

► CEDAR BAYOU WATERSHED

Barges, bacteria topics at meeting

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Members of the Cedar Bayou Watershed Partnership met Thursday for a first look at expanded water quality monitoring of Cedar Bayou, but water hazards much larger than bacteria also were a topic of interest as Guido Persiani presented information on the possible removal of sunken barges and shrimp boats that dot the waterway.

The watershed partnership is a project of the Houston-Galveston Area Council and the Texas Soil and Water Conservation Board to get community input into addressing water quality in Cedar Bayou, which has failed to meet Texas water quality standards, particularly for excessive bacteria levels.

Justin Bower, with H-GAC, said the problem of submerged and partially submerged vessels also was an appropriate topic, as it is an issue identified by the local community as affecting the health of the bayou.

Persiani is involved in the watershed partnership and is employed by Bayer, but is working with the sunken vessel issue in his role as project manager for the Cedar Bayou Navigation District.

He said the latest effort to deal with the half-dozen or so abandoned vessels started with Gerald Hayes, an area resident who is active with Friends of Cedar Bayou United — a community group formed to advocate protection of the waterway's conservation and recreational uses.

Hayes worked with the Texas General

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Land Office, which put him in touch with a salvage company that has done similar vessel removals along the Gulf Coast.

He then got in touch with Persiani, who asked the CBND to get involved.

"The [CBND] board authorized my participation to bring this project to fruition," Persiani said.

Hayes and Persiani are working with the General Land Office to start the process for the state to officially determine the vessels are abandoned and subject to removal.

The next step locally, Persiani said, is to identify a source of the money required to remove them, estimated to be \$30,000 - \$60,000.

He said potential financial partners include the navigation district, the Port of Houston Authority, Harris and Chambers counties and the city of Baytown.

He said one of the sponsoring agencies will need to handle the actual contract and supervision of the project.

While the sunken barges and shrimp boats are not in the commercial navigation channel of the bayou, Persiani said they present a significant

hazard to recreational users in smaller boats and personal watercraft.

Jerry Jones, president of FCBU, said, "This is an excellent example of citizens, organizations, government and industry working together for a common cause that benefits everybody."

Bower presented early results of expanded water quality monitoring of Cedar Bayou.

He said, for several years water quality in the bayou has been tested at four points on a quarterly basis.

In an effort to better understand why the water quality is impaired and where sources of contamination are, water is now being tested monthly in 10 locations.

While monthly monitoring just started at the end of 2012 and it is too early to draw any conclusions, Bower said the very first results show that the level of dissolved oxygen is acceptable to slightly below acceptable in most of the bayou, but bacteria levels are excessive in many of the samples taken — extremely so in some cases.

Further testing and analysis, it is hoped, will give a better picture of where those high levels originate.

That, in turn, will help in determining strategies to reduce contamination.

Friends of Cedar Bayou United
Jan. 8
 Friends of Cedar Bayou United will meet at 7 p.m. today at the Roseland Park Pavilion, 100 Roseland Drive in Baytown.
 The meeting is a week later than usual since the first Tuesday in January was New Year's Day.