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News of the  
Coastal Bend's Bays and Estuaries

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## Final Bays Plan Goes to Print!

"This is a Program that exemplifies the Governor's goal of bringing local participation and leadership into the resource management process, and you are all to be commended."

Commissioner John Baker, Chair of Policy Committee

At a joint meeting of the CCBNEP Policy and Management Committees on July 9<sup>th</sup>, members gave unanimous approval to final revisions of the **Coastal Bend Bays Plan**, paving the way for printing and submission to Governor Bush for his approval.

ership into the resource management process, and you are all to be commended."

With 50 actions detailed under six separate chapters, the **Bays Plan** will now be printed in final form and submitted to Governor Bush for signature by late August. Upon final approval by EPA Administrator Carol Browner, the Program will be eligible for continued federal funding to begin implementing the actions contained in the Plan.

The Corpus Christi Bay National Estuary Program is the first of 28 programs nationwide to complete its technical characterization and comprehensive

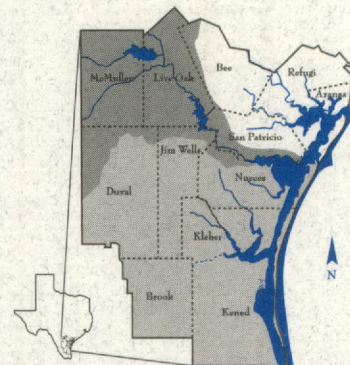
planning process within a prescribed streamlined, four-year period.

"We believe the fundamentals of good science have prevailed to achieve a  
*see 'Bays Plan' page 4*

"When I became involved with this program a little over two years ago, it seemed like an impossible task to bring consensus to such a broad range of stakeholders and interests", said Policy Committee Chair and TNRCC Commissioner, John Baker. "But through an incredible amount of work and sweat equity, this community has achieved success. This is a Program that exemplifies the Governor's goal of bringing local participation and lead-

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Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program Project Area

### New Program Name: The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program



In recognition of the full geographical extent of the project area, which encompasses all of the bays and estuaries of the Coastal Bend, Program leaders have adopted a new name as the Program prepares to implement the **Coastal Bend Bays Plan**.

Henceforth, the Program will be called The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program.

*'New Name' next page*



# State of the Bay Report: The Pulse of Our Estuaries



How healthy are the Coastal Bend bays and estuaries? Are the fish and shellfish as plentiful as they once were? Can the bays survive the additional pollution expected as the population doubles over the

next 30 - 40 years? Finally, at least some of these questions may be answered.

Over the last century our bays and estuaries have been exposed to point and nonpoint source pollution; navigation and energy production dredging; increased pressure on natural resources and habitat loss; dams and decreased freshwater inflows; and dramatically altered circulation. Throughout all of these changes, our bays have remained relatively healthy. That is according to the recent Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP) publication, "The State of the Bay: A Report for the Future".

Joan Holt from the U.T. Marine Sciences Institute is the report's editor. "Although the bays are generally healthy, there are signs that human impacts are beginning to take their toll. Somewhat like an aging person, the bays are not what they used to be, but they are still very productive."

And like an aging person, the future health of our estuaries depends on the kind of care they receive. "We know that much of the current productivity of

our bays is a testament to their resilience. And now we better understand the physical and biological factors that may ultimately limit the productivity of Coastal Bend bays."

If asked to describe the health of Coastal Bend estuaries, it would have been difficult to answer even four years ago. Although volumes of data have been collected over the past century, it wasn't until recently that this information was compiled and synthesized.

Understanding the processes of Coastal Bend estuaries was one of CBBEP's major tasks. During the past four years, teams of scientists have conducted studies in an effort to characterize the bays and watersheds of the Coastal Bend. To date, over twenty-five reports have been published and ten more are expected before year-end. These studies are the foundation of the State of the Bay report.

"The State of the Bay report relies heavily on the body of knowledge contained in the CBBEP characterization reports," says Holt. "But it is very different from the source reports, which were very technical."

"The report is full of graphics and pictures which help tell the story of our estuaries. It is easy to read and accessible to anyone with an interest in the Coastal Bend, including students, resource managers, policy makers, and especially the general public", says Holt.

The State of the Bay report will help everyone better understand the history, health, and ecosystems of Coastal Bend estuaries - and why they are so important.

The report is scheduled for release the end of August and copies can be requested by calling the CBBEP office at 512/980-3420.

## 'New Name' from page 1

"The new name brings focus on the entire project area and our program goal, which is to find sustainable, long-range solutions to any issues which may affect our bays and estuaries", said Program Director, Richard Volk. "The **Bays Plan** is a regional framework for action, and it is critical to our success that citizens from Kingsville to Rockport, or from Mathis to Port Aransas, begin to 'think regionally, and act locally'."

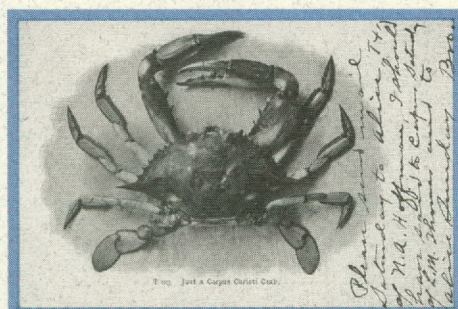
*Around the Bend* is produced quarterly by the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program with funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission. For more information about the Program, call 512/980-3420.

Contributors to this issue include Sandra Alvarado, Doug Baker, and Richard Volk. Illustrations: Dinah Bowman and Bonnie Bower-Dennis.

News items, photographs, and letters are welcome and may be submitted to the CBBEP office, Natural Resources Center, Suite 3300, TAMU-CC, 6300 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78412. The submission deadline for the next newsletter is September 10, 1998.

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# Regional Monitoring Strategy Nears Completion

Approximately 40 federal, state, local, private, and academic organizations currently collect environmental information and related data in the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP) project area. More than 1,000 monitoring stations are utilized at an annual cost of about \$3 million. The complexity of developing a monitoring strategy is as varied and diverse as these ongoing efforts. The following passages attempt to explain what the Regional Monitoring Strategy is, why we need it, what will be the outcome, and how things will differ as a result of this effort.

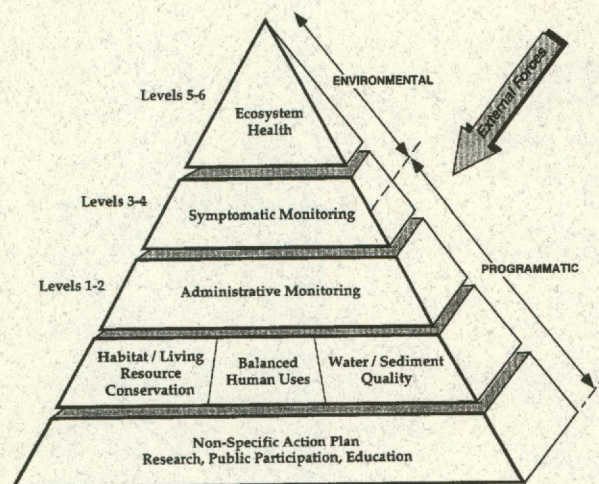
## What is the Regional Monitoring Strategy?

The Regional Monitoring Strategy (RMS) is a framework tool to guide future monitoring activities in the Coastal Bend. When implemented, it will allow managers and researchers to detect changes and monitor the health of the bays and estuaries. Monitoring is defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as "...the continued systematic time-series observation of predetermined pollutants or pertinent components of the ecosystem over a period of time sufficient to determine 1) the existing level, 2) trends, and 3) natural variations of measured components."

Two types of monitoring have been identified for inclusion in the RMS, programmatic and environmental. The former tracks institutional changes necessary to improve coordination, communication, and implementation of certain activities. The latter addresses the collection of scientific data and information in order to assess changes in water quality, living resources, habitats, or other physical and chemical components of an ecosystem.

## Why develop a Regional Monitoring Strategy?

The purpose of the RMS is twofold, 1) facilitate the monitoring of bay health; and 2) assess the effectiveness of the implementation of the *Coastal Bend Bays Plan*. Ultimately, the RMS should allow the NEP to measure ecosystem change resulting from implementation of actions in the *Bays Plan*.



## What will be the outcome of the Regional Monitoring Strategy?

The RMS recommends a coordinated regional effort across all institutional boundaries to reduce redundancy and improve efficiency. One suggestion is to standardize monitoring practices among monitoring agencies. For example, the use of similar equipment and methodology for measuring the same parameter would promote data sharing and address quality control concerns.

Data sharing is a central component of the RMS, which suggests integrating Internet forms into the data collection and reporting workflow. This would streamline data sharing and provide timely access to provisional data. Obviously, this level of sharing has many inherent obstacles. Beyond the technical and admin-

istrative issues are data security, data integrity, and secured access concerns that would have to be addressed prior to this level of coordination.

## How will monitoring activities differ in the future?

Although the RMS identified a huge ongoing monitoring effort already in place, several improvements have been identified. One is the need for new monitoring activities to adequately cover the CBBEP project area. Presently some areas receive little or no monitoring at all. These areas could be added as cost savings realized from data sharing activities. The RMS identifies many such efficiencies to resolve data and information gaps.

Cost savings are an important incentive for monitoring entities to implement the RMS. Many organizations face shrinking budgets coupled with increased administrative costs, and greater personnel resource demands. This raises concerns about the ability of organizations to continue today's level of monitoring effort into the future. This is exactly why the RMS is important to the Coastal Bend.

Additional water quality sampling sites, standardization of methodologies, and data sharing are among the topics for discussion at a monitoring workshop to be held during the first quarter of 1999. This workshop will initiate discussions regarding ways to more efficiently and comprehensively pool resources and improve upon the existing monitoring efforts.

Completion of the Strategy is scheduled for mid-August 1998 and will be made available on the CBBEP web page at: [www.sci.tamucc.edu/ccbnep](http://www.sci.tamucc.edu/ccbnep).



# Bay User's Guide Available

'Bays Plan' from page 1

Visitors and residents of the Coastal Bend now have a single source for information on places to go bird watching, windsurfing, kayaking, and boating. The Bay User's Guide is now available and provides "one-stop shopping" for information on these bay uses.

Before the completion of the Bay User's Guide, determining the best place to launch a boat, kayak, or windsurfer was difficult. Now, people unfamiliar with the Coastal Bend will find it easier to unlock its hidden treasures. The BUG indicates the location of boat ramps, marinas, beaches, and popular areas for kayaking and windsurfing. In addition, the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail sites are shown.

The BUG is designed to withstand rugged outdoor use. A donation by Dupont allowed the Guide to be printed on Tyvek. This material is waterproof and resists tearing.

If the BUG is rugged, it is every bit as beautiful. On the reverse side of each of the three maps - one for each Coastal Bend estuary - is a panel of artwork and articles. The artwork was commissioned especially for the project and includes scenery from the region. Marine organisms, birds, and recreational activities are all featured in full color throughout.

The articles introduce the Coastal Bend and serve to increase awareness about our natural resources. Each panel has a

different set of articles highlighting recreational activities, estuarine organisms, and habitats.

Articles focus on those habitats that support recreational activities in the Coastal Bend. Tidal flats, coastal marshes, and sea-grass beds are highlighted. The BUG helps users make the connection between bay activities and continued protection of its resources. After all, users of the bay have a vested interest in the sustainable use and preservation of the environment.

The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP) produced the BUG with assistance from many individuals and organizations. Partners include Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Dupont which contributed to the paper and printing. The CBBEP would like to thank each of these partners and the numerous other individuals who donated their time and expertise to develop the guide.

Copies of the BUG can be requested from the CBBEP office (512/980-3420), TPWD (512/980-3244), or USFWS (512/994-9005).



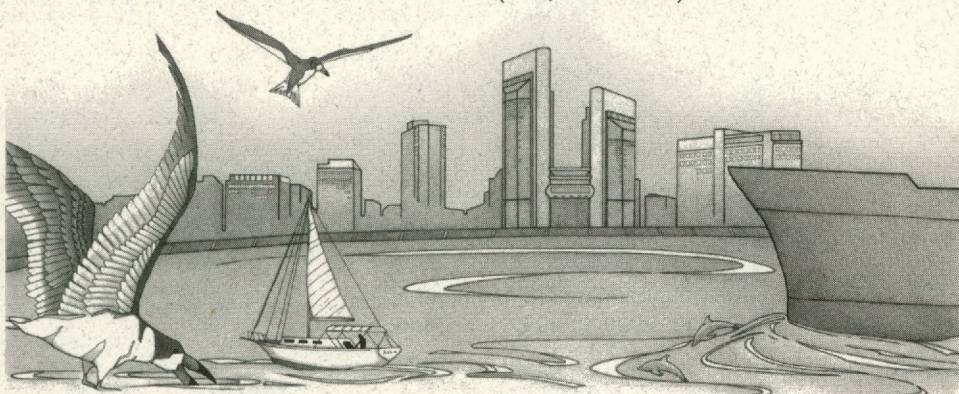
sound **Bays Plan**", said Frank Newchurch, Chair of the Port Industries of Corpus Christi. "We are encouraged by the current overall good assessment of our bays and estuaries."

A companion piece entitled "The State of the Bay: A Report for the Future" is now in press and will be released with the final **Bays Plan** in late August, (see article on page 2). The report summarizes the results of more than 30 technical investigations undertaken during the past four years, which form the scientific basis for the actions contained in the Plan.

"The effort to gather the best scientific information to help shape public policy has resulted in an outstanding guide for bay resource protection to take us into the 21<sup>st</sup> century", said Ray Allen, Chairman of the Coastal Bend Bays Foundation. "Our biggest challenge now is to instill a broader commitment among all local governments and organizations within the region, and to find partnership opportunities and funding to fully implement the **Bays Plan**."

More than 350 individuals representing over 100 organizations volunteered 40,000 hours of their time in overseeing the technical studies and creation of the **Plan**. "Now is the time for our entire regional community to support - and advocate - the implementation of the **Plan**", urged Bob Corrigan, Co-Chair of the CCBNEP Citizens Advisory Committee. "We have the opportunity to make a significant contribution towards ensuring the sustainable use of these valuable resources for generations to come."

For a copy of the final **Coastal Bend Bays Plan**, call the Program Office at 512/980-3420.





# Neighborhood NEWS

## New Interpretive Signage to be Placed at Four Area Wetlands

By Jennifer Lorenz

Four popular wetland areas in the Corpus Christi area will receive new interpretive signage this fall thanks to a combined effort of private groups and governmental agencies.

Representatives from National Audubon Society (NAS), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), U.S. Fish and Wildlife, Center for Coastal Studies, Coastal Bend Bays Foundation and Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP) are pooling resources and talents to design and place more than 40 signs at important birding sites. These sites include Newport Pass, Hans Suter Refuge, Indian Point Park, and Oso Creek.

The four sites were chosen because of their high visibility and their inclusion in a volunteer-based bird monitoring pro-

gram administered by NAS and TPWD, called "Waterbird Watch". Curt Zonick, Coastal Biologist for the NAS, says that because most census programs are group efforts that end soon after they begin, participants do not feel personally involved with the protection of the species counted or the site visited. "Waterbird Watch encourages a strong personal connection to adopted sites and bird populations because it is a year-round program linking an individual to a single wetland," said Zonick.

### Indian Point

Located off Highway 181 near Portland, Indian Point is a unique birding area which has two elevated boardwalks for nature viewing. The park includes several long berms of crushed oyster shell, which provide nesting sites for Black Skimmers, and Least Terns in the past.

Bordering the shoreline of Corpus Christi Bay, the Indian Point area also provides a good example of inner salt marsh habitats. Signage will be included at the park entry and along the boardwalks.

### Newport Pass

This washover pass, located on Mustang Island, attracted over 30 nesting pairs of Least Terns by mid-May in 1997. But it was discovered after Memorial Day that 16 nests in adjacent dunes were crushed by vehicles. The new signs will not only educate beachgoers on the unique features of washover passes, but also to remind drivers to keep clear of the dune areas.

### Oso Creek

A historical dumping ground for tires, boats, carpeting and even sofas, the Oso Creek area in Flour

Bluff has been given a new lease on a cleaner life with a City of Corpus Christi cleanup. On May 2, 1998, Project Sparkle had over 70 volunteers, mostly from Flour Bluff I.S.D., clean this area of more than 13 tons of trash.

An important site of nesting birds, the sands of this area often harbor chicks of Least Terns, Snowy Plovers, Wilson's Plovers, Horned Larks, Nighthawks, and Killdeers. This site is scheduled for permanent closure to vehicular traffic in the near future, and interpretive signs about the sensitivity of the site will be part of the project.

### Hans Suter Refuge

Located on Oso Bay, Hans Suter Refuge is a frequently visited site by the birding public. Walking along its lengthy boardwalk, one can spot birders with their guides as well as children and non-birders just enjoying the walk. At Suter Refuge, there is a kiosk at the boardwalk entry, adjacent to the parking area. For years this four-sided sign has displayed the same photos on each panel. The new signage will include color drawings of the many birds easily identified along the boardwalk and in the bay. There will also be a sign that can be regularly updated to include area birding activities and rare bird sightings.

The CBBEP has identified this project for support as part of its education outreach plan. Liz Smith, Research Scientist for the Center for Coastal Studies at TAMU-CC says, "This is an excellent demonstration of successful partnerships to increase public awareness about the importance of our natural resources."

For more information contact Jennifer Lorenz, Coastal Bend Bays Foundation, Executive Director at 512/822-4363.



Curt Zonick, NAS (left), and Lee Elliott, TPWD discuss sign changes to be made at Hans Suter Refuge.



# Coastal Bend Bays Plan Signing Ceremony

The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program and the Management Conference proudly announce the official **Coastal Bend Bays Plan Signing Ceremony** on October 1, 1998. The event is being held to acknowledge the four-year planning effort of hundreds of individuals and organizations that contributed to the *Bays Plan*.

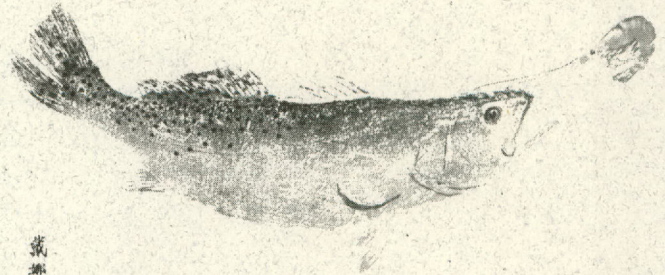
The celebration will also mark the metamorphosis of the Corpus Christi Bay National Estuary Program into the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program. The event will highlight past successes and consider the many challenges that lie ahead.

The festivities will include music, refreshments and the unveiling of CBBEP's Texas State Aquarium exhibit, "Major Estuaries of Texas". If you would like to attend, contact the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program office for tickets at 512/980-3420.

## NATIONAL WETLANDS INVENTORY (NWI) MAP FOR NUECES COUNTY

Fresh off the press, the Atlas of National Wetlands Inventory Maps (with resource descriptions) for Nueces County, Texas is available at the CBBEP office. The atlas includes: wetlands definition and classification system; map preparation, use, and limitations; current wetland acreage statistics; information on wetland losses, gains, and condition; and fish and wildlife resources. The atlas features copies of all NWI maps covering the county, and on-the-ground photos of vegetation or substrates associated with the predominant wetland types occurring in the county.

THESE ARE AVAILABLE FOR PICKUP ONLY. COME BY THE CBBEP OFFICE TO GET YOUR COPY!



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