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May 15, 2018

The Honorable Ed Emmett  
County Judge, Harris County

The Honorable R. Jack Cagle  
County Commissioner, Harris County

The Honorable Rodney Ellis  
County Commissioner, Harris County

The Honorable Jack Morman  
County Commissioner, Harris County

The Honorable Steve Radack  
County Commissioner, Harris County

Dear Harris County Judge and Commissioners,

On behalf of Bayou Land Conservancy and the communities that we work in, thank you for your leadership through a three-year period of exceptional storms in our region, culminating with Hurricane Harvey. We write to respectfully request that as Harris County considers a \$3.1 billion bond authorization to address water and flooding resource issues, that it explicitly call out land conservation and natural infrastructure to ensure our communities receive the best tools to address flooding. Such an approach can provide Harris County with flexibility to provide significant improvements to drainage, including joint projects with the U.S. Army Corps, the State of Texas and adjoining counties, cities and special districts.

Water, both too much and not enough, will remain a challenge to the economic success and the quality of life that we currently enjoy. We are encouraged that there is a regional effort to meet these challenges, and do so with 21<sup>st</sup> century solutions while engaging the full spectrum of our citizens.

Bayou Land Conservancy protects land along streams for flood control, clean water, and wildlife. We envision a network of green spaces that connect people to nature. We are the only local, accredited, land trust working to protect the Lake Houston watershed, a key water source for millions of people. We currently protect nearly 12,500 acres of land in the Houston region at 59 preserves and connect our communities to nature through programs for adults and youth. Our preserved lands include about 2,500 acres on the Spring Creek Greenway, the longest, contiguous, urban, forested greenway in the country. Bayou Land Conservancy is a partner with other land trusts and conservation organizations on the Headwaters to Baywaters projects. This project seeks to identify and protect undeveloped riparian corridors in the San Jacinto River watershed. We are currently engaged with several groups tackling

flood mitigation issues including CEER (Coalition for Environment, Equity & Resilience) and the Bayou City Initiative. We recently traveled to Washington, D.C. to advocate for federal programs to bolster land conservation, including the Land Water Conservation Fund and the 2018 Farm Bill.

On April 5, 2018 the Greater Houston Flood Mitigation Consortium released a report, “Greater Houston Strategies for Flood Mitigation”. We agree fully with the mission stated in the report: “We want to protect and sustain our residents, particularly those most vulnerable, as well as our environment and our economy.” The vision put forth of bold action to protect our residents, economy and the region’s vitality from the consequences of future flooding should be taken to heart as the Court proposes a far-reaching slate of projects to be voted on in a bond election by the citizens of Harris County. We urge you to follow the guidance provided by the study.

**Bayou Land Conservancy supports projects that protect homes and prevents loss of life from flood disasters by protecting, acquiring, and restoring land and property interests to establish natural corridors along bayous, rivers, and streams and to provide natural floodwater storage, for example:**

- A balance of structural and non-structural projects, including natural infrastructure and Low Impact Design (LID) projects, restoration of natural systems, buyouts, and relocation.
- Acquisition of contiguous riparian corridors in areas of the county which are not currently developed (Cypress Creek, Spring Creek, Willow Creek, etc..) and permanent protection of those lands through use of conservation easements. This could facilitate completion of the Bayou Greenways project across the county.
- Buyouts that remove people from harm’s way and the creation of permanent green space in buyout areas, with protection by conservation easement where possible.
- Cost-benefit studies to ensure that any reservoirs provide the maximum benefit and value for county taxpayers, including providing ecologically sound protection and recreational access.

Recent research in the Texas Water Journal (*Vol. 9, No. 1, 3-20-18 “Peak flow trends highlight emerging urban flooding hotspots in Texas; M. Berg*) highlights the challenge and opportunity unique to the region. This study showed that, of all streams in each of Texas’s 25 largest metropolitan areas, the vast majority of those with troubling increases in streamflow are located in just one place: Harris County. A history of old solutions has brought us to this situation. More of the same will not get us out of it. We cannot afford an outdated approach.

Again, we thank you for your leadership. We appreciate Harris County's efforts to provide potential local match so that our region attracts the federal funds that our communities so desperately need. Last, we hope you will continue to support land conservation and natural infrastructure to address water and flooding resource issues in Harris County.

Sincerely,



Jill Boullion  
Executive Director



Lisa Graiff  
Chair, Board of Directors

Cc: Russell "Russ" Poppe, P.E.  
Executive Director  
Harris County Flood Control District

John Blount, P.E.  
County Engineer  
Harris County