

# Bay City The Tribune

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## **Future of Bay could have impact on economy**

**Shelly Gormey**

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Bay City council members heard a presentation on Matagorda Bay's projected future and were asked to adopt a resolution urging protection of freshwater inflows to keep the bay healthy.

Jennifer McMahon of the National Wildlife Foundation (NWF) and Jennifer Walker of Sierra Club asked for the resolution to protect the bays and the coastal economy at council's meeting Thursday night.

The NWF and Sierra Club are part of a coalition, along with Environmental Defense, called the Texas Living Waters Project formed to meet the needs of the people and the environment, said McMahon.

McMahon summarized NWF's report — Bays in Peril — explaining how the Texas water-permitting process threatens freshwater inflows into Texas bays.

"This report shows the effect of only permits that are authorized today — not permits that are pending or projected," said McMahon.

"The population of Texas is expected to double in the next 50 years and water permits are becoming a hot commodity," said McMahon.

The report, which gives Matagorda Bay a danger rating, projects what would happen to the inflows to Texas' seven major estuaries if existing water permits were fully used and wastewater reuse increased.

"The salinity mix in the bays plays an important part in ecology," McMahon said.

The NWF report also studied drought-tolerance levels — estuary needs during low-rainfall periods to keep salinity levels in bays stable.

Matagorda Bay's future use shows a 567 percent increase in the number of periods it would drop below tolerance level, the report said.

"This means the bay would not be getting the water it needs to support wildlife that depends on it," said McMahon.

A second criteria used in the study was freshwater pulses of high inflows into the bays that naturally occur during spring and summer most years.

"During normal rainfall periods, the years with low freshwater pulses is expected to increase 94 percent," McMahon said.

"This number is lower than the drought-tolerance level, but is still a significant increase," said McMahon.

The freshwater pulses support strong levels of reproduction and growth for fish and other wildlife dependent on the bays.

"Because of these two findings, Matagorda Bay was given a danger rating," said McMahon.

Estuaries deemed to be in danger by the NWF include Matagorda Bay, Sabine Lake, Galveston Bay, San Antonio Bay and Corpus Christi Bay.

"Matagorda Bay is important to the community in that it plays a major part in the coastal economy."

"Nature tourism relies on a healthy bay system and the people will be affected if healthy bays are not present," McMahon said.

McMahon asked that council follow the lead of Galveston and Aransas, which already passed resolutions to urge protection of the bays.

"My family fishes here and the information brought to you tonight is really important to us," said Diane Wassenich, a former Bay City resident who has family still in the county.

"It will have an economic impact on nature tourism."

Bay City Mayor Richard Knapik said that council would consider a resolution.

In other council news:

- Meetings are ongoing with the City of Wharton and Texas Department of Transportation (TXDoT) to discuss a possible route from FM 1161 to Texas 60 on the southside of Wharton, said D.C. Dunham, Bay City Community Development Corporation executive director.

"The City of Wharton thinks it is a good idea because they have a lot of truck traffic through the city," said Dunham.

"It would be a better evacuation route from Matagorda County and the clearer route to Bay City is in our best interest."

"It would make Bay City a lot more accessible," said council member Andy Hawkins.

Two counties presenting the plan to TXDoT have a better chance of approval, said Dunham.

"We need a letter of endorsement to continue to pursue this with TXDoT," Dunham said.

Council agreed to adopt a resolution supporting Wharton County to develop a Regional Mobility Plan around the City of Wharton.

- Bay City Police Chief Mike Baker and officer Cleven Goodman gave an update on the new technology system to replace the 10-year-old system now used by the police department.

"The hardware we have had for the last 10 years is outdated and we are having to focus on going to a new system," said Goodman.

"With the new system, we will be able to get better response time from law enforcement to the public and be better able to track people."