

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Charting Buffalo?

Charting Buffalo is a study of 32 miles of Buffalo Bayou from the Barker Reservoir to the Houston Ship Channel Turning Basin and 7 miles of lower White Oak Bayou from Loop 610 to the confluence with Buffalo Bayou in downtown Houston. Charting Buffalo aims to integrate options for reducing flooding risks and damages and the need for streambank stabilization with opportunities for third parties to collaborate in creating community and environmental enhancements.

Once public feedback has been taken into account, the Charting Buffalo study will result in a final report that will include many options and a recommended implementation strategy for:

- Reducing flooding risks and damages and improving streambank stability
- Identifying additional uses of greenspace created by the Harris County Flood Control District

What are the goals of Charting Buffalo?

The Flood Control District's goals for Charting Buffalo are to:

1. Reduce bayou flooding
2. Identify collaborative opportunities to reduce flooding from local drainage systems (such as roadside ditches or storm sewers)
3. Identify and prioritize areas in need of streambank stabilization; and
4. Identify opportunities for community and environmental enhancements such as trails, neighborhood access points, boat launches, and habitat restoration

How is Charting Buffalo different?

Charting Buffalo is a study unique to the Flood Control District in several ways: 1) It incorporates the expertise of a Steering Committee, which is made up of 15 individuals who represent a cross section of planning, environmental, residential, and economic interests in the Buffalo and lower White Oak bayou watersheds. The Steering Committee is helping the District identify options for reducing flooding risks that consider community interests; 2) It looks at low-impact methods to stabilize the streambanks of bayous and tributaries and to reduce the occurrence of erosion; 3) It examines the overall flooding problems in the watersheds and the role the District can play in addressing the problems; 4) And, most importantly, it looks at partnership possibilities to help make these opportunities a reality.

Charting Buffalo follows five years of study of the Buffalo Bayou and lower White Oak Bayou watersheds by the Flood Control District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Those efforts produced baseline documentation on flooding and environmental conditions in these watersheds and gathered feedback from past public and stakeholder meetings. That information, combined with the efforts from the Charting Buffalo Steering Committee, is allowing the Charting Buffalo study to be completed in a one-year timeframe. The study began in January 2011, and the Flood Control District is on schedule to share the Charting Buffalo draft report, which includes options for reducing flooding risks, for public feedback in early 2012. A final report will not be developed until public feedback has been gathered. Although many options for improvements are identified in the draft report, there is currently no funding for implementation.

Why Charting Buffalo?

While completed flood damage reduction projects have reduced flooding risks and damages in the Buffalo Bayou and lower White Oak Bayou watersheds, flooding remains a problem. Reducing flooding risks and damages is a goal not only for the Flood Control District but also for cities that manage local drainage infrastructure, such as storm sewers and road side ditches, which eventually drain into bayous and their tributaries.

- More than 1,500 homes and businesses are at risk of flooding as a direct result of these bayous overflowing their banks during a 1 percent (100-year) flood event (approximately 13 inches of rain in a 24-hour period watershed-wide or 1 in 4 chance of being flooded during a 30-year mortgage).
- Initial Charting Buffalo research estimates that as many as 10,000 structures in the Buffalo and lower White Oak bayou watersheds could be affected by flooding from local drainage issues, such as sheetflow (water traveling over land trying to reach a bayou) and ponding (the collection of stormwater on streets or on undeveloped land that typically forms when rainfall exceeds the design capacity of a street's drainage system or exceeds the land's ability to drain).
- Lack of sufficient conveyance capacity and detention storage also are factors to street and house flooding in neighborhoods located away from the bayous during moderate to heavy rainfall events.

The Flood Control District strives to balance flood damage reduction with appropriate regard for community and natural values. Charting Buffalo is seeking such a balance.

Are there plans for Terry Hershey Park?

The Flood Control District owns a corridor of land along Buffalo Bayou between Highway 6 and Beltway 8 for flood damage reduction purposes. Since 1993, this property has been managed by Harris County Precinct Three as Terry Hershey Park. Charting Buffalo has identified several options for providing stormwater detention in the upper reaches of Buffalo Bayou. Some of these options include developing one or more stormwater detention areas in Terry Hershey Park. This concept is not new; as such options have been identified in previous studies within this area. Charting Buffalo also identifies opportunities to develop new trails, trail heads, overlooks and boat access in Terry Hershey Park. Options will be presented in the Charting Buffalo draft report to the public for feedback in early 2012. Feedback from the public will be used to help the Flood Control District prioritize options that could be pursued if approved by Commissioners Court and if funding to implement an option is obtained.

Has the Flood Control District been approached by the City of Houston (the City) to provide land for detention within the study area?

Yes, the Flood Control District has been approached by the City to provide land for the purpose of creating stormwater detention storage as a means of mitigating increased flood flows into the bayou that would result from their efforts to reduce flooding caused by local drainage infrastructure (storm sewers and roadside ditches) exceeding its capacity. The District's response has been that until the Charting Buffalo study is complete, it is premature to make any recommendations to Commissioners Court or to provide the City with any form of commitment.

The request by the City and the feedback we have received from citizens to date expressing interest to preserve the existing environment represent two of the many considerations the District has to balance.

Can we send more stormwater into the Addicks and Barker Reservoirs to reduce flooding risks?

The reservoirs are owned, operated and maintained by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Changes to the reservoirs and their operations would require federal approvals. The Charting Buffalo study has identified many options that could provide effective flood damage reduction without having to propose changes to the Addicks and Barker Reservoirs.

What flood damage reduction options in the draft report would reduce flooding the most?

Charting Buffalo identifies more than 40 options for reducing flooding risks and damages, and the District is actively seeing feedback on those options. Public feedback will help us finalize the Charting Buffalo report. The Charting Buffalo report will then be used as a starting point for planning improvements.

Who are the participants in Charting Buffalo?

The Flood Control District is conducting this study and has formed a 15-member Steering Committee to collaborate with us. The majority of these members have already invested funding to develop plans and projects within the study area. This Steering Committee includes representatives from the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department, Bayou Preservation Association, Energy Corridor District and Buffalo Bayou Partnership, among others. See a full list of Steering Committee members on our website, <http://www.chartingbuffalo.org/ABOUT-THE-STUDY/Steering-Committee/>.

How is the public involved in Charting Buffalo?

In addition to involvement of the Steering Committee, the public has been involved in the study of Buffalo and lower White Oak bayous in several ways. Charting Buffalo evolved from a federal study the Flood Control District began in 2005. As part of that federal study, the District engaged a study stakeholder group that has met at least once a year since 2005. In addition, two public meetings were held in 2007 to solicit feedback on the study.

As part of the Charting Buffalo study, the District will present a report of study findings for public feedback in early 2012. Information about the scheduling of community meetings will be shared with the public. Please go to the website at www.chartingbuffalo.org to sign up for email alerts and to take our online survey.

What type of information does the Charting Buffalo draft report include?

The Charting Buffalo draft report will include information about the potential of flooding in the study area, types of flooding and options to address flooding, as well as opportunities for community and environmental enhancements such as trails, boat access and habitat restoration.

How will public feedback be incorporated into the Charting Buffalo process?

Public feedback will help us finalize the Charting Buffalo report. Every comment received is being carefully documented to track public opinion and preferences. The final report will include the approximately 40 options identified to reduce flooding risks and damages as well as the summarized public feedback we receive about these options.

The report will then be used as a starting point for planning improvements. Comments that are specific to a particular map or geographic area will be referenced and considered if a flood damage reduction option is identified for possible implementation, or for more in-depth study efforts in those particular areas. The final report will be posted online. If you have signed up for our email alerts, you will receive a notice that the updated report is available online.

How do I review the draft report?

- The draft report will be posted in PDF format on the Charting Buffalo website at www.chartingbuffalo.org.
- The draft report will be available at the Flood Control District for viewing from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday – Friday.
- The draft report will be available at select libraries in the study area. Visit www.chartingbuffalo.org to obtain a list and address of the libraries where the draft report will be available.
- The draft report will be discussed and available for review at community meetings hosted in the study area in early February 2012.

What is the comment period?

The Charting Buffalo draft report is available for review and feedback from February 8, 2012 through April 1, 2012.

How can I provide a comment?

Feedback can be submitted in several ways:

- Online via a comment form available on the website at www.chartingbuffalo.org.
- In person at community meetings scheduled in February 2012. At these meetings, computers will be available for electronic comments and a printed form will be available for hand-written comments.
- By U.S. mail by mailing a letter to the Harris County Flood Control District, ATTN: Charting Buffalo, 9900 Northwest Freeway, Houston, TX 77092. Feedback submitted by mail must be postmarked by April 1, 2012.

The comment period concludes **April 1, 2012**. Feedback received after the comment period concludes will be documented, but will not be part of the final Charting Buffalo report.

What happens after the comment period ends?

Public feedback will help us finalize the Charting Buffalo report. The Charting Buffalo report will then be used as a starting point for planning improvements. Comments that are specific to a particular map or geographic area will be referenced and considered if a flood damage reduction option is identified for possible implementation, or for more in-depth study efforts in those particular areas.

The final Charting Buffalo report will be made available online at www.chartingbuffalo.org in mid-2012.