



What was the Blue Thumb Project?

The Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project was a unique educational effort designed to inform and educate the public about the importance of clean water. This program was meant to motivate individuals to take action by fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship. Simply put, a blue thumb is to water what a green thumb is to plants. In both cases, people have a hand in making their surroundings healthy and beautiful!

The project was divided into two main components: education/outreach and volunteer activities. The education aspect of the project involved presenting programs to students in grades 3 through adult that addressed nonpoint source water pollution and best management practices. Home sewer workshops were also offered to home and camp owners. These workshops provided valuable information about the care and maintenance of home sewer systems.

Individuals and groups who were interested in participating in volunteer activities were able to participate in water monitoring or storm drain marking activities.

Blue Thumb Service Area

The Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project served Avoyelles, Evangeline, St. Landry, Acadia, Lafayette, St. Martin, Vermilion, Iberia and St. Mary Parishes.



Putting Blue Thumb to Work

Volunteer Water Monitoring Efforts Tasks 1, 2, & 4

The Blue Thumb Water Monitoring Program, slated to begin in October 2000, was delayed until October 2001 because of problems with the Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP). Finally, with the approved QAPP in hand, a water monitoring training workshop for teachers was organized. The workshop, held in October 2001 at the National Wetlands Research Center in Lafayette, Louisiana, hosted eight teachers from St. Martin, St. Landry, St. Mary, Lafayette, Iberia and Vermilion Parishes. Private mini-

workshops were held for four more teachers in Lafayette and Acadia Parishes during October and November 2002.

During the hands-on workshops, each teacher learned the appropriate techniques to use while testing water samples for dissolved oxygen, pH, nitrates, ammonia, phosphates, chlorides, temperature and turbidity. At the end of the workshop, each teacher was issued his or her own set of water monitoring equipment to take back to the classroom. There, the teachers taught their students how to use the equipment so that the class could monitor a site along Bayou



Teche or Bayou Vermilion. Each teacher participating in the water monitoring program agreed to sample water with their students from their selected site once a month for at least a year.

Several times throughout the year, the Blue Thumb Project Coordinator would visit the participating classrooms to complete quality control/quality assurance checks on the students and the teacher. A rubric approved in the QAPP was used to rate the participants. Upon the conclusion of the class period, the Project Coordinator explained each missed item to the teacher and encouraged him or her to correct the problem before the next visit.

All of the teachers participating in the Blue Thumb Water Monitoring Program were able to incorporate the water monitoring activities into their lessons in their biology, environmental science or chemistry classes. Several teachers taught more than one section of a particular subject and therefore used the water monitoring kits with each class.

In addition to being used as part of the required curriculum, the water monitoring activities were also used as enrichment activities. For example, Venise Ortego, a math and environmental science teacher at Opelousas Catholic School in St. Landry Parish, incorporated the Blue Thumb Water Monitoring Program into an ongoing, larger habitat restoration project her environmental science class began in 2000. Coupled with Mrs. Ortego's existing activities, the water monitoring served to enhance the students overall learning experience while at the same time helping them to make the connection between healthy water and a healthy environment.



Similarly, Theresa Privat, a librarian and Science Olympiad coach at Breaux Bridge High School in St. Martin Parish, used the water monitoring activities to help her students train for the state Science Olympiad. The hands-on water monitoring activities not only gave

the students the upper hand at their competition, but it also helped them to better understand and appreciate our precious water resources.

In all, over 356 students at nine different schools, monitored seven different sites along Bayou Teche and three different sites along Bayou Vermilion.

Educational Efforts Tasks 3 & 6

Enviroscape

The Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project offered a variety of educational programming and activities. The most popular activity was the hands-on Enviroscape demonstration offered to students in grades 3 through adult. It was also frequently presented to civic organizations.

According to the manufacturer of the Enviroscape model, the Enviroscape model is one of the leading teaching tools in water quality education. The hands-on watershed model is approximately 2' X 3' and depicts all of the activities that take place in a watershed. The size of the model makes it ideal to bring people together around a table to visually demonstrate how we pollute water.

Pollution and runoff are obviously apparent when rain (water dispensed from a spray bottle) carries soil (cocoa), pesticides and fertilizer (colored drink mixes) and oil (cocoa and water mixture) through the watershed to the bayou.



In addition to demonstrating sources of nonpoint source pollution from residential areas, forestry transportation, recreational, agricultural and construction activities, the Enviroscape model allows participants to implement best management practices. Being able to physically *see* the sources of pollution and being able to correct the problem on the model helped individuals to understand that we all play a role in water quality.

In 2000, 338 students in 11 schools in four parishes participated in the Enviroscape demonstration. In 2002 alone, 1,754 students in 29 schools in nine parishes took advantage of the activity. Between 2000 and 2002, the Enviroscape was presented in 58 different schools. This activity was most frequently presented to students in grade six.

Make a Splash! Water Festival

In November 2002, 437 fourth, fifth and sixth grade students from Evangeline, Avoyelles, Acadia, and St. Landry Parishes left their classrooms behind and headed out to the *Make a Splash! Water Festival*. The festival is held annually as part of a nationwide effort to emphasize the importance of understanding and conserving our water resources. Sponsored by National Project WET, this year's event was organized by

the Blue Thumb Project coordinator and held in the Native Plant Heritage Garden in the town of Ville Platte.

Students participating in the event traveled around to five different activity stations, spending twenty-five minutes at each station.



At the Incredible Journey station, students assumed the role of a water molecule as it traveled through the water cycle. At the groundwater model station, students saw first hand how groundwater moves underground and how it is affected by pollution. The macroinvertebrate and wetland plant station gave students a glimpse into the rarely seen world of plant roots and small aquatic creatures. Students at the Enviroscape station were able to “pollute” a

watershed model using colored drink mixes to represent the most common pollutants. Finally, students learned about turbidity and its effects at the hands-on turbidity station.

This event was successful due in part to a multi-agency effort. Each activity was presented by an employee or employees from local Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, the Department of Environmental Quality or a local parish government.

Home Sewer Education Workshops

Utilizing the Home Sewer Awareness Toolbox (see Task 7), Blue Thumb teamed up with the Department of Health and Hospitals and the Imperial Calcasieu RC&D Council Blue Thumb Program to offer three home sewer workshops between 2000 and 2002. The workshops were held in Lafayette, Calcasieu and Jefferson Davis Parishes. A total of 86 people from nine parishes in south Louisiana attended the workshops.

Topic addressed during the workshops included installation considerations, the permitting process for installation and improvements to an existing system, as well as some essential steps for caring for a home sewer system.

Parish sanitarians were available during the question and answer sessions that were held at the end of each segment. This time period provided opportunities for the



attendees to have specific questions answered about their home sewer system. At the conclusion of each workshop, participants received a packet of valuable information pertaining to home sewer systems in Louisiana.

Participants who chose to fill out the evaluation form included in the workshop packets rated the workshops “Very Satisfactory”. Participants also indicated that they would recommend the workshops to a friend.

Traveling Blue Thumb Display Board and Website

In an effort to promote the Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project and to help educate the community about the importance of clean water, a traveling display board and website were developed.



The traveling display board was erected in high traffic public areas such as the library and office buildings. The display board usually remained on site for five to seven working days. The material on the display board addressed nonpoint source pollution, defined Blue Thumb and described Blue Thumb activities. Free informational brochures that addressed home sewer maintenance, nonpoint source pollution, and Blue Thumb programming were available to the public.

At outdoor events such as Earth Day celebrations, the Bayou Vermilion Water Festival and Festival Acadians, the Blue Thumb display board was accompanied by the Enviroscape model. Throughout the duration of the event, the Blue Thumb coordinator was available to periodically present the Enviroscape demonstration and answer specific questions about Blue Thumb and water quality issues.

The Blue Thumb website was constructed to serve as a medium for communication, as well as to build support for the program within the community. The site, located at www.LABlueThumb.org, is very easy to navigate and is loaded with more information than a brochure can provide. The site contains information about nonpoint source pollution, storm drain marking, water monitoring and general Blue Thumb programming. It also contains a calendar of events, contact information and an online version of Blue Thumb's printed newsletters, among other things. The Blue Thumb website received close to 1,000 hits between July 2001 and November 2002.

Storm Drain Marking



Over 127 people of all ages participated in storm drain marking events in Lafayette, Iberia, and St. Mary Parishes. As a result, 257 storm drains have been marked with a four inch round marker that says, "Dump No Waste Drains to Bayou". Additionally, over 4,000 informational door hangers carrying a pollution prevention message were distributed to homes and businesses within sight of the marked storm drains.

While marking the drains, participants assisted with the nation wide collection of storm drain data for the Ocean Conservancy, headquartered in Virginia. As part of the *Million Points of Blight* program sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency and the



Ocean Conservancy, participants took note of the different types of debris found around each storm drain and recorded these observations on a data card. This information was used by the Ocean Conservancy to document the debris types found in and around the drains. The data are also used to create a national map of areas that have participated in the program.

A Girl Scout troop, a Beta Club, a 4-H Club, an environmental science club and a church youth group conducted this half-day service project. Storm drain marking turned out to be a unique way to get different organizations out into the community. As a result, these groups were successful in educating the community about the impact they have on the local waterways.

Home Sewage Task 7

In the original contract with the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, Task 7 addressed replacing 12 failing home sewer systems along Bayou Teche and Bayou Vermilion. Once the systems were replaced, the sites were to be used as demonstration and workshop sites. However, after much discussion, it was determined that this portion of the task was not feasible. As a result, Task 7 was rewritten and included the creation of a Home Sewer Awareness Toolbox.

In the fall of 2001, Imperial Calcasieu RC&D Council, a sister council to the Acadiana RC&D Council, implemented a scaled down version of the Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project. One of the programs within the Imperial Calcasieu Blue Thumb Project was to develop a *Home Sewer Awareness Toolbox*. The concept of a home sewage toolbox is borrowed from *The Septic Education Kit* that was developed by Padilla Bay National Estuarine Reserve in Washington State. According to the team that developed *The Septic Education Kit*, the kit is widely used and has been successful in educating the public about the need to maintain their home septic systems.

In an agreement between the Imperial Calcasieu RC&D Council and the Acadiana RC&D Council, it was decided that Imperial Calcasieu RC&D would produce one completed copy of the *Home Sewer Awareness Toolbox*. After the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality approved the concept and actual product, Imperial Calcasieu turned it over to the Acadiana RC&D Council and the Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project for reproduction and distribution.

To date, a total of 60 toolboxes have been reproduced. Fourteen toolboxes have been distributed to the Soil and Water Conservation Districts through southwest Louisiana. Twenty toolboxes will be turned over to the Department of Health and Hospitals for distribution to parish sanitarians and other outreach personnel. The remaining toolboxes will be distributed among the coastal parish Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The *Home Sewer Awareness Toolbox* contains guidance on how to organize a home sewer workshop, sample publicity materials for the print and audio media, reproducible fact sheets, a sample workshop agenda and a slide show script. Each item in the toolbox is designed to “stand alone” so that it may be used with or without the rest of the materials.

Erosion and Sediment Control
Task 5

This task was not addressed due to a lack of resources and time.

Acknowledgements

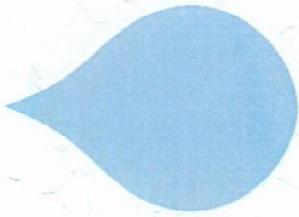
Thank you to all of the Acadiana RC&D Council members who served as consultants on the Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project. Without your time, input and energy, this project would not have come to fruition.

The following council members assisted with the development of the final report:

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Douglas Foreman, Lafayette SWCD
Rose Hollier, St. Martin SWCD
Theresa Privat, St. Martin SWCD
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Patrick Hebert, Vermilion SWCD
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Beth Roberts, St. Martin Parish Council
Paul Naquin, St. Mary Parish Council
Donald Menard, Vermilion Parish PJ

The following individuals provided information and suggestions that contributed to the Blue Thumb final report:

Mike Vidrine, DHH Individual Home Sewer
Dane Thibodeaux, DHH Individual Home Sewer
Donna Pouirrer, DHH Individual Home Sewer
Mike Perry, Imperial Calcasieu RC&D
Desi Simon, Imperial Calcasieu RC&D
Greg Ducote, DNR Coastal Resources Division
Linda Pace, DNR Coastal Resources Division



Become a Part of the Pollution Solution!

Did you know that there are many different things you can do *right now* that will help give Acadiana's water a hand? Put your Blue Thumb to work by...

-  ...being aware of your responsibilities to help keep Acadiana's water clean.
-  ...disposing of household appliances and garbage properly.
-  ...applying pesticides and fertilizers conservatively.
-  ...recycling.
-  ...maintaining your home sewer system.
-  ...using and disposing of chemicals properly.
-  ...becoming involved in clean up efforts.

Teche/Vermillion



Blue Thumb Project

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Giving Acadiana's
Water a Hand!



What is the Blue Thumb Project?

The Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project is a unique educational effort designed to inform and educate the public about the importance of clean water. This program is meant to motivate individuals to take action by fostering a sense of responsibility and stewardship. Simply put, a blue thumb is to water what a green thumb is to plants. In both cases, people have a hand in making their surroundings healthy and beautiful!

Getting to the Non-Point

Let's get right to the point. Nonpoint source pollution is making Acadiana's waterways sick.

Nonpoint source pollution occurs when home sewer systems do not function properly, when storm drains release runoff from city and neighborhood streets or when fertilizer and pesticides are over-applied to croplands and lawns. This type of pollution does not come from a factory pipe. It comes from many different, sometimes hard to identify sources.

Nonpoint source pollution, more often than not, is something we can not see. Even so, this type of pollution can harm wildlife and humans by contaminating the surface water we hunt and fish in and the ground water we drink.

Everyone in Acadiana contributes to nonpoint source pollution, but through education, public awareness and direct involvement, this type of pollution can be significantly reduced.

Lagniappe

The Blue Thumb Project offers unique educational programs that are available to the public at no cost! These programs are targeted at:

Students

Students (grades 3-adult) participate in a hands-on pollution demonstration and see for themselves what pollution does to our bayous! Designed with benchmarks in mind, you'll want to include this activity in your lesson plans each year!

Home and Camp Owners

Home sewer workshops are offered several times a year throughout Acadiana. These workshops provide valuable information about the care and maintenance of your home sewer system.

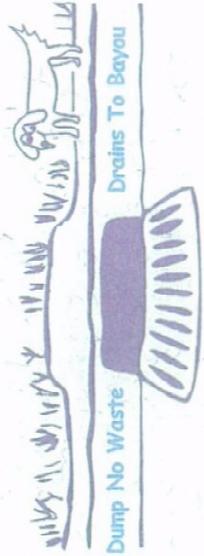
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www.LABlueThumb.org




Our Very Important People! are

Our volunteers receive VIP treatment because without them, the Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project wouldn't exist! The Project is funded through the Acadiana Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council, a non-profit organization. As a result, the Blue Thumb Project is heavily supported by volunteers who live and work within the Vermilion-Teche watershed and surrounding areas. Volunteers conduct water monitoring tests, mark storm drains and much, much more. For more information on volunteer opportunities, contact the Blue Thumb Coordinator!

Is Blue Thumb In Your Community?

The Teche/Vermilion Blue Thumb Project serves Avoyelles, Evangeline, St. Landry, Acadia, Lafayette, St. Martin, Vermilion, Iberia and St. Mary Parishes.

Blue Thumb Sponsors

Acadiana Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Council

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality

US Environmental Protection Agency