

Environmental Exchange

A publication of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition

December 2002
Newsletter &
Calendar

The Houston-Galveston area's most comprehensive listing of environmental activities and events.

Who foots the bill?

With clean water in short supply, residents wonder where the bucks start

By Erika McDonald

A report released by the Environmental Protection Agency in October projected a gap of more than \$500 billion in unmet water needs in the United States over 20 years.

The so-called gap analysis of water infrastructure needs found an increase in spending on the nation's network of treatment plants by 3 percent above the rate of inflation would be required for cities and towns to meet pressing needs.

By 2019, systems could be short \$263 billion

for drinking water and \$271 billion for wastewater. The money would be needed to replace aging pipes, maintain existing facilities and build new ones to meet rising demand, EPA officials said. Even with the recommended spending increases, the gaps could still be as much as \$45 billion for drinking water and \$31 billion for wastewater.

The report made no recommendation on who should pick up the tab.

As local residents are finding out, they are

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Clean water anniversary

Thirty years later, activists concerned for law's future

By Erika McDonald

October marked the 30-year anniversary of the Clean Water Act, but instead of celebrating, environmentalists across the country accused the Bush administration of attempting to weaken the decades-old law.

According to Dwayne Andersen, program coordinator for Texas Clean Water Action, the Act, though not always properly applied, has made significant impact since its inception in 1972 with 60 percent of Texas waterways meeting its criteria. Before that time, more than half of the state's waterways were polluted.

Still, he fears that recent rule changes and the promise of future ones by the current administration will halt the progress needed to meet the Act's goal of 100 percent of U.S. waters being safe for fishing, swimming and drinking.

"Not only have (the new rules) left the door open for industrial polluters," he said, "they took the door off the hinges."

Upon taking office in January 2001, George W. Bush put a hold on regulations proposed by the Clinton administration that were designed to control overflows of raw sewage from inadequate and poorly maintained sewer systems. The proposed regulations would have imposed tougher operation and maintenance requirements on sewer system operators.

In May, the administration approved a new rule allowing the Army Corps of Engineers to

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In Fresno, Fort Bend County some residents, desperate for cleanwater, have received fines for building their own wells and septic systems.

Environmental Exchange

The Environmental Exchange is published by the Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), an information clearinghouse and communications network for environmental issues in the Houston/Galveston area.

The CEC mission is to improve the quality of life and health in the region through education, dialogue and collaboration.

CEC serves the general public by bringing many diverse groups together to build awareness and stimulate discussion about environmental issues in the region.

Programs include forums that give a balanced perspective on environmental issues, and information vehicles that enhance understanding.

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Perspectives

Originally published October 2001

Living with our Watersheds

*By Kevin Shanley, President,
Bayou Preservation Association*

For decades, individuals and non-profits have fought, cajoled, pleaded and litigated to protect our region's bayous, stream corridors and green-spaces. But in an urban fabric that is growing as fast as the Houston metro area, the pressure on our natural systems is intense, and each local effort and skirmish ends with a compromise that results in an inexorable diminution of the resources we are trying to vouchsafe for future generations.

Events like last year's tropical storm Allison bring into sharp focus a history of inappropriate and unfortunate public policy that has left thousands of Houstonians in harm's way and has drained the economy of billions of dollars in damage recovery. If we can look back and wonder, perhaps a little too smugly, how we permitted so many structures to be built deep in the floodplains, then we need to ask today what we might be doing right now that might put ourselves and our children at risk.

If simple ignorance of hydrology and hydraulics shaped a public policy that has resulted in so much public harm, what questions should we be asking, what science should we be probing, what engineering should we be exploring to forestall even greater damages to a city grown to double or triple its current population? Instead of fighting myriad small skirmishes with little to show for the effort, what kind of public policy can we shape to avoid loss and tragedy in both natural and human terms?

Just to get the pump primed and to encourage discussion, I would like to suggest that the following recommendations be integrated into our public policy, whether by legislative action, by ordinance, or just by departmental decision.

To better manage our watersheds:

- Since what happens in our stream corridors and floodplains is absolutely linked to what happens in the streams' watersheds, both must be managed as a single integral system.

- Regional watershed management needs to be consolidated into one entity with the responsibility, authority and funding to properly manage the region's watersheds (currently there are more than 30 separate entities within Harris County).
- "System Watershed Capacity," or the total amount of water the watershed can non-destructively accommodate, is a valuable publicly owned resource.
- No project, of any scale, should be allowed to reduce or diminish system capacity.
- No project impacts should be permitted until after system capacity compensatory mitigation is in place.
- Calculated and measured time of concentration should be used as a primary test of impact on system capacity (not just floodplain displacement).
- System storage should be the first priority in watershed management; system conveyance should be the second priority.
- System planning and design should balance needs for storage, conveyance, habitat, recreation and aesthetics.

To safely live with our region's floodplains:

- Accurately map ALL 100-year flood hazards in urbanized areas (not just along primary streams and bayous).
- Identify flood elevations in all structures within flood hazard zones.
- Communicate flood-hazard zone information and depth of floor below base flood elevation on all tax bills and property transaction disclosure statements (for properties within a flood-hazard zone).
- Communicate to all property owners, by mailed announcement, any changes to flood-hazard maps.
- Communicate to renters by including flood-hazard zone and depth information on monthly utility bills.
- Set an administrative goal of having 100 percent participation in the Flood Insurance Program for properties in flood-hazard zones.

To reduce flood damages:

- Adequately fund a permanent buyout program for frequently damaged structures and frequently submerged undeveloped properties that are deepest in the floodplains abutting stream and bayou corridors.
- Create a compliance-based buy-out program to encourage elevating or rebuilding frequently damaged structures with-

in neighborhoods not adjacent to stream corridors in order to maintain the integrity of the neighborhood fabric.

- Purchase land and create tributary and neighborhood level detention basins as well as regional main stream detention basins.
- Continue to pursue federal participation in major projects that will increase system capacity while stressing the need for properly balancing our requirements for storage, conveyance, habitat, recreation, and aesthetics.

Some of these recommendations will require a measure of vision and daring to implement. Others are simple and could be implemented by existing agencies and departments in a short period of time by department heads.

This list could, and should, go on to include consideration of all aspects of watershed management. I have purposely focused on issues related to flooding, because flood damage reduction is the driving force that shapes most of the stormwater infrastructure investment in our cities. It also carries both the greatest threat to our stream corridors and the greatest promise for urban stream corridors, all depending on our public policy. 🌱

Houston development paves the way for flooding

By Erika McDonald

In November, Congress passed a bill backed by local representatives Kevin Brady and Sheila Jackson Lee to study, among other things, why flooding seemed to be increasing in Harris County. Local environmentalists think they already know the answer: urban sprawl.

Houston ranked in the top 20 cities affected by urban sprawl, according to a fall report by American Rivers, National Resources Defense Council and Smart Growth America. Using U.S. Department of Agriculture data on land-use changes, researchers estimated the total area of land developed from 1982 to 1997. The report

found that, during this period, Houston increased developed land area by 39 percent ranking fifth highest among the 320 metropolitan areas studied.

Researchers said that flooding is just one of the negative impacts of concrete-happy urban planning. With the amount of impervious surfaces increasing in Houston at an alarming rate, billions of gallons of water each year have nowhere to go.

This is no news to nearby residents and commuters who traverse the I-10/Beltway 8 exchange, which frequently ends up underwater after a heavy storm. Larry Dunbar, an engineering consultant for the Galveston Bay Conservation and Preservation Association who specializes in flooding and drainage said expanding the freeway was a terrible idea. Not only would the added lanes gobble up a large amount of land that could absorb rainwater, it would render the freeway impassable for the many streams it crosses. The streams can only overflow, he said, threatening nearby homes and businesses.

Promises from the Texas Department of Transportation to build detention ponds have not silenced freeway expansion opponents. "We've seen this before. They tell you, 'don't worry, we'll take care of it,' and frankly, we don't trust them," Dunbar said.

For years, environmentalists have fought construction of the Grand Parkway, a third loop that would stretch 140 miles across seven counties to encircle the Greater Houston area. Most heavily contested is segment C of the parkway, which crosses a frequently overflowing Brazos River.

Pat Tovsen, a Sierra Club member and vocal opponent of the Parkway criticized TXDOT for trying to save money by building an elevated parkway rather than bridges. She said that bridges would allow for sheet flow of rainwater while the elevated road would essentially act as a 10-foot high dam across the watershed.

"It's my money," Tovsen said. "If they're going to build this thing they might as well do it right because it will be my money they'll have to spend to fix the road when they find out it doesn't work."

Freeway opponents also fear that expansion will encourage commercial development along the roads, which will slice through much-needed green space, compounding the flooding problem.

Environmentalists urged city planners to focus funds on improving public transportation rather than adding lane miles of

highway at a furious rate. Currently however, Houston business and political leaders support plans to expand every major existing freeway and to add several more.

Elie Alkourhi, a drainage specialist with TXDOT said he was advised by the agency's lawyer not to discuss the freeway projects with CEC.

The American Rivers report linked other water problems to urban sprawl. Because water that runs off impervious surfaces would normally recharge aquifers and surface waters, urban sprawl could be a leading cause of drought across the country. Researchers estimate that in Houston, an average of about 30 billion gallons of groundwater infiltration is lost each year as it runs off developed land.

Pollution is also a problem compounded by sprawl, but not just because urban pollutants are washed through storm drains into rivers and lakes.

Researchers found that an increase in the amount of driving, a characteristic endemic to sprawling communities, caused higher levels of polycyclic aromatic carbons in some watersheds. Higher levels of PAH, a group of suspected carcinogens, were linked to the increase in miles traveled because of tire wear, crankcase oil, roadway wear and car soot and exhaust.

To download the full report, visit <http://www.americanrivers.org/landuse/sprawldroughtreport.htm>. 🌱

Resource Corner

Helpful hints for CEC member organizations

Do your part by getting involved with the City of Houston's Water Conservation Program.

The program is projected to reduce water demand in Houston by 21.8 mgd or 7.3 percent of retail water production by the year 2006. On the city's web site, you'll find water quantity statistics, tips

on what you can do to conserve and descriptions of city implementations and past successes. There are also details on how your organization can join the Adopt-an-Esplanade program. Just visit <http://www.ci.houston.tx.us/pwe/utilities/conservation/index.htm>.



Water Shortage

Continued from page 1

often the ones who bear the financial burden for improving inadequate infrastructure and cleaning up contaminated water.

In February, voters in Fresno, Fort Bend County will consider a ballot initiative that would quadruple property taxes, now 25 cents per \$100, to \$1 to help fund construction of water and wastewater facilities. County commissioners said the money would be used to drill two water wells in the next year and a half and to construct a sanitary sewer plant. The county would then lay water pipelines with all 1,500 homes hooked up to the system by May, 2005.

"That's not good enough," said Fresno resident Rodrigo Carreon. He suggested the county should bear the brunt of the cost for clean water rather than the low-income residents for whom clean water is a matter of life and death.

"Water is life," he said. "They're talking about building and connecting (water and sewer facilities) by 2005, but residents who live here can't afford to pay higher taxes."

According to precinct 1 Commissioner Tom Stavinoha, county commissioners are doing their part. In October, they appropriated \$3 million and helped to secure another \$400,000 in community development block grants for the wastewater and water facilities, in addition to recommending the tax increase.

Similar water woes are facing some homeowners in Cypress-Fairbanks, Harris County where 33 wells were contaminated with perchloroethylene, a cancer-causing chemical commonly used in dry cleaning.

Although the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality installed carbon filters on all wells containing dangerous levels of the chemical, residents are looking for a long-term solution. They were disappointed when TCEQ referred the contaminated wells for the federal Superfund Site Discovery and Assessment Program, which cleans up sites that pose a public health or environmental risk. Residents fear that Superfund status will dramatically lower their property values and that it could take up to 10 years for the wells to be cleaned.

They are also angry that TCEQ has not fined Bell Dry Cleaners (who last month changed their name to King Cleaners), which the agency found responsible for leaking the chemical. The agency said it chose not to fine

Bell because it could not establish that the cleaners intentionally emitted the chemical and because of the company's financial inadequacies. Based on financial documents, reviewed by TCEQ, the cleaner does not have enough money to pay for the cleanup.

Frustrated by what they call TCEQ's lack of communication, residents said they sought support from Harris County officials. At a recent Commissioners Court meeting, a resident with a tainted well called on the county to pay the estimated \$400,000 it would cost to hook up to a nearby municipal utility district. They were informed by Precinct 4 Commissioner Jerry Eversole, some of whose constituents are affected by the contaminated wells, that the county was not responsible.

"This water situation is a state issue," Eversole said. "I have no authority to step in." Harris County Freshwater Supply District 61 has since agreed to assess the cost of hooking the residents up to its water supply and providing sewage services, but funding remains a problem.

Running out of options, residents may have to apply for a Texas Water Development Board loan. Since public grants are not available, residents would still shoulder the financial burden because they would have to repay the loan.

Carreon said he thinks more federal money is needed to provide clean water to overburdened citizens. But EPA officials said this was unlikely. Earlier this year, the Bush administration opposed a House plan to make billions more available to states for wastewater projects saying Congress' priority should be defense spending. ●

Clean Water

Continued from page 1

give mining companies permits to dump debris from mountaintop removals into wetlands, rivers and streams. The rule is constructed so broadly that environmentalists fear the corps can issue permits allowing nearly any kind of waste dumping from industrial operations into streams and wetlands in any part of the country.

In July 2001, the Environmental Protection Agency announced an extensive "redesign" of the regulations aimed at addressing non-point source pollution: oil, fertilizers, pesticides, sediments, debris and other hazardous waste that contaminates runoff from farms and streets and winds up in waterways.

Another of the regulations the administration has formally proposed would relax the EPA's responsibility to recommend pollution reduction plans for waterways where states have failed to offer their own plans. Other changes would eliminate fixed and enforceable schedules for states to set pollution limits for impaired water bodies.

This is particularly dangerous in pro-business Texas, Anderson said. He compared the administration's approach to clean water to the voluntary compliance programs enacted to address clean air in Texas by then-governor Bush. The Texas Natural Resources and Conservation Commission (now TCEQ) reported a reduction of less than one percent of air pollutants as none of the state's major offenders volunteered for enforcement programs. According to the EPA, Texas was one of the 10 worst states at allowing wastewater treatment facilities to exceed the Clean Water Act effluent permit from 1999-2001.

In September, administration officials announced at a congressional hearing that they plan to issue new rules limiting the scope of the Clean Water Act to navigable interstate waters, removing many smaller rivers, streams and wetlands from under the law's protective umbrella.

Anderson said environmentalists had little faith that state and local environmental law enforcement would be able to compensate for the weakening of federal clean water policy.

"The only way we're going to have cleaner water is if local enforcement agents improve their policing efforts," he said.

Harris County Pollution Control officials referred CEC's questions to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and EPA Region 6 because they said the state, not the county, was responsible for enforcing the Clean Water Act. Officials from both agencies who were contacted for this story said they were unaware of how specific changes to the law would affect their enforcement or the health of Houston's waterways. ●

EcoNotes

Universities to study drinking water safety

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency awarded funds to six universities for the study of drinking water safety and

techniques to reduce risks to America's public water system. The grants are funded through U.S. EPA's program for research in environmental science and engineering, Science to Achieve Results. Reports earlier this year highlighted the vulnerability of the public water system to potential terrorist attack. The results of the Drinking Water Safety research will lead to a more secure public water system. Three projects investigate microbial risk in drinking water while the others focus on public health effects of chemical contaminants in drinking water. More detailed information on the projects can be found at http://cfpub.epa.gov/ncer_abstracts/index.cfm/fuseaction/recipients.display/rfa_id/273 and http://cfpub.epa.gov/ncer_abstracts/index.cfm/fuseaction/recipients.display/rfa_id/275.

Study to determine trends in frequency of flooding

The \$5 million Inland Flood Forecasting and Warning System Act co-sponsored by Houston-area U.S. Reps. Sheila Jackson Lee and Kevin Brady, may answer a question on the minds of many Houstonians after the most recent flooding and last year's Tropical Storm Allison: Is flooding in Harris County increasing?

Jackson Lee amended the bill, signed into law by President George W. Bush this month, to add a three-year, \$300,000 study to access the long-term trends in frequency and severity of inland flooding and to determine how shifts in climate and other factors might make certain regions vulnerable to escalating flood damage in the future.

Overall, the bill provides \$1.15 million per year for five years to improve the accuracy of inland flooding forecasts, but Jackson Lee's amendment may also help answer whether climate shifts are increasing the frequency of flooding in our region.

— *Houston Chronicle*

Follow their lead

Communities around the country are using innovative approaches to address water pollution, flooding and conservation issues.

By converting an open ditch stormwater drain into a roadside swale garden, Seattle reduced rainwater runoff at the 2.3 acre site by 97 percent. City planners decreased the width

of the adjacent street and planted native vegetation and stimulating native soils. Opportunities exist in Houston, where some stormwater systems are either not fully developed or scheduled for redevelopment, to implement these sorts of infiltration projects to reduce the volume of polluted runoff and improve groundwater recharge.

Meanwhile, the Portland, Oregon City Council authorized funds to replace toilets at 5,000 apartment complexes with low flow models. The pilot project has the potential to save more than 30 million gallons of water and hundreds of thousand dollars in water and sewer bills each year.

EPA touts success of acid rain program

The Environmental Protection Agency announced in November their Acid Rain Program reduced emissions through market trading of pollution credits. The latest data available in the report confirm major reductions nationwide in emissions of two acid rain causing pollutants, sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides. The Acid Rain Program, based on a market-based cap and trade approach to achieving emissions reductions from the electric power industry, uses emission rate requirements to reduce emissions of nitrogen oxides, and has set a permanent cap requiring a 50 percent reduction from 1980 emission levels of sulfur dioxide by 2010. The Acid Rain Program, created as part of the 1990 reauthorization of the Clean Air Act, set a goal of reducing annual SO₂ emissions by 10 million tons below 1980 levels.

The EPA's "Acid Rain Program 2001 Progress Report" is available online at: <http://www.epa.gov/airmarkets/cmprpt/arp01/index.html>

Permit would reserve water for Guadalupe

After more than two years, state regulators are moving on a request that a million acre-feet of water in the Guadalupe River be left alone each year for the fish, shrimp, crabs, oysters and other life in the river and its coastal estuaries. A draft permit prepared by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality is the first step of what is certain to become a long and contentious process. The permit would also aid communities whose economies rely on the fishing,

tourism, hunting and bird watching, the river foundation argued. The San Marcos River Foundation submitted its request in July 2000 for the water right. The permit, if approved, would be the first ever issued in Texas that calls for water to be left in a river.

— *Associated Press*

Commission warns oceans threatened

Halfway through an 18-month study, the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy announced that the world's oceans are in big trouble, citing nothing short of a complete overhaul of marine policy to reverse the trend. According to the Smithsonian Institution's Ocean Planet program, runoff, including farm wastes, oil changes, industrial wastes and soil erosion, is the single biggest pollution problem. Ocean Planet says three-fourths of all ocean pollution comes from land. This problem is will be exacerbated as more and more people choose to live along coasts, putting pressure on coastal ecosystems. Loss of coastal wetlands, overfishing and climate change are also serious problems, the commission found. Nationally, nearly 15,000 acres of coastal wetlands disappeared in the last decade, mostly at the hands of developers. Many of the world's commercially important fish species are fished to capacity or depleted. Oceans are crucial in shaping climate because they store and move heat around the planet and they are a major source and storehouse for gases, such as carbon dioxide, that affect climate; it's not fully understood how much carbon dioxide the oceans can absorb and store. The findings of the completed report are expected to be released next summer. 🌊

President's Letter

Continued from page 8

square hole, the Ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules, and they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them, because they push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the Crazy Ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the Ones who'll do it. 🌊

December Calendar

For the most complete current listing of environmental happenings in the Houston-Galveston region, visit CEC's website at www.cechouston.org and click on Calendar.

Mon, Dec 2

Ornithology Group Meeting Use of the Christmas Bird Count Data

Keith Arnold, Speaker
Where: Bayland Community Center,
6400 Bissonnet
When: 7 pm
Contact: Skip Almonney at 713-524-4285
Fee: Free

Tue, Dec 3

2002 Power Tools for Nonprofits Conference

Where: George R. Brown Convention Center
When: 8 am-4 pm
Contact: 713-743-1060
Fee: Please call

Wed, Dec 4

Clean Energy Policy Forum

Where: Omni Hotel in Austin
Contact: 512-480-2220 or
www.goodcompanyassociates.com
Fee: Please call

Access, Mobility, and Place Part 2 – A Civic Forum

Where: Brown Auditorium, MFA Houston
When: 7 pm
Contact: 713-348-4876
Fee: Free

Thu, Dec 5

Restoring America's Everglades

Dr. Stuart Strahl, President of Florida Audubon Society, Speaker
Where: Houston Museum of Natural Science,
Wortham IMAX Theater
When: 7 pm
Contact: 713-639-4629
Fee: \$8 for member, \$10 for non-member

Fri, Dec 6

Audubon Society Owl Prowl

Where: Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary
When: 7 pm
Contact: 713-464-4900
Fee: \$5; Pre-registration required

Sat, Dec 7

Texas Safari

For ages 5-9 + an adult.
Where: Houston Museum of Natural Science
When: 9:15-11:30 am
Contact: 713-639-4629
Fee: \$15 for members, \$25 for non-members

Mammals – Perfect Pets

Learn about ferrets, rabbits, chinchillas, and more. For ages 5-12 + an adult.
Where: Houston Museum of Natural Science
When: 10 am-12 pm or 1-3 pm
Contact: 713-639-4629
Fee: \$30 for members, \$40 for non-members

Winter Star Party

Where: Terraced Gardens behind the
Discovery Pyramid, Moody Gardens
When: dusk-11 pm
Contact: 1-800-582-4673
Fee: Free

Tree Planting

Plant a variety of native trees along White Oak Bayou with The Park People.
Where: T.C. Jester Park
When: 10 am-12 noon
Contact: 713-942-7275
Fee: Free

Sun, Dec 8

Advanced Birding (field trip)

Where: Armand Bayou Nature Center
When: 8 am-4 pm
Contact: 713-743-1060
Fee: \$56 for member, \$64 for non-member

Urban Nature Series – Compost and Recycle That Holiday Tree

Where: Houston Arboretum & Nature Center
When: 2-4 pm
Contact: 713-681-8433
Fee: Free

Woodland Holiday

Family event: games, refreshments, crafts, interactive storytelling & more.
Where: Nature Discovery Center
When: 2-6 pm
Contact: 713-667-6550 or
www.naturediscoverycenter.org
Fee: \$5

Mon, Dec 9

How to Start a Community Garden

Where: Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane
When: 4-6:30 pm
Contact: 713-880-5540
Fee: Free; Pre-registration required

Wed, Dec 11

Houston Audubon Society December Membership Meeting:

The Wonders of Bird Migration Topic:
Paul Lehman, Speaker
Where: Cullen Hall, University of St. Thomas
When: 7:30 pm
Contact: 713-932-1639
Fee: Free

Thu, Dec 12

Composting Workshop: Large-Scale Composting for the Green Industry

Presented by TCEQ.
Where: Mercer Arboretum
When: 7:30 am-12:30 pm
Contact: Brian Noble at 512-239-6780
Fee: Free; Pre-registration required

Sat, Dec 14

Ornithology Group Field Trip – Houston Christmas Bird Count

Contact: Glenn Olsen at 281-345-4151
Fee: Free

Ants!

For ages 5-9 + an adult.
Where: Houston Museum of Natural Science,
Cockrell Butterfly Center
When: 8:45-11:30 am
Contact: 713-639-4629
Fee: \$15 for members, \$25 for non-members

Holiday Canoeing

Personalize your canoe with holiday decorations, then canoe down the bayou to see wildlife.
Where: Armand Bayou Nature Center
When: 7:30-11 am
Contact: 281-474-2551
Fee: \$20 for member, \$25 for non-member

Houston Canoe Club Christmas Party

Where: Northwest Fitness Center,
Hwy 290 & Pinemont
Contact: Fraser Baker at 713-202-2503 or
www.houstoncanooclub.org
Fee: Free

Fri, Dec 13, Sat, Dec 14 or Dec. 16

Tadpole Troopers – Noses and Beaks

For ages 3-5 + an adult.
Where: Houston Arboretum & Nature Center
When: 1:30-3 pm on Dec. 13
10-11:30 am or 1:30-3 pm on Dec.14
and Dec. 16
Contact: 713-681-8433
Fee: \$6 for member, \$10 for non-member

Sat, Dec 14-Sun, Jan 5

Ice Rink at Moody Gardens

Where: Moody Gardens Convention Center

When: 10 am-6 pm

Contact: 1-800-582-4673

Fee: \$5 + \$2.50 skate rental

How to Start a Community Garden

Where: Urban Harvest, 1900 Kane

When: 1-4 pm

Contact: 713-880-5540

Fee: Free; Pre-registration required

Tue, Dec 17

Piney Woods Wildlife Society Annual Meeting & Holiday Party

Contact: Kathy Coward at 281-893-1816 or

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/piney-woodswildlifesociety>

Fee: Free

Houston Audubon Society December Sanctuary Seminar: Winter Warblers

P.D. Hulce, Speaker

Where: Edith L. Moore Nature Sanctuary

When: 7:15 pm

Contact: 713-932-1639

Fee: \$5 donation; reservations requested

Fri, Dec 20

Family Posada Night Prowl

Where: Houston Zoo

When: 6:30-8:30 pm

Contact: 713-533-6544

Fee: \$10; Pre-registration required

Sat, Dec 21

Naturalist Explorers Class – What's Up on the Inside (ages 5-12)

Where: Houston Arboretum & Nature Center

When: 9 am-12 noon

Contact: 713-681-8433

Fee: \$9 for member, \$12 for non-member

Sun, Dec 22

Urban Nature Series – Landscaping with Natives

Where: Houston Arboretum & Nature Center

When: 2-4 pm

Contact: 713-681-8433

Fee: Free

Thu, Dec 26-Fri, Dec 27

Armand Bayou Nature Center Winter Camp

Choose from various topics, grade levels, and times. For Pre-K-5th Grade. A series of camps also runs Thu, Jan 2-Fri, Jan 3. Please call for more information.

Where: Armand Bayou Nature Center

Contact: 281-474-2551

Fee: \$30 for member, \$42 for non-member

Regular Meetings

Meetings are monthly unless otherwise indicated.

Call to verify before attending a meeting. To list meetings, call 713-524-4CEC or fax 713-524-3311.

American Institute of Architects Environmental Committee 2nd Tues at noon. AIA office 3000 Richmond, Ste 500. 713-520-0155.

American Institute of Chemical Engineers 1st Thurs, Sheraton Astrodome, 610 Loop S. & Kirby Matthew Kolodney, 713-767-3752.

American Planning Assoc. 1st Tues, 11:45 am, The Court at St. James Place. Bret Keast 713-785-0080.

Bayou Preservation Assoc. 2nd Monday of Jan, March, May, Sept & Nov, 12 noon, Houston Center for the Arts, 713-529-6443.

BikeHouston last Tues, 6:30 pm, 3015 Richmond 713-652-2555.

Citizens' Environmental Coalition Board meeting 1st Tues, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond. 713-524-4CEC.

Electric Auto Association, Houston Chapter. 3rd Thurs, 6:30 pm, HEC 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. Ben Chamberlin, 713-975-7744.

Environmental Educator's Exchange 1st Wed of Feb, May, Aug, Nov, 5 pm. Sites vary. Kelly Drinnen, 409-683-4233.

Friends of Texas Wildlife, 2nd Sat, 10 am, Samual Matthew Park, 1728 E. Hufsmith Road, Tomball, 281-255-8885 or Lynda Guertin, cell 713-825-4095.

Galveston Bay Estuary Program Quarterly. Call for specific dates: 281-332-9937.

Galveston-Houston Assoc. For Smog Prevention (GHASP) 3rd Thurs, 7:30 pm, 3126 Fairhope. Ron Parry, 713-669-1195.

Greater Houston Preservation Alliance, Monthly walking tours, 4th Sun, 2 pm. Historic Neighborhoods Council Meeting, 4th Sat, 10:30 am, Heights Branch Library. 713-216-5000 or www.ghpa.org.

Green Party 3rd Mon, Montrose Public Library 4100 Montrose. 713-866-6285 or 713-880-3219.

Gulf Coast Institute: Houston/Gulf Coast Smart Growth Initiative 4th Wed, monthly at 11:30 am, H-GAC, 3555 Timmons, 2nd floor. 713-523-5757.

Harris County Soil & Water Conservation District 1st Wed, 9 am. Bennie Billington, 713-855-8716.

HART – the Houston Animal Rights Team 1st and 3rd Thurs, 7pm, University of St. Thomas 2nd floor, Crooker Center (the student cafeteria) 713-527-9144 .

Historic Neighborhoods Council 1st Sun, 10:30 am, Heights Branch Library. Ramona Davis 713-216-5000.

Houston Arboretum & Nature Center 3rd Wed, 5:45 pm, Houston Arboretum. 713-681-8433.

Houston Archeological Society 2nd Fri, 7:30 pm, M.D. Anderson Hall, Univ. of St. Thomas. Tommy Nuckols, 713-664-8369.

Houston Audubon Society 2nd Wed, Sept-May. 7 pm, University of St. Thomas, Cullen Hall. 713-932-1639.

Houston Bicycle Club, Inc 2nd Tues, except May. 7 pm, Tracy Gee Community Center, 3599 Westcenter Drive. 713-935-2810.

Houston Canoe Club Gen Mtg 2nd Wed, 7 pm, Red Cross Building, 2700 Southwest Frwy. Social Mtg 4th Wed, 7 pm Jax Grill, 1613 Shepherd. 713-467-8857.

Houston Homeowners Assoc 4th Mon (except November, Aug, and Dec), 5:30 pm, First Presbyterian, 5300 S. Main. Michael O'Brian, 281-496-0752.

Houston Renewable Energy Group Last Sunday of Jan, April, July, Oct., 2-4 pm, TSU School of Technology, Room 225. 713-524-2492.

Katy Prairie Conservancy 2nd Tues, 5:30 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-523-6135.

Keep Houston Beautiful Quarterly meetings at 2700 Post Oak Blvd., Ste. 1728. 713-621-7020.

Legacy Land Trust 3rd Wed, 6 pm, Houston Environmental Center, 3015 Richmond, Suite 280. 713-524-2100.

League of Women Voters of Houston 2nd Thurs or Fri. 713-784-2923.

Mothers for Clean Air Quarterly. Call Jane Laping 713-526-0110.

Nature Discovery Center of Friends of Bellaire Parks 3rd Mon, 7 pm, Nature Discovery Center, 7112 Newcastle. 713-667-6550.

Native Plant Society of Texas 3rd Thurs (except Dec, Jan), 7pm, Houston Arboretum, 4501 Woodway, 713-431-6346.

Outdoor Nature Club 2nd Thurs, Sept-May. 7:30 pm (social begins at 7), Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet. 281-358-5407.

Piney Woods Wildlife Society 3rd Tues, 7:30 pm, Mercer Arboretum, 22306 Aldine Westfield Rd. 713-955-6667.

Sierra Club 1st Thur, 7:30 pm, Central Presbyterian, 3788 Richmond @ Timmons. 713-895-9309.

Texas Association of Environmental Professionals 3rd Thurs, 11:30 am, Brady's Landing, 8505 Cypress; Reservations: www.taep.org, reservation@taep.org, or 713-629-9119.

Urban Harvest Community Gardens Quarterly Meeting 4th Tuesday in January, April, July, 6-8 pm; Organic Gardening Classes weekly; workshops for outdoor classroom teachers annually summers. 1900 Kane. 713-880-5540.

Vegetarian Society of Houston 4th Wed, dinner mtg. at various local restaurants. 713-880-1055; Outreach volunteers call 713-880-1055.

White Oak Bayou Assoc 2nd Wed, 7:30 pm, Heights Fire House, 12th & Yale. For agenda, Fred Lazare, President, 713-864-9416 or Teresa Matlock, Treasurer, 713-864-3008.

Wildlife Rehab & Education Central/West: Carol at 713-661-5038 date and times. South/East: 2nd Wed 7 pm Sharon, 281-332-8319.

The Woodlands GREEN 2nd Tues (except Aug), 7:30 pm South County Library, Lake Robbins Rd. Karen Carter, 281-367-3457.

President's Letter

Changing the world

By David Gresham, CEC President

What does it take to make a difference? According to Francis Moore Lappe and Paul Martin Du Bois in *The Quickening of America*, there are three traditional ways individuals react when faced with a challenge to their sense of what's right. They give up and focus on doing what's right for them as individuals; they protest, make demands and fight for the right choice; or they sacrifice, denying their self-interest to relieve the suffering of others. There is a fourth action that can be taken, an action, it seems, many of us have forgotten about – get involved.

The best job I ever had kept me away from home 12, 16, sometimes 20 hours a day. I spent most of that time in front of a computer, editing pictures, sound recordings and video for a company that strove to make a difference by teaching children as-

pects of environmental awareness. We all worked our butts off, not because we had to, not because of a boss standing over us, threatening us, but because we believed so completely in what we were doing. We each felt we made a difference, every day. We were empowered to do whatever was needed to get the projects completed, the best way we knew how.

I bring this up because of the sense of liberation taking responsibility gave to me. Too often we are quick to blame the man who cut us off on the freeway, the politician raising our property taxes, or the professor who failed you in physics. Just blame it on them. It's all their fault. We didn't cause the problem, right? Isn't it wonderful to wash our hands of responsibility?

However, when we absolve ourselves of responsibility two things happen. First, we move the sense of immediacy a step further away, distancing ourselves from the issue. Second, we're no longer empowered to do anything about the problem. Hey, if I'm not responsible for it happening, I can't do anything about it, right?

Wrong. If you're tired of feeling powerless to stop injustice, or just tired of not being

able to walk down the sidewalk in your neighborhood, become involved. Do something about it. Take responsibility. Go to a City Council meeting next Tuesday. Tell them you're mad as hell and not going to take it anymore. Talk to your neighbors. Chances are they're tired of the same things too. Get together and do something about it.

We have a wonderful form of government. Problem is, most people have forgotten how it works. Take responsibility. Learn. Engage. Make a difference.

I've never been a big fan of advertising, but the most inspiring words I've ever heard uttered in a commercial hang above my desk and remind me every day of the power we each have within us:

Here's to the Crazy Ones, the Misfits, the Rebels, the Troublemakers. The Round Pegs in a

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Clean water anniversary

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Houston development paves the way for flooding

Resource Corner: Houston's Water Conservation Program

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December Calendar

Regular Meetings

President's Letter

Citizens' Environmental Coalition

3015 Richmond Suite 270
Houston TX 77098

December 2002

Newsletter &

Environmental Calendar

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