

# CURRENTS

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Cedar Bayou,  
a year Later

# Cedar Bayou — A Year Later

By John Blaha

**D**YNAMIC, defined as an adjective, is a process or system characterized by constant change, activity, or progress.

When a person thinks of Cedar Bayou and Vinson Slough, one of the first thoughts that comes to mind is dynamic. Cedar Bayou and Vinson Slough have been open and flowing to the Gulf for thirteen months as this article is being written.

This pass to the Gulf has been changing and reshaping itself since the very first flow of water started on September 25, 2014. In the first 75 days that Cedar Bayou flowed to the Gulf, the southern bank of the pass moved to the south 400 feet.

Since that time, the opening to the Gulf continues to move south and changes with every weather and tidal event.

**M**any questions are voiced by concerned anglers and the general public after every weather event or change in the bayou. The first reaction is generally, "What is happening?" and then people realize once again that the system is forever changing. The original designs for dredging Cedar Bayou and Vinson Slough called for Cedar Bayou to be dredged to a bottom width of 300 feet and 9 feet deep. Through the permitting process, this design was modified to be 100 feet wide and 6 feet deep for both Cedar Bayou and Vinson Slough, due to requirements put forward by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in the permitting process. This process also includes input from Federal and State agencies. Though this was not the design originally sought, it was approved and the effort to open Cedar Bayou and Vinson Slough was finally

becoming reality. A key component to CCA Texas's financial commitment to the project was to have a maintenance component to the project to ensure that the pass remained open, and when necessary, maintenance would be executed based on surveys and behavior of the pass in the time prior to maintenance needs.

"Cedar Bayou is like having another kid," commented Aransas County Judge Burt Mills. Mills continued, "Like a kid, you watch over them and you worry about them, but you know in the end it is all going to be okay. Sometimes you have to help them along, and with Cedar Bayou we are developing a maintenance plan and will do everything we can to keep it flowing."

**S**ince its opening, recreational fishermen from across the state have visited the bayou to fish within it and in the surf. There have been days where as many as 25 to 30 boats have been in the bayou at any given time. Fishing has been consistent throughout this time, but because it's fishing and not always catching, some days are good and some days are not as good.





*October 6, 2015, aerials from a year after the opening. Above, wade fishermen work near the mouth of the pass. At lower right, a shoreline shows the constant influence of heavy winds and tides. Cover photograph and shoreline images by Lisa Laskowski.*

Then you have those days where you experience a trip like never before and you simply seem to throw your bait in a fish's mouth every cast.

Not only is Cedar Bayou providing a great benefit to the ecosystem, it is providing anglers from across the state with an epic fishing destination.

**T**he biological impacts of the opening of Cedar Bayou and Vinson Slough were felt immediately. Within just a few days, first-year marine biology students from Texas A&M Corpus Christi visited the site with Dr. Greg Stunz to see how sampling was done for research and to see the project. After pulling some sampling equipment, one of the students came forward to Dr. Stunz with a few small fish in

hand and asked Dr. Stunz what they were. Redfish! In the prior two years of sampling in the Cedar Bayou area, not a single redfish larvae had been found, and within a week of opening, larvae were now present.

The opening of Cedar Bayou coincided with the beginning of the fall run of redfish in the surf for spawning and the opening was already paying big dividends for the surrounding fishery. Post-opening surveys show that since the opening, the densities of redfish larvae at Cedar Bayou are significant and in line with other inlets.

Harte Research Institute

(HRI) sampling has also shown good presence of blue crab and Atlantic croaker, and the presence of southern flounder. These post-opening surveys provided great data and reinforced the importance of coastal passes tying Texas's bays to the Gulf of Mexico.

The immediate area of Cedar Bayou is rich with seagrass beds, which are critical habitat for many early life marine species and provide these species with the opportunity for survival. These seagrass beds have shown a resurgence in growth since the opening, and along with critical rains that the area has had this past spring and in recent months, the beds are as strong as ever.

"The opening of Cedar Bayou has provided a great benefit to the surrounding ecosystem," commented Quentin Hall, Masters of Science Graduate at Texas A&M Corpus

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# Habitat Today for Fish Tomorrow

## BUILDING A FUTURE FOR TEXAS MARINE HABITAT



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Christi. “The area is alive with larvae of many marine animals and the growth and expansion of seagrass beds in the area has been great to see. The immediate and surrounding areas should see the benefit of this pass opening for years to come.”

Quentin graduated recently from Texas A&M with his Masters of Science. Quentin’s thesis title was “*Determination of Seasonal Abundance, Density, and Distribution of Nekton Species Proximal to Cedar Bayou Pre- and Post-Opening.*”

His research focus was on the effects of reopening a tidal inlet on nekton species. To read his thesis defense abstract, and to view his public defense on line, please visit <http://harteresearchinstitute.org/component/content/article/11-frontpage-news/290-watch-online-hri-master-s-student-quentin-hall>.

CCA Texas graciously thanks Quentin, Dr. Greg Stunz and the rest of the staff at HRI for their support and willingness to provide educational outreach about the ecological effects of the opening

of Cedar Bayou to CCA Texas volunteer chapters across the state.

In closing, Cedar Bayou is a project that the majority of CCA Texas membership, CCA Texas leadership and the general public has endorsed and supported. The project has had ups and downs, but it has been a full year and it continues to flow strongly between Mesquite Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

As I close in writing this article, it has been a week of what ifs, from hearing it was totally closed only to find it flowing freely and then just a few days later having another big tide push in, with a front to follow, pushing water in and out. I and others have visited the bayou twice in the last five days, and even those five days have seen changes. The area some called closed was three to four feet deep on the second visit, and current was moving

strongly to the Gulf. Some areas had as little as 12” to 18” flowing across sand flats, and some of the main guts had water over eight feet deep, flowing like a swollen river.

Remember, by the time you are reading this article, it will have changed once again. For the worse in some cases and for the better in others. In the end, Mother Nature is in ultimate control and we are all here to try our best to help her along and make right what mankind may have disturbed in prior years.

Thank you to CCA Texas members, the general public and agencies that all supported not only this effort, but all of the other conservation-minded efforts of CCA Texas throughout the year. Merry Christmas and we hope your lines are tight throughout the holiday season.

—John Blaha



## Concert for Conservation 2015

As thousands of music fans begin taking their places at the Sam Houston Race Park, **Folk Family Revival** opens the concert with a hammer down, full blast set that has the early crowd on their feet. Other bands in the rip-roaring lineup

include **Atlanta Rhythm Section, Eddie Money, Grand Funk Railroad** and the evening’s headliner, **Lynyrd Skynyrd**.

As dusk begins, CCA Executive Director Robby Byers welcomes CCA members and thousands of

potential new CCA members. The lights are barely on when Grand Funk Railroad storms the stage with a non-stop performance that ups the energy level, and has thousands of fans singing along. The big moment comes as one of the nation’s premiere bands appears

to deafening applause. Lynyrd Skynyrd is in prime form, and the crowd roars its approval. It will be difficult to top this one, but I’ll be looking forward to 2016. — Sam Caldwell

Photos by Kim Ogonosky and Sam Caldwell. More Concert photos on page 20.

