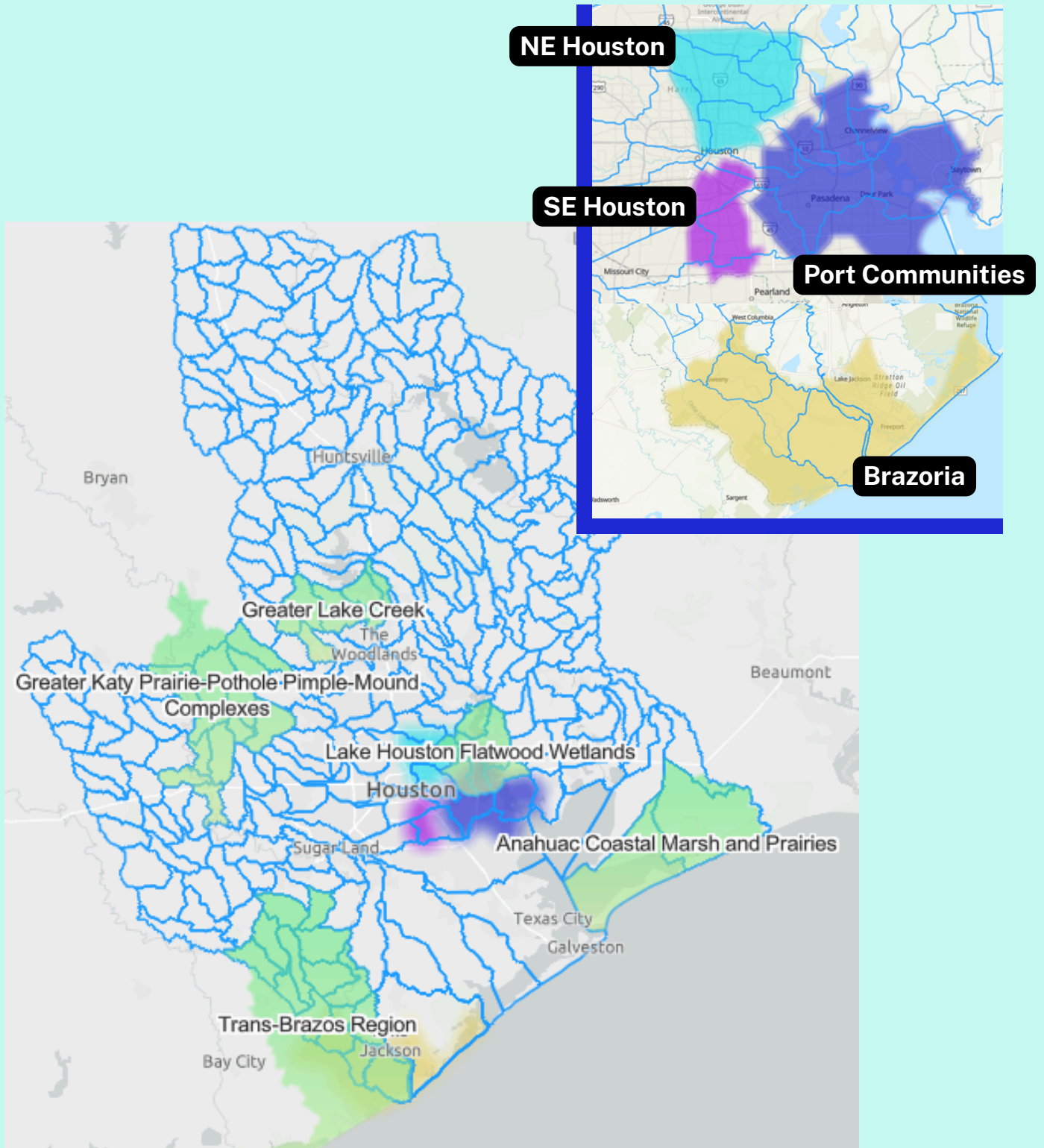
Priorities

Exploratory zones: Galveston and Southwest Houston

Five Critical Wetland Areas: Lake Houston, Greater Lake Creek, Katy Prairie, Trans-Brazos Region, Anahuac

Where we work

The Lower Galveston Bay Watershed is one connected water system. Sewage failures, flooding, industrial pollution, wetland loss, and coastal resilience are not separate problems; they move through the same watershed and often affect the same communities. Below are the Water Justice Zones and Five Critical Wetlands where our work is focused.



Turning the Tide Community priorities to public policy

In 2025, Bayou City Waterkeeper launched *Turning the Tide*, our first policy agenda.

Throughout the year, BCWK has used *Turning the Tide* as a strategic framework for action: connecting resident stories, public data, legal accountability, community science, and coalition priorities to decisions being made at City Hall, Harris County Commissioners Court, the Texas Legislature, state agencies, and federal advocacy spaces to advance Clean Water.

The year's biggest policy opening was Texas Proposition 4 and the Texas Water Fund. Prop 4 created the possibility of long-term water infrastructure funding across Texas. BCWK's role was to help ensure that Houston's urgent needs, sewage failures, water loss, flooding, affordability, wetland protection, and infrastructure disinvestment, were part of the conversation and state-wide decision making.



That same policy framework shaped BCWK's advocacy on State Revolving Funds, Flood Infrastructure Fund, regional water planning, county flood bond oversight, industrial accountability, public participation, and implementation of Houston's wastewater consent decree.



Turning the Tide has given BCWK a way to carry community priorities across programs and into the systems that decide how public dollars, legal protections, and infrastructure investments move.

Policy Pathways

Community Stories

Residents documented sewage overflows, flooding, drainage failures, industrial risk, and infrastructure gaps.

BCWK Policy Agenda

Turning the Tide translated those experiences into clear policy priorities.

Comment + Testimony

BCWK submitted comments, testified, joined coalitions, and created public education resources.

Legislative Decisions

BCWK engaged the Texas Legislature, TWDB, Harris County, City of Houston, and federal partners.

Implementation Watchdog

BCWK continues pushing to ensure public funding and legal commitments reach communities most impacted.

Key Policy Moments

Prop 4 + Texas Water Fund

BCWK helped educate communities about the year's biggest water infrastructure funding opportunity and pushed for equitable implementation.

First Legislative Engagement

BCWK engaged directly in the 89th Texas Legislative Session, connecting Houston's water justice priorities to statewide policy debates.

TWDB + SRF Advocacy

BCWK engaged the Texas Water Development Board through State Revolving Fund comments and broader advocacy around how water infrastructure dollars are allocated.

Regional Water Planning

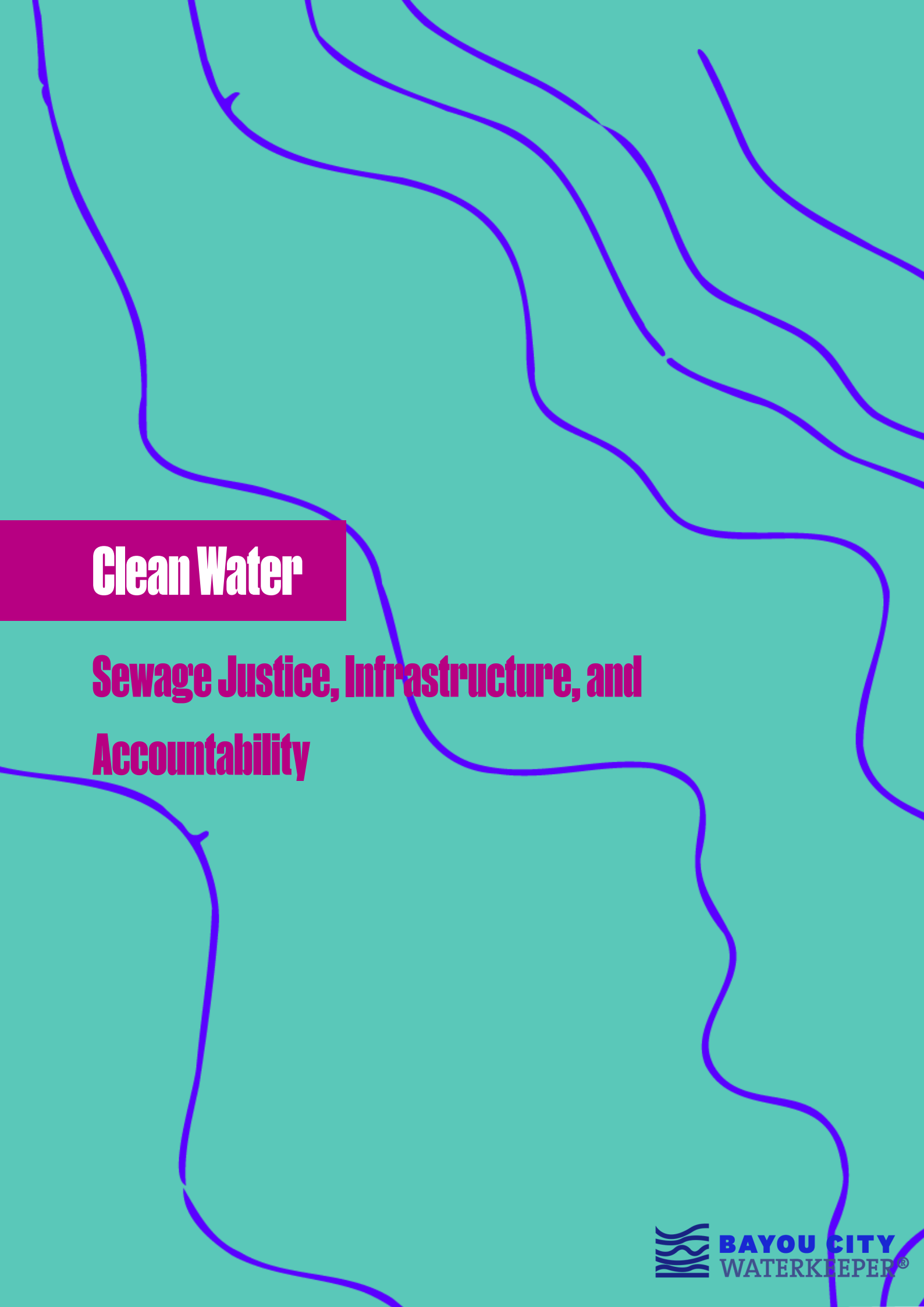
BCWK submitted Region H Water Plan comments calling for repair-first strategies, conservation, nature-based solutions, public engagement, and stronger protections for water quality and ecosystems.

Flood Infrastructure Fund

BCWK submitted comments on the Flood Infrastructure Fund, supporting projects in communities like Pleasantville and Sunnyside while raising concerns about scoring methods that may overlook disadvantaged communities.

Local + County Advocacy

BCWK brought policy demands to City Hall and Harris County, including sewage justice, the Private Sewer Lateral Fund, city budget advocacy, flood bond prioritization, and infrastructure transparency.

The background of the entire page is a solid teal color. Overlaid on this are several thick, dark teal wavy lines that flow from the top left towards the bottom right, creating a sense of movement and water. A solid pink rectangle is positioned on the left side, partially overlapping the teal background and the wavy lines.

Clean Water

**Sewage Justice, Infrastructure, and
Accountability**

Years into Houston's wastewater consent decree, too many families are still living with sewage.

In 2021, a federal judge approved Houston's \$2 billion wastewater consent decree, requiring the City to make major sanitary sewer upgrades over 15 years. Four years later, the decree remains a critical clean water accountability tool, but sewage overflows are still a persistent crisis.

Since 2018, BCWK has tracked more than 9,300 sewage overflows across Houston. Since January 8, 2021, more than 6 million gallons of sewage have spilled into local waterways, with Black, Brown, and lower-wealth neighborhoods facing disproportionate exposure.



In 2025, BCWK marked the consent decree's four-year anniversary by renewing its push for sewage justice through the Justice in the Sewers campaign. Working with Northeast Action Collective and West Street Recovery, we paired public overflow data with resident stories, community audiograms, legal accountability, and public advocacy to show that Houston's wastewater crisis is also a public health, housing, and environmental justice issue.

A central campaign demand is a \$20 million Private Sewer Lateral Fund to help homeowners in the hardest-hit communities repair failing private sewer lines. BCWK will continue pushing to protect the consent decree, close implementation gaps, improve transparency, and ensure clean water investments reach the communities most impacted by sewage infrastructure failures.

Campaign Demand: Creating A Private Sewer Lateral Fund

The Problem

Houston's wastewater consent decree requires major public sewer upgrades, but many families are still dealing with sewage problems at home.

Private sewer laterals (the lines that connect homes to the public sewer system) can fail, crack, or back up. When that happens, residents may be left with sewage in their yards, streets, or homes.

The Gap

The consent decree does not address private sewer laterals.

That leaves many homeowners responsible for expensive repairs they cannot afford, even when the problem is connected to broader infrastructure failures and years of disinvestment.

This burden falls hardest on Black, Brown, and lower-wealth communities already facing chronic sewage overflows and aging infrastructure.

The Solution

BCWK is calling for a Private Sewer Lateral Fund to help homeowners in the hardest-hit communities repair failing private sewer lines.

Public investment is necessary to make sure clean water infrastructure improvements reach the residents most affected, not just the public pipes beneath the street.

Policy in Action: Local Sewage Failures to State Water Funding



Houston's sewage crisis is local, but the solutions require action at every level of government.

In 2025, BCWK connected resident experiences with sewage overflows, water loss, flooding, affordability, and infrastructure disinvestment to the year's biggest statewide water policy opportunity: Texas Proposition 4 and the Texas Water Fund.

Prop 4 created the possibility of long-term water infrastructure funding for Texas. BCWK's role was to help make sure Houston's urgent needs were part of the conversation and to push for funding decisions that prioritize the communities most affected by failing water systems.

At City Hall and County Commissioners Court

Local demand. Local accountability.

BCWK called on the City of Houston address ongoing sewage overflows, and create a \$20 million Private Sewer Lateral Fund for residents in the hardest-hit communities and ensure meaningful and equitable investments in our water infrastructure and an integrated water management through One Water. BCWK called on Harris County to ensure that our region's flood infrastructure reaches the worst first.

- Justice in the Sewers campaign
- April 15 City Hall advocacy
- Private Sewer Lateral Fund demand
- City budget advocacy
- Consent decree accountability
- One Water Plan
- Harris County Flood Control investments rooted in equity
- Harris County Budget



At the Legislature

Bringing Houston's water justice needs to the state.

In BCWK's first year directly engaging the Texas Legislature, we worked to ensure state water funding conversations included sewage failures, water loss, affordability, flooding, and long-term infrastructure repair.

- 89th Texas Legislative Session advocacy
- Texas Water Fund and Prop 4 education
- Texas Water Day
- EJ Advocacy Day at the Legislature
- Special session flood advocacy

At State Agencies

Turning public funding into public accountability.

BCWK engaged the Texas Water Development Board and state planning processes to push for equitable implementation of water funding, stronger community engagement, and investment in communities facing the greatest infrastructure burdens.

- First direct engagement with TWDB
- State Revolving Fund advocacy
- Southern SRF Cohort leadership
- Flood Infrastructure Fund comments
- Regional Water Plan comments
- State Flood Plan comments





Industrial Risk

Legal Accountability in the Ship Channel Region



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Houston's industrial corridor is a national economic engine, but the **pollution burden** falls unevenly on **nearby waterways and communities**. BCWK's industrial risk work connects Clean Water Act enforcement, permitting accountability, public participation, and impacted communities' right-to-know.



National Clean Water Act Win

In 2025, Bayou City Waterkeeper helped secure a major legal victory when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit ruled that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) acted unlawfully by declining to update decades-old wastewater pollution standards for some of the nation's most polluting industries.

While the decision was national in scope, its impact is especially important for Greater Houston, where many of these industries operate along the Houston Ship Channel and Buffalo Bayou.

What the Court Decided

The court ruled that EPA could not continue relying on outdated wastewater standards without adequately evaluating whether stronger pollution limits were needed.

The decision requires EPA to revisit pollution standards for seven major industrial sectors whose wastewater can affect rivers, bayous, and coastal waters across the country.

Why It Matters in Houston

Houston is home to one of the nation's largest concentrations of industrial facilities.

Many of the industries covered by the ruling discharge wastewater into waterways connected to Buffalo Bayou and the Houston Ship Channel, places where industrial pollution, public health, and environmental justice intersect.

Stronger national standards can lead to cleaner waterways, healthier communities, and greater accountability for industries that have operated under outdated pollution limits for decades.



BCWK's Role

Bayou City Waterkeeper participated in the case as part of a national coalition represented by the Environmental Integrity Project.

The case reflects BCWK's broader strategy of connecting national Clean Water Act protections to the everyday experiences of communities living near Houston's industrial corridor.

Permitting, Public Participation, and the Right to Know

Many water decisions happen before pollution reaches a bayou, wetland, or neighborhood. They happen in **permit applications, public notices, agency reviews, comment periods, and technical documents** that are often difficult for residents to access.

In 2025, BCWK worked to defend the public's right to participate in environmental permitting and pushed for stronger transparency around industrial development, dredging, wastewater, wetlands, and port-related projects.

Why Permitting Matters

Permits decide what industries can build, discharge, dredge, fill, expand, or alter.

When permitting processes are rushed, unclear, or inaccessible, communities lose the ability to understand risks before decisions are made. For port communities and neighborhoods near industrial corridors, meaningful public participation is not just a formality; it is a clean water protection.

BCWK's Role

BCWK strengthened public accountability in permitting by reviewing permits, submitting comments, joining coalition letters, and opposing efforts to weaken or fast-track Clean Water Act protections.



Permit Watch

Community Participation

BCWK supported an amicus brief before the Texas Supreme Court defending the public's right to participate in environmental permitting decisions.

USACE Permit Review

BCWK reviewed and commented on U.S. Army Corps of Engineers permits affecting wetlands, dredging, waterways, and industrial development in the Galveston District and beyond.

Project 11

BCWK continued tracking port-related projects and industrial expansion affecting communities near the Houston Ship Channel.

Petrochemical Wastewater

BCWK pushed for stronger accountability around refinery and petrochemical wastewater, connecting local permitting concerns to national Clean Water Act standards.

Section 404 Permits

BCWK raised concerns about efforts to fast-track Clean Water Act Section 404 permits, which govern certain dredge-and-fill activities in wetlands and waterways.

WOTUS Advocacy

BCWK engaged in advocacy around Waters of the United States protections, helping defend the waterways and wetlands that fall under the Clean Water Act.



Tracking “Forever Chemicals” in Hunting Bayou

BCWK partnered with Waterkeeper Alliance to sample for PFAS in Hunting Bayou. Often called “forever chemicals,” PFAS are a group of persistent synthetic compounds linked to serious environmental and public health concerns.

This work helped connect local water quality concerns in Houston to broader national questions about industrial pollution, toxic exposure, and the need for stronger regulation.

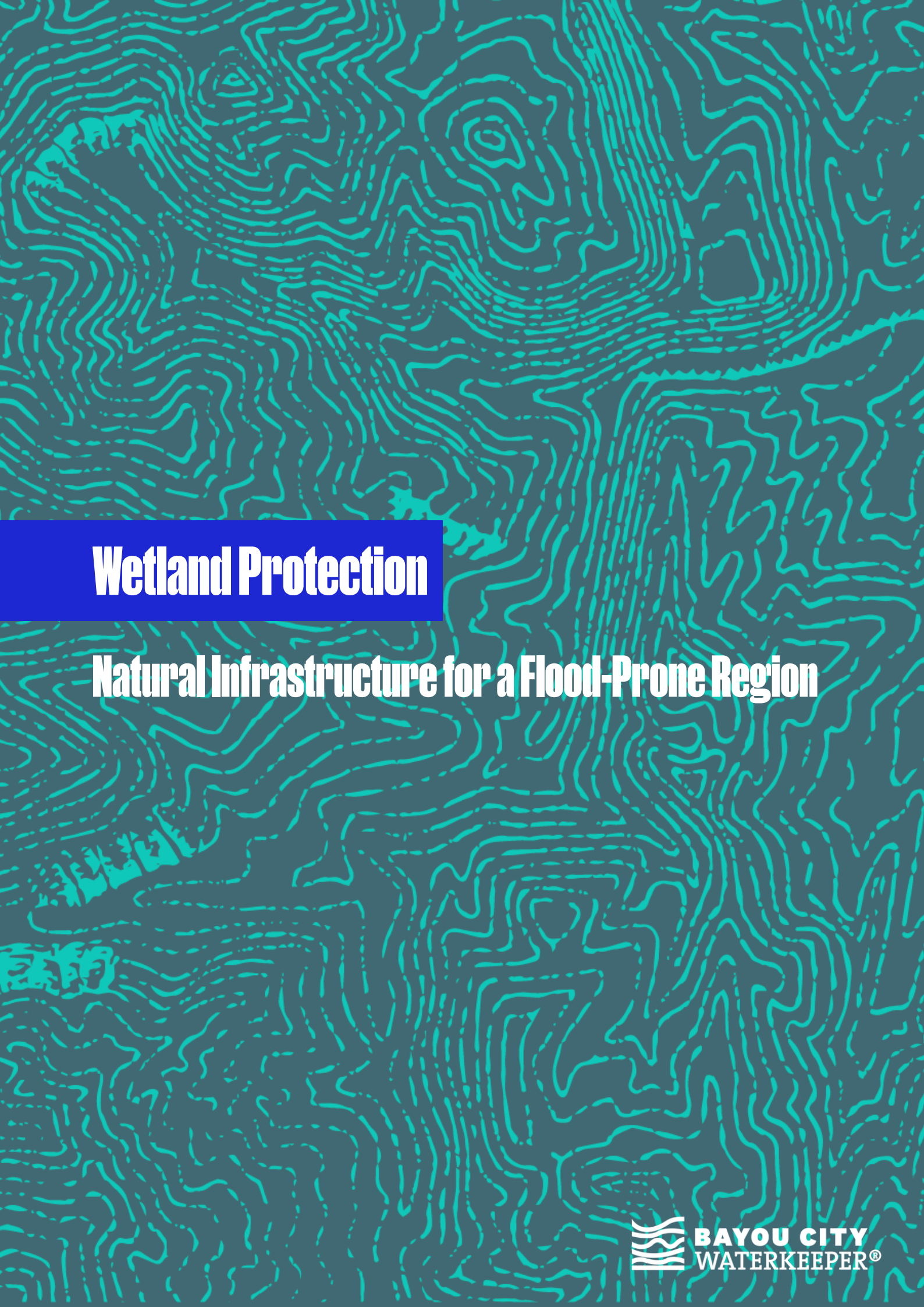
What are PFAS?

PFAS are a class of human-made chemicals used in products and industrial processes because they resist heat, water, and oil.

They are often called “forever chemicals” because they do not break down easily in the environment and can build up over time in water, soil, wildlife, and people.



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Wetland Protection

Natural Infrastructure for a Flood-Prone Region



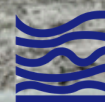
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For decades, Greater Houston has relied heavily on gray stormwater infrastructure: pipes, concrete channels, culverts, and drainage systems. These systems remain important, but they **cannot replace the natural infrastructure** our region continues to lose.

Wetlands, prairies, rain gardens, bioswales, and other **nature-based solutions** can absorb water, slow runoff, reduce flooding, improve water quality, and support healthier neighborhoods. But these solutions only work equitably when communities help shape where they go, how they are maintained, and who benefits.

From 2023 to 2025, Bayou City Waterkeeper **partnered with Stanford University** to better understand how residents in Northeast Houston and Baytown experience flooding and evaluate nature-based solutions. Through focus groups, bilingual surveys, community researchers, and public workshops, the project **translated residents' lived experiences into accessible data** that can support advocacy, public comments, funding requests, and stronger flood planning.

The findings reinforced what residents already know: communities want solutions that **reduce flooding, protect homes, and improve neighborhood resilience**, but they also need clear information, fair implementation, and long-term maintenance plans.



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Study Regions

Northeast Houston

Northeast Houston sits downstream of critical wetland systems and has experienced decades of flooding, infrastructure disinvestment, environmental burden, and unequal access to recovery resources.

Baytown

Baytown is a water-rich, industrial city shaped by wetlands, refining, subsidence, aging drainage systems, flooding, sewage overflows, and sea-level rise.

Together, these communities show why flood resilience must address both natural systems and long-standing infrastructure inequities.



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Project Pathway

1. Focus Groups

BCWK and Stanford began by listening. Residents in Northeast Houston and Baytown shared their experiences with flooding, drainage, sewage, recovery, and neighborhood infrastructure.



2. Bilingual Survey

Those conversations shaped an English and Spanish survey focused on flooding experiences, green stormwater infrastructure, barriers, priorities, and community concerns.

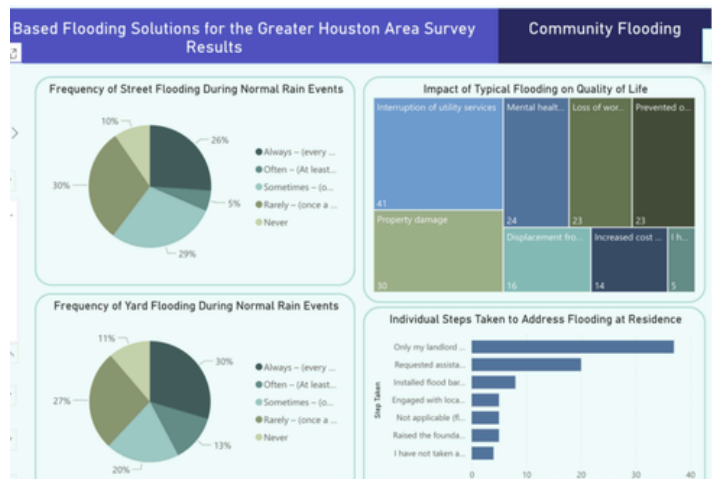
3. Community Researchers

Community researchers helped distribute the survey through trusted local networks, increasing participation and keeping the research grounded in relationships.



4. Public Dashboard

The results were turned into a public Nature-Based Flooding Solutions Dashboard that makes community experiences easier to understand, explore, and use.



5. Community Workshops

BCWK and Stanford shared findings back with residents through workshops in Northeast Houston and Baytown, where participants reviewed results and discussed possible solutions.

6. Advocacy

The dashboard now supports residents and advocates who want to speak at public meetings, submit comments, request funding, and push for stronger flood planning and wetland protection.



What Residents Named

Residents identified flooding impacts that go far beyond standing water.

Named priorities:

- Utility interruptions
- Anxiety during rain events
- Property damage
- High repair costs
- Street and yard flooding
- Displacement concerns
- Drainage problems
- Sewage and overflow concerns

Named barriers:

- Cost
- Maintenance
- Taxes
- Lack of information
- Trust and implementation concerns
- Unequal access to flood solutions

A dashboard as an advocacy tool

The [Nature-Based Flooding Solutions Dashboard](#) turns community knowledge into action, helping residents and advocates document flooding, identify barriers to green infrastructure, and strengthen public comments, planning decisions, and funding requests.

Sustaining the community connection

Throughout the year, BCWK also expanded its wetland education and outreach programming through guided Wetland Walks, educational presentations, community workshops, and outreach events. These programs helped residents better understand wetland ecology, flood resilience, and nature-based solutions while connecting participants with tools and opportunities to support wetland protection in their own communities.

Education and outreach also strengthened BCWK's long-term partnerships with schools, universities, nonprofit organizations, and community groups, helping expand opportunities for wetland stewardship, volunteer engagement, and public participation in local conservation efforts.

Wetlands, Flood Equity, and Public Investment

In 2025, BCWK pushed flood infrastructure decisions to better reflect equity, transparency, and community vulnerability. This included advocacy on the Texas Water Development Board's Flood Infrastructure Fund, Harris County flood bond prioritization, and stronger public access to flood infrastructure data.

This work connected wetlands, flood resilience, public investment and community priorities by making a clear case that funding decisions should prioritize the communities facing the greatest flood risk and the fewest resources to recover.



Flood resilience depends on more than building projects. It depends on whether public dollars reach the communities facing the greatest risk. In 2025, BCWK pushed state and county flood infrastructure decisions to better account for community vulnerability, long-standing disinvestment, and the need for transparent public oversight.

At the state level, BCWK submitted comments to the Texas Water Development Board on the Flood Infrastructure Fund, supporting drainage projects in Pleasantville and Sunnyside while raising concerns about scoring methods that may overlook disadvantaged communities.

At the county level, BCWK and coalition partners called on Harris County to maintain equity-based prioritization as the 2018 Flood Bond program faced a major funding shortfall.

BCWK in the news



Topic: Sewage Overflows / Houston SSOs

Headline: “We’re talking about poop”: Houston neighborhoods face raw sewage problems, health risks from sewage spills

Topic: Prop 4 / Texas Water Funding

Headline: Crisis del agua en Texas: Propuesta 4 pretende millonaria inversión para proyectos hídricos



Topic: Water Disinvestment

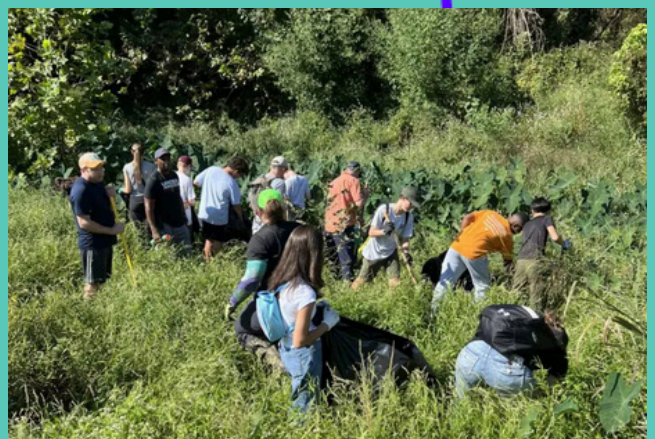
Headline: It’s brown and burns your eyes. In small town Texas, clean water can be elusive.



FY25 Financials

Bayou City Waterkeeper closed 2025 in a stronger financial position, with total revenue rising to **\$1.3 million from \$721,000 in 2024**, driven primarily by increased foundation and grant support. Careful expense management also contributed to a positive change in net assets of \$162,000, a significant turnaround from the prior year.

At year-end, BCWK held **\$875,000 in total net assets** and **nearly \$900,000 in total assets**, including approximately \$727,000 in cash and certificates of deposit. This carryover strengthens the organization's stability heading into 2026 and supports continued investment in clean water advocacy, industrial accountability, wetland protection, and community-centered work across the watershed.



Staff & Board

(as of July 2026)



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Vanessa Toro Barragán
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Katy Butterwick
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Leah Chambers
Board Member



Caroline Crow
Board Member

Supporters & Partners



The Current Carries Us On

The work ahead is clear.

Public water funding must reach the communities that have waited the longest for repair. Houston's wastewater consent decree must be protected. Industrial polluters must be held to stronger standards. Wetlands must be treated as infrastructure. Flood decisions must be transparent, equitable, and shaped by the people most at risk.

BCWK will keep showing up wherever the future of our watershed is being decided — in neighborhoods, public meetings, courtrooms, agency processes, research partnerships, and coalition spaces. Join us in the current.

Give. Partner. Attend. Share your story. Use our maps and tools. Advocate with us.

Together, we can turn the tide toward a just and regenerative watershed.

