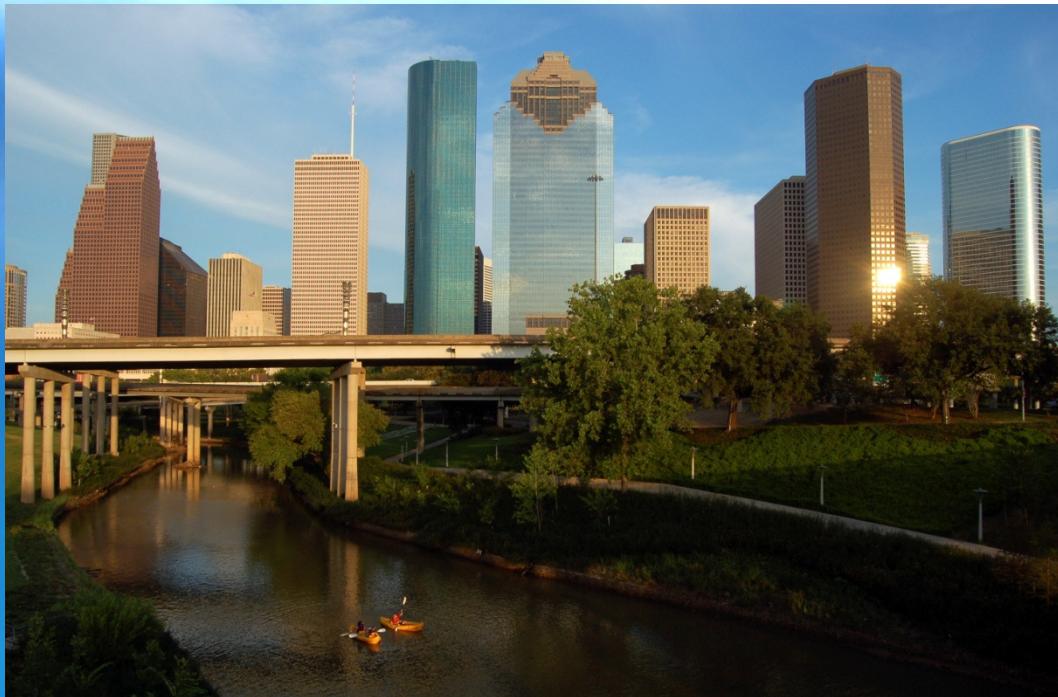


Natural Capital

Habitats of the Houston Region



Lisa Gonzalez
Research Scientist
Houston Advanced Research Center
lgonzalez@harc.edu



Bayous and Waterways



- **Services include:**
 - Distributory channels for stormwater
 - Freshwater inflows for Galveston Bay
 - Transportation and international trade



Photos: Kimberly Smith, istockphoto.com; Lisa Gonzalez, HARC

Riparian Forests and Bottomlands



- Services include:
 - Stormwater retention and flood mitigation
 - Water quality protection in urban and suburban areas

Coastal Prairie



- **Services include:**
 - Grazing for food production
 - Wildlife habitat
 - Nature viewing and hunting

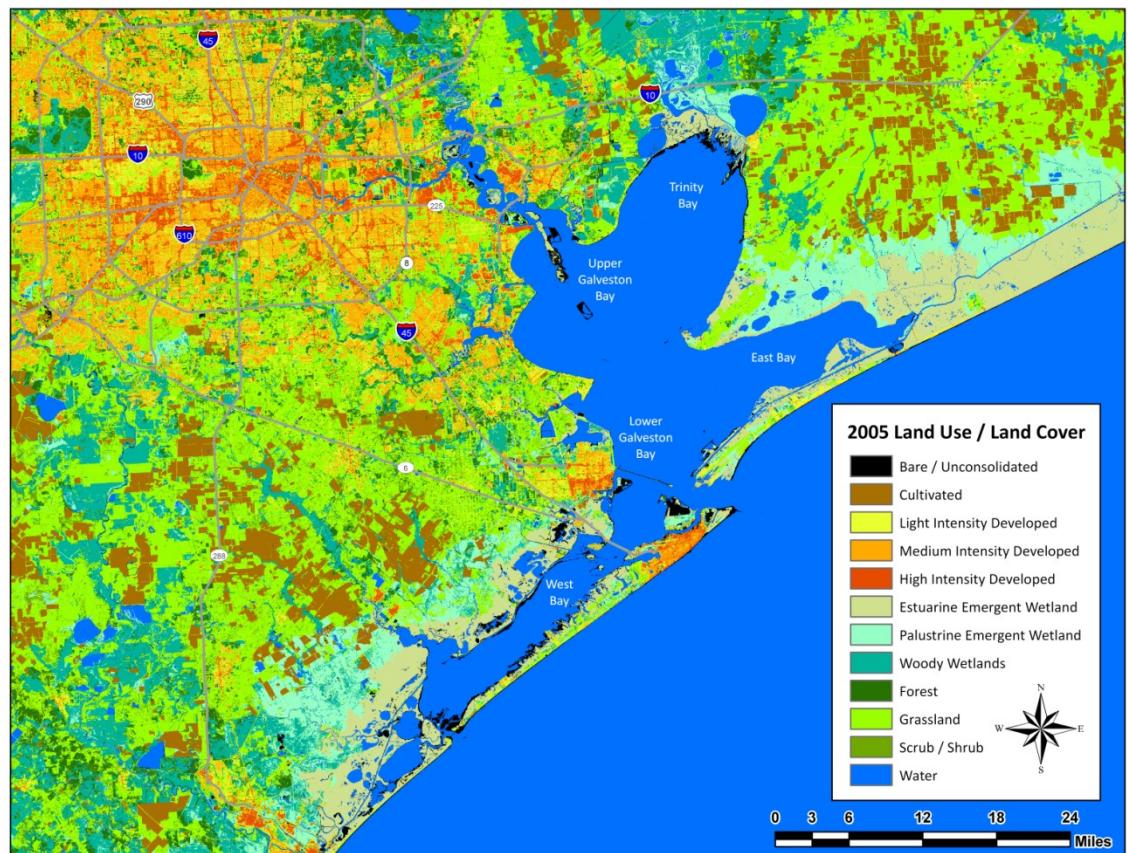
Photos: Carolyn Fannon, Houston Coastal Center, EIH-UHCL and Lisa Gonzalez, HARC

Wetlands



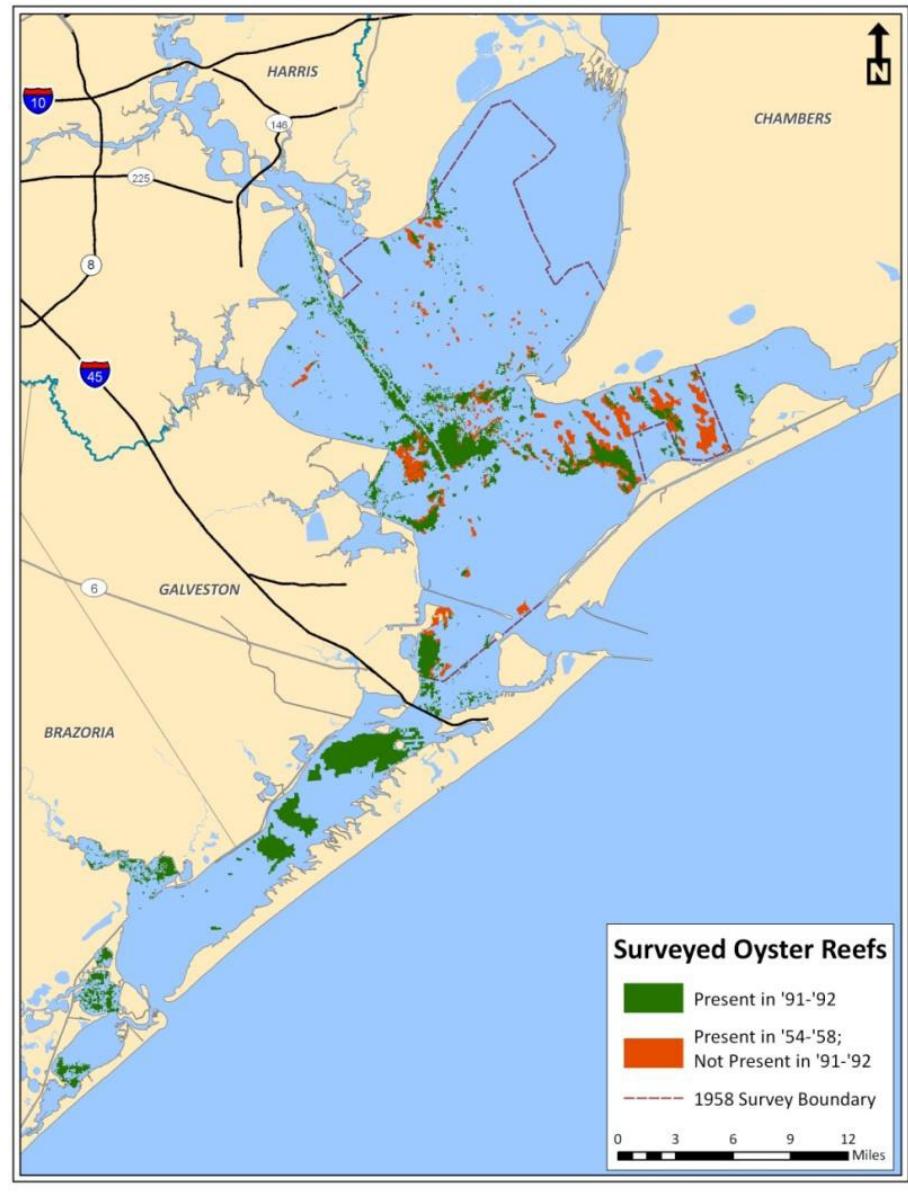
- Services include:
 - Protection from storm surge
 - Fish and wildlife habitat
 - Water quality protection in urban and suburban areas

	1996	2005	Change
Palustrine	809,522	783,536	-25,986
Estuarine	163,258	163,452	194



Credits: (Photo) Dr. John Jacob; (Data) NOAA CCAP in State of the Bay, 3rd Edition

Oyster Reefs



- **Services include:**
 - Commercial seafood
 - Filtration of the bay water reducing turbidity and algal concentrations
 - Stabilization of the sediment

Data Credit: TPWD in State of the Bay, 3rd Edition

Challenges to Natural Capital in Houston

- Rich assortment of habitats continues to provide numerous services to the human population.
- Urban and suburban development and other human uses often do not consider the ecosystem services that are lost.
- Many important habitats lie outside of the regulatory realm (e.g. freshwater wetlands) and novel, non-regulatory management and approaches are needed.
- Restoration has been a focus in the region for the past 30 years. While very important, need greater habitat conservation efforts.
- Habitat conservation is difficult to fund due to the lack of non-federal matching funds, conservation landholders, and managers.
- These issues must be addressed in the years to come if the remaining habitat diversity around Houston is to be protected.

A Path Forward for Protecting Houston's Natural Capital

- Use existing strategies in novel ways:
 - Use watershed protection plans in permitting activities
 - Model existing policies and legislation and shape into new forms
- Create incentive programs to encourage
 - Private land owners and developers to work with conservation organizations and land trusts
 - Low impact development in Houston
- Bring more non-federal dollars to Houston and increase leveraging of funds through new partnerships with large conservation organizations.
- Increase and better coordinate use of existing technologies and data for decision making at local government level (e.g. GIS and decision support systems).
- Shift thinking away from preserving nature's past – instead create the future – change the discussion and engage the general public.