EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A Clear Vision for the Texas Coast

PREPARED FOR MEMBERS OF THE 109TH U.S. CONGRESS AND 79TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE

TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE
JERRY PATTERSON, COMMISSIONER
Dear Fellow Texan,

Thank you for taking the time to review this Executive Summary and the report for the Coastal Texas 2020 initiative. Your involvement and interest in these issues is key to its continued success.

The next 15 years is vital for the Texas coast. The decisions made by community and elected leaders during this time will have a tremendous impact on not only the fragile environment of the coast, but the economy that it supports. Coastal Texas 2020 examines how we can plan, and most importantly, how we can fund the changes needed to keep the Texas coast vibrant and healthy in the future.

The 367 miles of coastline and more than 3,300 miles of bay shores house an amazing diversity of rare wildlife alongside bustling ports and petrochemical industry. While population growth places increasing stress on regional economic and environmental resources, the real threat to the future of the Texas coast is erosion.

Texas suffers from some of the worst coastal erosion rates in the nation. Erosion threatens environmental sustainability, public tax base, wildlife habitat and vital infrastructure. A top priority of the Coastal Texas 2020 initiative is to unite local, state and federal agencies in an effort to fight this devastating erosion wherever and whenever it makes economic sense to do so.

My vision for the future of the Texas coast is clear. It is one in which families can enjoy a day at the beach or fishing in the bay. It is one that maintains safe, efficient transportation along the coast for the regional industries that drive our state economy. Ultimately, the Coastal Texas 2020 initiative is an undertaking that recognizes the value of the coast to all Texans and seeks to protect and improve it for future generations.

I hope you share this vision, and will join me in fighting for the Texas coast. Thank you again for your consideration of this report. If you have any questions, or would like more information on Coastal Texas 2020, please feel free to contact me or my Deputy Commissioner for Coastal Resources, Sam Webb, at (512) 463-2718.

Sincerely,

JERRY PATTERSON
Commissioner, General Land Office
Mission Statement

The Texas coast’s environmental diversity and economic vitality is threatened by erosion from natural and man-made causes. The Texas General Land Office has created Coastal Texas 2020 to lead a long-term, statewide initiative to unite local, state and federal efforts to promote the economic and environmental health of the Texas coast.

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The Importance of the Texas Coast

From the Sabine River to the Rio Grande, Texas meets the Gulf of Mexico along 367 miles of coastline and more than 3,300 miles of bay shores. With nearly two-thirds of the state’s Gulf shoreline protected in parks, wildlife refuges and natural areas off-limits to development, the Texas coast is a natural wonder and home to blue crabs, oysters, pelicans, shrimp, whooping cranes and the rare Kemp’s ridley sea turtle.

Most Texans, wherever they live in the state, benefit from the coast. Benefits include commerce through coastal ports, commerce along the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), commercial marine fisheries, coastal recreation, tax and other revenues generated by coastal commercial activity. Inland water management programs impact the coast. These activities include construction of dams, realignment of waterways for flood control and drainage, withdrawal of underground water and the discharge of pollutants into waterways. A growing population is increasing the benefits of and damage to the coast, resulting in an urgent need for all Texans to address coastal issues.

Since the earliest days of Texas, humans, too, have flourished along the coast. Twenty-five percent of Texans now live in the 18-county coastal region. As the population of the state increases, the number of Texans living near and using the coast will increase. Economic, recreational, and other benefits of the coast to the entire state will improve proportionately – provided the state addresses today’s coastal issues.

The Texas coast is vital to the state’s economy. Galveston Bay supports one of the largest metropolitan areas in the United States and the nation’s largest concentration of oil refineries and a sizable chemical industry, which is ranked No. 1 in the nation in size and production. The Texas coast is home to three of the top 10 ports in the country (based on total cargo tonnage). Texas’ commercial fishing fleets bring in more than $170 million of fish and shellfish annually. More than 66 million short tons of cargo move along the Texas portion of the GIWW each year with a commercial value of more than $25 billion.

Yet, ports and petrochemical production are only a part of the economic benefit derived from the coast. Tourists spend more than $7.5 billion annually in Texas’ coastal counties. Visitors come for the beaches, bird watching, fishing, a mild winter climate and a colorful history. The coast accounts for more than one-quarter of the money spent on travel in Texas, making it the second most popular tourist destination in the state.

In Galveston, they now come for the cruises. Since the opening of the city’s first cruise line terminal in 2000, more than 1 million people have sailed from the Port of Galveston on cruise ships. Cruise ships pour more than $445 million into the Texas economy each year.

The region’s largest urban centers – such as Houston and Corpus Christi – are continuing to grow and place demands on the area’s economic and environmental resources.
Erosion threatens the future of the coast. The sea is reclaiming it — bit by bit. In some cases up to 10 feet of shoreline per year erodes into the Gulf of Mexico.\textsuperscript{13} Texas suffers from some of the highest coastal erosion rates in the nation.\textsuperscript{14} The rate of erosion and the effect of erosion are not uniform on the coast. Erosion threatens environmental sustainability, public tax base, wildlife refuges and vital infrastructure.

Hurricanes and tropical storms regularly sweep across the coastal landscape bringing high tides, waves, storm surges and strong winds that reshape the land, wipe away structures and cut through barrier islands. Rivers swollen with floodwater pour fresh water into coastal bays and estuaries, flushing them out and promoting productive wetlands that serve as nursery grounds for fish and shrimp. Fish and wildlife migrate in and out of these areas with the seasons. Other changes are man-made. New channels are dredged to accommodate ships and boaters. Rivers and tidal flows are diverted or dammed, reducing the amount of sediment and fresh water reaching bays and estuaries. Houses, roads and entire communities are being built to meet the needs of people wanting to live near and enjoy the sea.

In an effort to stem the tide, Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson created Coastal Texas 2020 — a long-term, statewide initiative to unite local, state and federal efforts to promote the economic and environmental health of the Texas coast. Coastal Texas 2020 provides the tools to identify challenges and find unified solutions to the coastal problems of the next 20 years. “The Texas coast faces difficult challenges,” Patterson said. “However, by pooling our efforts, we can face those challenges and make a change for the better. This will take years, not months.”

One goal of the Coastal Texas 2020 plan is increasing the state’s share of federal funding to fight coastal erosion. Texas is far behind other states in seeking federal assistance to fight this erosion. In the 95 years the federal government has provided states money to curb coastal erosion, Texas has garnered less than 1 percent of the total money allocated. Florida, by comparison, has received 32 percent of that money, and even New Jersey has netted 27 percent.\textsuperscript{15}

Congressional authorization and funding for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) feasibility studies is a necessary prerequisite to allow the money to flow to Texas. Nonfederal matching funds from state and local sources will also be needed for Texas to get its fair share of federal funds for coastal erosion. For example, a $100 million erosion response project would require a non-federal match of $35 million.
Coastal Texas 2020 was launched in June 2003. A series of public meetings was held on the Texas coast to gather public comment on the issues facing the region. More than 500 people attended these meetings and helped shape this document. Additional public input was gained by way of a 34-question scoping document posted online and distributed throughout coastal communities. The General Land Office’s (GLO’s) Fifth Biennial Texas Coastal Issues Conference, held in March 2004, also highlighted the initiative.

The Texas coast was divided into five regions that included the 18 coastal counties comprising Texas’ coastal zone. A Regional Advisory Committee was assembled for each region. These committees typically included representatives from state and local government, natural resource agencies, academia and nonprofit organizations, as well as the general public. These committees held public hearings in their respective regions and developed a list of the key coastal issues affecting their areas of the coast. Specific projects were proposed to address these issues, and a Technical Advisory Committee – made up of members of state natural resource agencies and coastal experts – reviewed these projects to offer feedback and determine feasibility and cost.
The Texas coast is distinctive. Many elements contribute to the landscape and its appeal. From Sabine Pass to the Rio Grande, the evolution through time is seen in its vast estuaries, lagoons, marshes, river deltas, peninsulas, tidal inlets and barrier islands that span the 367 miles of Gulf of Mexico coastline and 3,300 miles of bay shoreline. Each of the unique coastal resources responds to changes in climate and wave conditions in different ways, but they all are exposed to rising sea level and long-term erosional trends.

Today, the Texas coast experiences significant erosion because there is not enough sediment in the coastal zone and shoreline currents to balance the effects of rising sea level and coastal storms and hurricanes. Solutions to shoreline erosion are not cheap and take a lot of effort and coordination among many interest groups. Inadequate funding is often a stumbling block for many erosion response projects.

The most efficient and cost-effective method of beach nourishment is to dredge sand from offshore sources and pump it directly onto the beach. It is expected that sand obtained from offshore sources can be placed on the beach for a third less than it costs to deliver it by truck.

A July 2004 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) feasibility study conducted along the coasts of Jefferson and Galveston counties identified several offshore, submerged sand sources. The GLO has developed a project that will conduct a detailed geophysical and geotechnical investigation of two offshore sources in proximity to West Galveston Island.

The greatest cause of periodic coastal erosion is the effect of storms and hurricanes. However, long-term erosion, which affects 64 percent of the Gulf shoreline, is caused by the rate of relative sea level rise and the lack of new sediment coming into the coastal system. Many bay shorelines are eroding, but factors influencing shoreline change and the method for response are the geology, setting (with respect to wind and wave direction), shoreline armoring and the proximity to major ship traffic.
Coastal Erosion Affects Us All

As more and more people come to the Texas coast to play, live and do business, the region is seeing problems with competing land uses. Continued growth in the region is putting pressure on natural resources. Balancing growth in tourism, population and industry are major challenges. With this growth comes issues that must be solved to ensure the continued productivity of the region. Shoreline erosion is one of the most critical issues facing the Texas coast. It is one of the issues of concern identified by the Regional Advisory Committees.

Projects dealing with coastal erosion (bay shore and gulf) account for almost one-quarter of the projects identified. However, in one way or another, coastal erosion is tied to all of the key issues facing the Texas coast. Bay shore erosion is a major concern simply because more people live on bay shorelines. Texas has 3,300 miles of bay shoreline and 367 miles of Gulf shoreline. In general, Texas’ coastal erosion is related to sediment loss, changes in freshwater inflows, effects of structures such as jetties and seawalls, man-made inlets, impacts from navigation, armored inlets, ship wakes, storms and relative sea level rise.

Even the coast’s wetlands suffer from the effects of erosion. Wetlands located along navigation channels are being eroded by the wakes of passing ships. Other areas — especially along the upper Texas coast — are facing the compound problem of rising sea levels and subsidence.

Subsidence can occur naturally as soils settle. It can also occur when groundwater, oil and natural gas are removed from underground. The ground settles and fills up the space previously occupied by these substances. When coastal areas subside, wetlands are often inundated and succumb to the waves of bay waters. Coastal wetlands also face pressure from development.

Erosion damages infrastructure. Erosion resulting from tropical storms and the day-to-day action of waves can undercut roads and homes. Erosion has consumed 26 miles of State Highway 87, which once connected Galveston to Sabine Pass. It also threatens homes on the west end of Galveston Island. In the past, the effects of coastal erosion were offset by new sediment carried in by way of rivers. That has since changed. Much of the sediment now flowing along the coastline comes from eroding beaches. This sediment threatens navigation channels and creates the constant need for dredging in order to keep these channels open to traffic.
As the state sponsor of the GIWW, the Texas Department of Transportation advocates the continuance of shallow draft navigation along with the maintenance of the GIWW by the USACE. The GIWW is the nation’s third busiest waterway and is an important component of the state’s diversified multimodal transportation system. In 2000, more than 66 million short tons of cargo were moved on the Texas portion of the waterway. The waterway provides a safe, cost-efficient means of moving cargo. Fifteen percent of the nation’s freight is carried on the GIWW at only a fraction of the cost of moving the same cargo by truck. Each barge on the GIWW represents 60 to 150 tank trucks that are not operating on state roads. Air pollution for barge traffic on the GIWW is one-tenth of that of other modes of transportation, such as trucks and trains.

More than half of the nation’s chemical products and gasoline comes from plants along the Texas portion of the GIWW. The state also leads the nation in the development of port facilities for importing Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). The state has nine LNG port terminals in the works.

To protect these facilities and ensure the safe passage of their cargo, the GIWW must be maintained and not breached by the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The shorelines of the GIWW also must be protected from erosion as this threatens industry and homes that line the canal in places. Additionally, the shoreline ecosystem adjacent to the GIWW contains sand dunes, wetlands, coastal prairies, oak mottes and lagoons that provide habitat for many wildlife species. Sensitive areas adjacent to the GIWW, especially those in the southern portion where it passes through the Laguna Madre, have required and will continue to require significant coordination between stakeholders in order to find acceptable solutions for dredging operations.

Over the last 10 years, funding from the Texas Coastal Management Plan (CMP) and the Coastal Erosion and Response Act (CEPRA) has provided grants to tackle some of these issues. Each year, the GLO receives $2.2 million from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to fund projects in the coastal zone through the CMP. In addition, the 78th Texas Legislature provided CEPRA with $7.32 million to fund projects to fight coastal erosion. While significant, this funding allowed the program to fund only a fraction of the $36.5 million requested by coastal communities to fund 77 projects.

An economic analysis of selected CEPRA Cycle 1 construction projects by the Community and Regional Planning Program at the University of Texas at Austin in 2003 demonstrated that for every dollar invested in CEPRA projects by Texas state government and local communities, more than $16 will be generated in economic benefits over the life of the projects. These benefits come through increases in tourist spending, property value, property taxes, user fees and public infrastructure savings.

“In sum, this systematic evaluation of Texas CEPRA Cycle 1 projects indicates that preserving coastal resources and assets is a public investment strategy yielding high returns for Texas taxpayers,” said the study’s authors in conclusion.
A 2005 version of the study detailed the benefits reaped by communities even further by looking at selected CEPRA Cycle 2 construction projects. The study still found almost $14 were generated for local communities for every $1 invested in the project. The state’s support of these 15 projects created an economic benefit valued at more than $177 million.

While these studies were based on erosion response projects, their findings can be applied to other projects, such as shoreline protection, marsh restoration and beach nourishment. These projects boost a community’s tax base, attract more tourism dollars and protect infrastructure from costly repairs.

**Sand Dollars: Funding The Fight Against Erosion**

The Heinz Center, a nonprofit organization that studies environmental policy, found erosion costs the nation’s property owners more than $500 million a year. Unless steps are taken, a Heinz Center study predicts 1 out of 4 houses within 500 feet of the U.S. shoreline will be lost to erosion within the next 60 years. That property disappears from tax rolls and leads to less tourism money coming into affected communities. Gulf of Mexico shorelines experience higher erosion rates than any other part of the U.S. coastline. At an annual average of six feet a year, erosion rates along the Texas coast are among the highest along the Gulf of Mexico. Eighty percent of Galveston’s beaches are eroding. In some cases, the beaches are losing up to 15 feet a year. The Heinz Center report assumed an absence of erosion response. With several erosion response structures now in place, loss to erosion could be delayed and reduced; however, these projects are relatively new, and long-term monitoring data are not yet available.

Without a firm commitment and support from federal, state and local governments working together, the state will continue to see its natural resources washing away. Texas lags behind other states in coastal funding. With the third longest coastline in the nation, the state received less than 1 percent of the federal money set aside for beach restoration in Fiscal Year 2003. Delaware – with only 381 miles of shoreline – received 16 times more federal money than Texas. Without a concerted effort to obtain federal money to address coastal challenges, Texas will continue to fall behind other states in protecting its coastal resources.

To meet federal funding requirements, state funding in the $12 million to $15 million per year range is needed to match the non-federal cost share for projects that will cost tens of millions of dollars and take decades to complete.
RECOMMENDATIONS

The vision for the Texas coast is clear. It is one in which the state’s coast supports a healthy, vibrant economy and environment. It is one in which families and individuals alike can enjoy a day at the beach or fishing on the bay. It is one that maintains safe, efficient transportation along the coast and supports the industries that rely on it. It is one that recognizes the value of the coast to all Texans.

In charting a course for the future of the Texas coast, these recommendations, if implemented, will provide much-needed tools for ensuring the continued productivity of the state’s coastal zone for generations to come.

Recommendations requiring federal action:

**Authorization and funding of the Conservation and Reinvestment Act (CARA) to provide outer continental shelf impact assistance to state and local governments**

Texas, Louisiana and other western Gulf states help meet the nation’s energy needs by allowing offshore drilling for oil and natural gas. CARA would establish a fund to provide for the permanent protection of resources that may be impacted by offshore oil and gas production. In substance, the CARA bill would allocate a portion of the royalty on federal offshore leases directly to the adjacent states for coastal-related purposes. If adopted, CARA could solve most, if not all, of Texas’ coastal erosion problems. Texas should join Louisiana, which is making a major push to adopt CARA in order to solve its wetlands erosion problem, in the effort to adopt the act.

**ACTION:** Forge a Texas-Louisiana federal, coastal delegation partnership to introduce the CARA legislation into Congress and push for its authorization and funding.

**Authorization and funding of a Texas coastwide feasibility study by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)**

A coastwide feasibility study would qualify Texas for federal funding to address coastal challenges not only along its Gulf beaches but also throughout its massive bay system.

**ACTION:** Coordinate the lobbying efforts of local governments to include this item on all coastal-related congressional requests.

**Funding for the CMP at current or higher levels by the federal government**

The federally approved Coastal Management Program brings more than $2 million in federal Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) funds to Texas state and local entities to implement projects and program activities. Texas is unique among coastal states in that it passes 90 percent of its CZMA funds through to coastal communities for projects in the coastal zone.

**ACTION:** Coordinate the lobbying efforts of local governments to include this item on all coastal-related congressional requests.

**Continued and enhanced participation in USACE Continuing Authorities Programs**

The Continuing Authorities Program allows the USACE to respond more quickly than is possible through the congressional authorization process.

**ACTION:** Have the Land Office lead efforts to educate local governments on options available under the USACE Continuing Authorities Program.
Recommendations requiring state action:

✦ Fully funded state erosion program

A fully funded CEPRRA program is needed to meet the match requirements of federal projects and studies outlined on the previous page. In order to participate in the federal grant matching programs, the state must enter into project cooperation agreements, which commit funding through project completion.

**ACTION:** By issuing this report, the Texas General Land Office is providing information that citizens, local governments and legislators can use to make a strong case for state erosion funds and to lobby the Legislature for a dedicated funding source for the CEPRRA program.

✦ Additional state laws to allow local governments to provide matching funds for coastal projects

In addition to the state match, the CEPRRA program and other grant programs require a local or non-state match requirement. Many coastal communities do not have adequate means to raise these matching requirements. Through statutory changes, additional means can be found to help local governments meet these requirements.

**ACTION:** Encourage local governments to contact their state legislators about proposing laws that provide the ability to raise local funds to match state/federal funds.
Endnotes

1. The University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology
3. 2003 Total Population Estimates for Texas Counties," Texas State Data Center, Office of the State Demographer, The University of Texas at San Antonio
6. Texas Chemical Industry Fact, Business and Industry Data Center, Office of the Governor
7. American Association of Port Authorities — 2002
9. Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association
10. Texas Department of Economic Development – 2002 data
11. The Port of Galveston
12. International Association of Cruise Lines
13. The University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology
15. Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines, Duke University
22. Ibid
26. The University of Texas Bureau of Economic Geology
27. Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines, Duke University
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