

# Plum Creek Watershed Partnership Ground Rules

The following are the Ground Rules for the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership (hereafter referred to as the Partnership) agreed to and signed by the members of the Plum Creek Watershed Partnership Steering Committee (hereafter referred to as the Steering Committee) in an effort to develop and implement a watershed protection plan.

The signatories to these Ground Rules agree as follows:

## **GOALS**

The goal of the Partnership is to develop and implement a Watershed Protection Plan (WPP) to improve and protect the water quality of Plum Creek (Segment 1810). According to the draft *2004 Texas Water Quality Inventory and 303(d) List*, Plum Creek exhibits elevated nutrient levels and is impaired by elevated bacteria concentrations making it unsuitable for contact recreation use.

The Steering Committee will consider and attempt to incorporate the following into the development and implementation of the WPP:

- Economic feasibility, affordability and growth;
- Unique environmental resources of the watershed;
- Regional water planning efforts; and
- Regional cooperation.

## **POWERS**

The Steering Committee is the decision making body for the Partnership. As such, the Steering Committee will formulate recommendations to be used in drafting the WPP and will guide the implementation of the WPP to success. Formal Steering Committee recommendations will be identified as such in the planning documents and meeting summaries.

Although formation of the Steering Committee was facilitated by the Texas Cooperative Extension (TCE) and the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB), the Steering Committee is an independent group of watershed stakeholders and individuals with an interest in restoring and protecting the designated uses and the overall health of the Plum Creek Watershed.

The Steering Committee provides the method for public participation in the planning process and will be instrumental in obtaining local support for actions aimed at restoring surface water quality in Plum Creek.

## **TIME FRAME**

Development of a Plum Creek WPP will require at least a 15-month period. The Steering Committee will function under a June 2007 target date to complete the initial development of the WPP. Achieving water quality improvement in Plum Creek may require significant time as implementation is an iterative process of executing programs and practices followed by achievement of interim milestones and reassessment of strategies and recommendations. The Steering Committee will function throughout the 15-month initial development period and may continue to function thereafter as a recommendation of the WPP.

## **STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP SELECTION**

The Steering Committee is composed of stakeholders from the Plum Creek Watershed. Initial solicitation of members for equitable geographic and topical representation was conducted using three methods: 1) consultation with the TCE County Agents, Plum Creek Conservation District, Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority, Caldwell-Travis and Hays County Soil and Water Conservation Districts and local and regional governments, 2) meetings with the various stakeholder interest groups and individuals, and 3) self-nomination or requests by the various stakeholder groups or individuals.

Stakeholders are defined as either those who make and implement decisions or those who are affected by the decisions made or those who have the ability to assist with implementation of the decisions.

## **STEERING COMMITTEE**

Members include both individuals and representatives of organizations and agencies. A variety of members serve on the Steering Committee to reflect the diversity of interests within the Plum Creek Watershed and to incorporate the viewpoints of those who will be affected by the WPP.

Size of the Steering Committee is not strictly limited by number but rather by practicality. To effectively function as a decision-making body, the membership shall achieve geographic and topical representation. If the Steering Committee becomes so large that it becomes impossible or impractical to function, the Committee will institute a consensus-based system for limiting membership.

Steering Committee members are expected to participate fully in Committee deliberations. Members will identify and present insights, suggestions, and concerns from a community, environmental, or public interest perspective. Committee members are expected to work constructively and collaboratively with other members toward reaching consensus.

Committee members will be expected to assist with the following:

- Identify the desired water quality conditions and measurable goals;
- Prioritization of programs and practices to achieve goals;
- Help develop a WPP document;
- Lead the effort to implement this plan at the local level; and
- Communicate implications of the WPP to other affected parties in the watershed.

Steering Committee members will be asked to sign the final WPP.

The Steering Committee will not elect a chair, but rather remain a facilitated group. TCE and/or TSSWCB will serve as the facilitator.

In order to carry out its responsibilities, the Steering Committee has discretion to form standing and ad hoc work groups to carry out specific assignments from the Committee. Steering Committee members will serve on a work group and represent that work group at Steering Committee meetings to bring forth information and recommendations.

## **WORK GROUPS**

Topical work groups formed by the Steering Committee will carry out specific assignments from the Steering Committee. Initially formed standing work groups are:

- Agricultural Nonpoint Source Work Group
- Outreach and Education Work Group
- Urban Stormwater and Nonpoint Source Work Group

- Waste Water and Industry Work Group
- Water Quality and Habitat Work Group

Each work group will be composed of a minimum of 5 Steering Committee members and any other members of the Partnership with a vested interest in that topic. There is no limit to the number of members on a work group. Each work group will elect a chair.

Tasks such as research or plan drafting will be better performed by these topical work groups. Work Group members will discuss specific issues and assist in developing that portion of the WPP, including implementation recommendations.

Work Groups and individual Work Group members are not authorized to make decisions or speak for the Steering Committee.

### **TECHNICAL ADVISORY GROUP**

A Technical Advisory Group (TAG) consisting of state and federal agencies with water quality responsibilities will provide guidance to the Steering Committee and Work Groups. The TAG will assist the Steering Committee and Work Groups in WPP development by answering questions related to the jurisdiction of each TAG member. The TAG includes, but is not limited to, representatives from the following agencies:

- Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
- Texas Cooperative Extension
- Texas Department of Agriculture
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Texas Railroad Commission
- Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board
- Texas Farm Bureau
- Texas Water Development Board
- U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Geological Survey
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

### **REPLACEMENTS AND ADDITIONS**

The Steering Committee may add new members if (1) a member is unable to continue serving and a vacancy is created or (2) important stakeholder interests are identified that are not represented by the existing membership. A new member must be approved by a majority of existing members. In either event, the Steering Committee will, when practical, accept additional members.

### **ALTERNATES**

Members unable to attend a Steering Committee meeting (an absentee) may send an alternate. An absentee should provide advance notification to the facilitator of the desire to send an alternate.

An alternate attending with prior notification from an absentee will serve as a proxy for that absent Steering Committee member and will have voting privileges. An alternate attending without advance notification will not be able to participate in Steering Committee votes.

Absentees may also provide input via another Committee member or send input via the facilitator. The facilitator will present such information to the Committee.

## **ABSENCES**

All Steering Committee members agree to make a good faith effort to attend all Steering Committee meetings, however, the members recognize that situations may arise necessitating the absence of a member. Three absences in a row of which the facilitator was not informed of beforehand or without designation of an alternate constitute a resignation from the Steering Committee.

## **DECISIONMAKING PROCESS**

The Steering Committee will strive for consensus when making decisions and recommendations. Consensus is defined as everyone being able to live with the decisions made. Consensus inherently requires compromise and negotiation.

If consensus cannot be achieved, the Steering Committee will make decisions by a simple majority vote. If members develop formal recommendations, they will do so by two-thirds majority vote.

Steering Committee members may submit recommendations as individuals or on behalf of their affiliated organization.

## **QUORUM**

In order to conduct business, the Steering Committee will have a quorum. Quorum is defined as at least 51% of the Steering Committee (and/or alternates) present and a representative of either TCE or TSSWCB present.

## **FACILITATOR**

The TSSWCB Regional Watershed Coordinator and the TCE Coordinator are independent positions, financed by the State of Texas through federal grant funds. Each has specific roles to perform in facilitating the Partnership and Steering Committee.

**TSSWCB Regional Watershed Coordinator:** The TSSWCB Regional Watershed Coordinator provides technical assistance to the stakeholders in developing the Plum Creek WPP. The TSSWCB Regional Watershed Coordinator will 1) ensure the planning process culminates in a WPP for Plum Creek, 2) facilitate discussions in Steering Committee and Work Group meetings necessary to formulate the WPP, 3) draft text and prepare the WPP such that it incorporates Steering Committee recommendations, 4) collaborate with the TCE Coordinator to facilitate the development and implementation of the WPP through the Steering Committee and Work Groups, and 5) ensure the Plum Creek WPP satisfies the nine elements fundamental to a WPP as promulgated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

**TCE Coordinator:** The TCE Coordinator will serve as an educator and facilitator to help the Steering Committee organize its work, run meetings, coordinate educational trainings and draft notes and other materials if requested, and work with the TSSWCB to facilitate the development and implementation of the plan. The TCE Coordinator will co-lead the meetings and work with all of the members to ensure that the process runs smoothly. The role of the TCE Coordinator includes working with the Steering Committee to prepare meeting summaries, assisting in the location and/or preparation of background materials, distributing documents the Steering Committee develops, conducting public outreach, moderating public workshops, providing assistance to Steering Committee members regarding Committee business between meetings, and other functions as the Steering Committee requests.

## **MEETINGS**

All meetings (Partnership, Steering Committee, and Work Group) are open and all interested stakeholders are encouraged and welcomed to participate.

Over the 15-month development period, regular meetings of either the Steering Committee or Work Groups will occur each month. The Steering Committee may determine the need for additional meetings. Steering Committee and Work Group meetings will be scheduled to accomplish specific milestones in the planning process.

Meetings will start and end on time. Meeting times will be set in an effort to accommodate the attendance of all Steering Committee members. The TCE Coordinator will notify members of the Partnership, Steering Committee, and Work Groups of respective meetings.

## **OPEN DISCUSSION**

Participants may express their views candidly, but without personal attacks. Time is shared because all participants are of equal importance.

## **AGENDA**

TCE and TSSWCB, in consultation with Steering Committee members are charged with developing the agenda. The anticipated topics are determined at the previous meeting and through correspondence. A draft agenda will be sent to the Steering Committee with the notice of the meeting. Agendas will be posted on the project website. Agenda items may be added by members at the time that the draft agenda is provided. The TCE Coordinator will review the agenda at the start of each meeting and the agenda will be amended if needed and the Committee agrees. The Committee will then follow the approved agenda unless they agree to revise it.

## **MEETING SUMMARIES**

TCE will take notes during the meetings and may provide audio recording. Meeting summaries will be based on notes and/or the recording. TCE and TSSWCB will draft meeting notes and distribute them to the committee for their review and approval. All meeting summaries will be posted on the project website.

## **DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALS**

TCE and TSSWCB will prepare and distribute the agenda and other needed items to members. Distribution will occur via email and websites, unless expressly asked to use U.S. Mail (i.e. member has no email access). To encourage equal sharing of information, materials will be made available to all. Those who wish to distribute materials to the Steering Committee or a Work Group may ask TCE or TSSWCB to do so on their behalf.

## **SPEAKING IN THE NAME OF THE COMMITTEE**

Individuals do not speak for the Steering Committee as a whole unless authorized by the Committee to do so. Members do not speak for the TCE or TSSWCB and neither the TCE nor TSSWCB speak for Steering Committee members. If Committee spokespersons are needed, they will be selected by the Steering Committee.

## **DEVELOPMENT AND REVISION OF GROUNDRULES**

These ground rules were drafted by the TCE and TSSWCB and presented to the Steering Committee for their review, possible revision, and adoption. Once adopted, ground rules may be changed by two-thirds majority vote provided a quorum is present.