



Bringing Wetlands to Market on the Gulf Coast

Project Overview

In the Gulf of Mexico, which contains more than half of the country's wetlands, wetland loss is occurring at an alarming rate. Because wetlands provide a variety of critical ecosystem services, including coastal blue carbon (the ability of wetlands to sequester and store significant amounts of carbon and other greenhouse gases), researchers and managers are searching for ways to fund restoration and demonstrate the value of these wetlands to the public.

Blue carbon projects—which allow restoration projects with a carbon benefit to generate credits and receive support from carbon finance—are gaining growing attention from researchers, policy makers, decision makers, and stakeholders as an avenue for advancing restoration. In Texas, blue carbon researchers and groups have identified a strong need for additional training, coordination, and funding for demonstration projects, as well as outreach products to inform and engage key stakeholders.

To meet this need, a project team led by the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve leveraged approaches and lessons learned from a 2011 [project](#) led by the Waquoit Bay Reserve. Using that project's successful "Roadshow Dialogues" model, the project team provided outreach to communicate blue carbon concepts and highlight relevant scientific research to currently engaged blue carbon end users on the Gulf of Mexico.

Project Benefits

By connecting blue carbon end users—including land owners, resource managers, and local, state, and federal agencies and officials—with established blue carbon networks in the region and exploring their needs and interests, the project team increased support for wetland restoration and conservation initiatives on the Gulf Coast. Additional benefits included the following:

- A deeper understanding of end user and stakeholder interests, issues, questions, opportunities, and constraints related to blue carbon projects.
- New and strengthened relationships among researchers, stakeholder groups, and those interested in advancing blue carbon projects in Texas.
- Enhanced communication techniques to more effectively gauge stakeholder needs and interests and guide conversations meaningful to each stakeholder group.
- More informed and knowledgeable stakeholder groups, decision makers, and members of the public who can better articulate the values of coastal habitats and relate blue carbon to the value of coastal wetlands.

Project Location

Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve, Texas

Project Duration

August 2016 to October 2018

Project Lead

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Project Type

Science Transfer — promoting the use of science

Products

- A [summary document](#) outlining needs, lessons learned, recommendations, and next steps in blue carbon finance research in Texas
- A [video](#) communicating blue carbon concepts to the public
- A [rack card](#) describing the concepts of natural capital and wetland ecosystem services

Project Partners

- Gulf of Mexico Regional Coastal Training Program Initiative
- Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve, Texas
- Restore America's Estuaries
- Tierra Resources, LLC
- Waquoit Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Massachusetts

Project Approach

The project team synthesized blue carbon needs assessments from prior workshops to inform the Roadshow Dialogues and subsequent workshops. The project approach contained the following three key components:

- **Roadshow Dialogues** – Using the communications model from Waquoit Bay Reserve, the team developed and conducted Roadshow Dialogues with key stakeholders. These events consisted of personal meetings to introduce blue carbon concepts, gather information about opportunities and constraints, identify additional stakeholders, and inform subsequent workshops.
- **Workshops** – The first workshop, held in September 2017, transferred blue carbon knowledge, skills, and lessons learned from the 2011 project to 40 Texas researchers and identified future potential blue carbon projects and research questions. The second workshop, held three months later, highlighted needs and opportunities identified during the Roadshow Dialogues that can help move blue carbon projects forward in Texas. It included a diverse, 35-person group comprised of project team members and other stakeholders.
- **Public Outreach** – Finally, the project team created a variety of public outreach tools to communicate concepts of coastal blue carbon to the public, including a video, rack cards, and public talks.

What's Next

This project made it clear that the political will is strong in Texas when it comes to addressing issues around wetlands conservation finance. There is an opportunity for leaders to engage scientists, private property owners, and other stakeholders in the world of blue carbon.

About the Science Collaborative

The National Estuarine Research Reserve System's Science Collaborative supports collaborative research that addresses coastal management problems important to the reserves. The Science Collaborative is managed by the University of Michigan's Water Center through a cooperative agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Funding for the research reserves and this program comes from NOAA. Learn more at coast.noaa.gov/nerrs or nerrsciencecollaborative.org.