

Examining Collaborative Governance for the Bahia Grande in Cameron County, Texas

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The Bahia Grande, a 6,500-acre tidal basin in southeastern Cameron County, Texas, is a historically significant wetland that once provided habitat for a diverse array of species. Construction projects, such as the construction of a railroad trestle bridge, an adjacent highway, and the Brownsville Ship Channel, altered ecosystem functions and separated it from its water source, reducing it to a dusty dry lakebed. In 2000, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) acquired this area and began restoration initiatives. USFWS reconnected Bahia Grande to the Lower Laguna Madre in 2005 with the construction of a restoration channel. Further restoration efforts, including a recent widening of the channel, continue. Despite this progress, this area had notable deficiencies in management efforts due to resource scarcity, limited research, and insufficient public awareness.

This research investigates the effects of management strategies on the antecedents and barriers to collaboration for ecosystem restoration. It operationalizes a typology of management strategies and other concepts and uses them in semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in the restoration of the Bahia Grande and surrounding floodplain. It seeks to understand what is done, how the network of stakeholders involved interacts, what barriers to a collaborative and co-productive process remain, and how the actions taken by network leaders affect the process. This study not only informs Bahia Grande's recovery efforts but also contributes to the broader scholarly literature on stakeholder collaboration in preserving and revitalizing ecosystems facing similar challenges.

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