

**Quarterly Report for Matagorda Bay Mitigation Trust  
Colorado River Delta II  
December 31, 2024**

**Project:**

Relating variation in freshwater inflow and water quality to biological communities in the Colorado River Delta to inform future habitat restoration projects.

**Organizations:**

<sup>1</sup>Center for Sportfish Science and Conservation (CSSC) at Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi

<sup>2</sup>BIOWEST, INC.

**Investigators:**

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**RFP#:** 2023-2024-01

**Project Term:** 03/01/2024 – 08/31/2026

**Reporting Period:** 3/1/2024 – 11/30/2024 (3)

The contracted project with the Matagorda Bay Mitigation Trust was initiated as of March 1, 2024. After this date, we identified and received approval for a subcontractor with expertise in areas not covered by researchers at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Areas for subcontract expertise include facilitation and coordination of meetings with potential sponsors of a pilot project to assess feasibility of controlled additions of freshwater to the Colorado River Delta and evaluating whether such additions may result in ecological benefits at potential habitat restoration sites. A technical memorandum will summarize key findings and recommendations. The chosen contractor was BIOWEST, Inc. and a subaward was issued to this group in March 2024 in the amount of \$25,000.

**Task 1 – Nekton Distribution & Community Structure:** Conduct a comprehensive assessment of juvenile finfish and shellfish distribution and community structure within the Colorado River Delta study area.

Status: Ongoing

Spring '24

- CSSC performed first of two sampling events for Spring 2024 on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Three epibenthic sled samples were taken at four sampling sites (CD\_1, CD\_2, CD\_4, CD\_5), totaling 12 samples, see map. All samples were preserved in 10% formalin and returned to CSSC Lab. Water samples were also collected at five sites (CD\_1, CD\_4, W1, W2, W3) and delivered to Dr. Wetz's lab later that same day. Lastly, water was recorded at two sentinel sites (Sal\_1, Sal\_2).
- CSSC performed the second Spring sampling event on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024. Epibenthic samples and water quality samples were taken from predetermined sites. Water

quality was also measured at sentinel sites. Currently CSSC lab has 24 epibenthic samples in house.

#### Summer '24

- CSSC carried out the first summer sampling trip on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Three replicate epibenthic sled tows were performed at four standard sites, resulting in 12 marsh edge nekton samples preserved and returned to lab. Water parameters were recorded at all sites in addition to two additional sites. Water samples for the Wetz lab were collected at 5 sites and handed over that night.
- CSSC performed second summer sampling on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2024. Epibenthic samples and water quality samples were taken from predetermined sites. Water quality was also measured at sentinel sites and water samples were collected and passed on to the Wetz lab. Currently CSSC lab has 48 epibenthic samples in house and has begun identifying, enumerating, and measuring species.

#### Fall '24

- CSSC sampled for Fall of 2024 on October 30<sup>th</sup> and November 18<sup>th</sup>. Epibenthic samples and water quality samples were taken from predetermined sites. Water quality was also measured at sentinel sites and water samples were collected and passed on to the Wetz lab. Currently CSSC lab has 72 epibenthic samples in house and has begun identifying, enumerating, and measuring species.

**Task 2 – Water Quality:** Process monthly water quality and nutrient samples collected over two full years at the two potential habitat restoration sites and the two control sites.

Status: Ongoing

#### Spring '24

- Wetz lab has water quality samples for the five sites on 4/17/24 and 5/1/24 and is currently analyzing for hydrographic parameters (salinity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH), chlorophyll, nutrients and phytoplankton abundance.

#### Summer '24

- On July 17<sup>th</sup>, 2024, CSSC went to the Delta to collect water samples from our five permanent water sites after heavy rains and flooding occurred as a result of Hurricane Beryl.
- Wetz lab has Summer 2024 water quality samples for the five sites on 8/28/24 and 9/9/24 and is currently analyzing for hydrographic parameters (salinity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH), chlorophyll, nutrients and phytoplankton abundance. Fifty total water samples in house.

#### Fall '24

- Wetz lab has Fall 2024 water quality samples for the five sites on 8/28/24 and 9/9/24 and is currently analyzing for hydrographic parameters (salinity, temperature, dissolved oxygen, pH), chlorophyll, nutrients and phytoplankton abundance. 60 total water samples in house.

**Task 3 – Sponsor Engagement:** Engage likely sponsors to determine feasibility and logistical considerations of a pilot project to test whether controlled additions of freshwater can be detected and offer ecological benefits at potential habitat restoration sites.

Status: Underway

Spring '24

- Nothing to report for this quarter.

Summer '24

- BIO-WEST met with Mr. Jay Kleberg, Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Trust to discuss freshwater inflow pilot projects and potential opportunities specific to the Colorado River delta.
- BIO-WEST also had multiple conversations with the Lower Colorado River Authority discussing feasibility and logistical considerations of a pilot project to test whether controlled additions of freshwater could provide ecological benefits to the Colorado River delta. Activities planned for next quarter include organizing and conducting in person meetings with the Matagorda Bay Foundation and Texas Water Trade.

Fall '24

- Ed Oborny attended the Gulf of Mexico Trust (GOMT) policy council meeting in Houston, TX on October 25<sup>th</sup> to discuss freshwater inflow opportunities along the Texas Gulf Coast with other GOMT policy council members.
- BIO-WEST met with Mr. Bill Balboa (Executive Director, Matagorda Bay Foundation) in Columbus, TX on November 18<sup>th</sup> to discuss freshwater inflow opportunities and potential pilot projects in Matagorda Bay and the Colorado River delta.
- BIO-WEST prepared for and participated in a meeting with Kevin De Santiago and Kyle Garmany (Texas Water Trade), Jay Kleberg (Executive Director, GOMT), and Dr. Matthew Streich (HRI) at TAMU-CC's Harte Research Institute in Corpus Christi, TX on November 25<sup>th</sup>. The meeting was centered on focused flow opportunities and existing Texas Water Trade pilot projects along the Texas Gulf Coast.
- BIO-WEST prepared for and participated in a digital meeting with Mr. James Dodson (San Antonio Bay Partnership) on December 11<sup>th</sup> to discuss potential water delivery projects to support the environment in the Guadalupe River delta and the Nueces River system.
- BIO-WEST met with Mr. Jay Kleberg (Executive Director, GOMT) in Austin, TX on December 12<sup>th</sup> to continue discussions on wastewater treatment plant infrastructure improvement in rural communities along the Texas Gulf Coast, and how these projects might support future freshwater inflow commitments.

