

**PUBLIC INPUT SOUGHT ON RESTORATION ALTERNATIVES  
FOR LAVACA BAY.  
COME TO TRUSTEE PUBLIC MEETING AT BAUER  
COMMUNITY CENTER ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 1998 AT  
6:30 PM.**

**Background**

The Alcoa/Lavaca Bay Superfund Site was designated as a Superfund Site in March of 1994. Since that time Alcoa has been collecting data on the Alcoa plant site and in and around Lavaca Bay to understand the nature and extent of contamination from the Alcoa facility and the risk that such contamination may pose to human health and the environment. Alcoa will then evaluate the various remedial alternatives and the federal and state agencies, with input from the public, will select a remedy to be undertaken.

The Natural Resource Trustees (the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas General Land Office, Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission, the United States Department of the Interior and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) (collectively "Trustees") have worked closely with Alcoa through this remedial process to ensure that the appropriate remedy will be selected. The Trustees have also worked with Alcoa to evaluate and quantify injuries to natural resources associated with contamination from the Alcoa facility. The natural resource injury assessment process (which is separate and distinct from the Superfund remedial process) culminates in the development of a restoration plan to restore any natural resources that have been injured as a result of contamination from Alcoa's facilities.

The Trustees are at the initial stages of the restoration planning process. They are seeking input from the public at this early stage in the process to increase public understanding of the process and to ensure that the Trustees are focusing their efforts on restoration projects that are important to the public.

**Alcoa Site History**

The Alcoa Point Comfort facility (PCO) has been in continuous service since 1946. Currently, it is an alumina refining operation that produces alumina from bauxite ore. From 1966 to 1970, the PCO facility discharged wastewaters that contained mercury into Lavaca Bay. Alcoa stopped the direct discharge of wastewater into the Bay in 1970 when the Texas Water Quality Board notified Alcoa of potential environmental impacts associated with the discharge. In April of 1988, the Texas Department of Health issued a "closure order" prohibiting the taking of finfish and crabs from a specific part of Lavaca Bay, due to elevated mercury concentrations in these species.

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## **Natural Resources**

Lavaca Bay is located on the Gulf Coast of Texas, between Galveston and Corpus Christi. Lavaca Bay is part of the larger Matagorda Bay system, which also includes Carancahua, Turtle, and Tres Palacios Bays. The Lavaca Bay system consists of Lavaca Bay and several smaller bays such as Cox, Keller, and Chocolate Bays (see Figure). Located in Calhoun and Jackson Counties, the Lavaca Bay system covers an area of 60 square miles (approximately 40,000 acres). It is a shallow bay, with an average depth of four feet.

[INSERT MAP]

Lavaca Bay contains a variety of habitats, including intertidal mudflat/fringe marsh, high marsh, oyster reef, and open water areas. These habitats support a diversity of fish and bird species. Approximately 300 bird species inhabit Lavaca Bay ecosystems. Several waterbird colonies have been identified and monitored on or near the site, including the roseate spoonbill, great blue heron, little blue heron, tricolored heron, great egret, snowy egret, Forster's tern, black skimmer, royal tern, laughing gull, white pelican, willet, black-necked stilt, and double-crested cormorant.

The Lavaca Bay system supports significant amounts of recreational fishing. It is a popular spot for local saltwater anglers, offering numerous fishing locations. There are fishing sites in Point Comfort, upper Lavaca Bay, Port Lavaca, Chocolate Bay, Magnolia Beach, and Keller Bay. Fish species in Lavaca Bay include mullet, Atlantic menhaden, sheepshead, croaker, gaftopsail catfish, striped sole, black drum, red drum, spotted seatrout, and southern flounder. Several of these species are recreationally important along the Texas Gulf Coast. Others are important as components of the bay ecosystem.

## **Assessment Activities**

In 1996, the Trustees and Alcoa began working on a natural resource damage assessment. This assessment focuses on a restoration-based solution to natural resource injuries that result from the release of mercury and other chemicals from the Alcoa facility. Restoration projects, such as the creation of new marsh habitat or the enhancement of existing marshes, directly address the service losses from affected resources by providing new or enhanced services. These services can be ecological services, such as food, shelter and nesting functions for birds and wildlife, or services to the public provided by the resources, such as recreational fishing.

The assessment is underway. Current efforts are directed at determining the scope and scale of injury to birds, fish, and other key species of the ecosystem, as well as the effect on recreational fishing. The magnitude of the losses determines the appropriate size and number of restoration projects that will compensate the public. Also underway are efforts to identify suitable restoration projects.

## **Restoration Projects and Public Input**

The Trustees have developed a preliminary list of potential restoration projects. The types of projects being considered include marsh creation or enhancement, oyster reef creation or enhancement, the creation or enhancement of bird sanctuaries, artificial reefs or fish attraction devices to enhance recreational fishing, and the creation or development of fishing facilities,

such as fishing piers. The Trustees would like input from the public about these projects and other suitable options. A number of locations in and around Lavaca Bay are being considered for these kinds of projects. In addition to the projects themselves, the Trustees would also like input from the public on other feasible locales.

The public is invited to a public meeting on Tuesday, February 17, 1998 at 6:30 p.m. at the Bauer Community Center. During this meeting, the Trustees will present some preliminary restoration options and seek public input about these and other options. Following a brief presentation by the Trustees, the public will be invited to ask questions and share their thoughts on restoration options.