

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Wednesday, April 13
8:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.

**Session 1:
Welcome Speakers**



Protection of Recreational Waters

Ellen Gilinsky, PhD

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Biosketch

Dr. Ellen Gilinsky has served since 2011 as the senior policy advisor for water at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In this position, Dr. Gilinsky addresses policy and technical issues related to all EPA water programs, with an emphasis on science, water quality, and state programs. Prior to that appointment, she served as director of the Water Division at the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, where she supervised a diverse array of water quality and quantity programs and before that as manager of the Office of Wetlands and Water Protection, helping to craft Virginia's nontidal wetlands regulations and permitting program. In addition, Dr. Gilinsky has 12 years of experience as an environmental consultant at several regional and national environmental engineering firms, focusing on water issues. Dr. Gilinsky received her bachelor of arts degree in biology from the University of Pennsylvania and her doctorate in zoology, with a concentration in aquatic ecology, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a past president of the Association of Clean Water Administrators, held a gubernatorial appointment to the State Advisory Board of the Virginia Water Resources Research Center, and served as an adjunct faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University in the departments of Biology and Environmental Studies.



The Continuing Recovery and Renaissance of Lake Pontchartrain and Its Rivers

Andrea Bourgeois-Calvin, PhD
Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation

Abstract

Since the founding of the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) in 1989, Lake Pontchartrain and the entire Pontchartrain Basin have experienced tremendous improvements in water quality through the cooperative efforts of many partners. Multiple waterways have been removed from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) list of impaired water bodies, enabling them to meet their designated uses, including primary contact recreation, once again.

LPBF established its Water Quality Monitoring Program in 2001 to intensively monitor water quality and track pollution sources while educating the public. Built on early LPBF successes, including banning shell dredging and a moratorium on oil and gas exploration in Lake Pontchartrain, LPBF worked with numerous parishes, municipalities, and agencies to locate and correct fecal pollution sources in Lake Pontchartrain and contributing rivers. By 2006, Lake Pontchartrain was removed from the EPA list of impaired water bodies for primary contact recreation (fecal bacteria). This has been followed by the removal of several other rivers for bacteria, dissolved oxygen, turbidity, and other parameters.

LPBF continues to monitor water quality and work to clean area lakes, rivers, and bayous with the goal of having all Pontchartrain water bodies removed from the impaired water bodies list so they can again become functional ecosystems and usable resources for basin citizens. With the improved water quality, we are able to encourage and facilitate recreational opportunities on Lake Pontchartrain at sites like Bayou St.

John, Pontchartrain Beach, and the New Canal Lighthouse Museum and Education Center, reintroducing the New Orleans and regional population to this incredible asset.

Biosketch

Dr. Andrea Bourgeois-Calvin is the Water Quality Program director for the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation (LPBF) in New Orleans, Louisiana. A native of New Orleans, she attended Loyola University for her bachelor of science degree in biological sciences and the University of New Orleans for her master of science degree in biological sciences–conservation biology. In 2008, she completed her PhD in engineering and applied science, focusing on water geochemistry, at the University of New Orleans. Dr. Bourgeois-Calvin joined LPBF in 1999 and has been the director of the foundation's water monitoring programs for 16 years. She also holds an assistant adjunct professor position with the Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine and regularly hosts graduate students and interns from several local universities.



Question & Answer Session

Question 1

Phil Scanlan: My question is for Ellen [Gilinsky]. The cover of our conference program says that having a nation of clean waters is EPA's [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's] goal. We have had improvements, but some things have gotten worse. Do you have a goal for the next 5 years for things getting better?

Answer 1

Ellen Gilinsky: It's really hard to get ahead of all the sources of pollution—you clean up one area, and then find another area that needs to be cleaned up or another source of pollution. We are still working toward our goal, especially nonpoint source pollution. Point sources can be a problem, but they are more localized. We need to focus on our priority watersheds. We are working with states to develop nutrient frameworks, focus on priority watersheds, work with the agricultural community, and work on stormwater controls and green infrastructure. We are trying to focus efforts more where they can really make a difference.

Question 2

(Unknown): Where did you get your sand?

Answer 2

Andrea Bourgeois-Calvin: We weren't quite ready for it, but had an opportunity we couldn't pass up. There was sand to be used for fracking north of Lake Pontchartrain. That was a contentious issue. They needed to get rid of a lot of sand. It was beautiful sand, good for a beach, and very cheap for us to buy.

Question 3

(Unknown): Did you say your south shore beaches are closed for swimming?

Answer 3

Andrea Bourgeois-Calvin: They are not closed, as we do not close beaches, but we issue an advisory for 3 days after a rain event.

Question 4

(Unknown): Do you sample to clear that advisory?

Answer 4

Andrea Bourgeois-Calvin: We are nonregulatory, so we present an advisory for informational purposes. But once the beaches are opened we hope it can become official.

Question 5

(Unknown): Could you talk more about the nitty-gritty of what you were sampling for with bacteria? Was it fecal coliform and not Enterococcus? I saw you were taken off the impaired waters list. How did you do that? Do you not sample anymore?

Answer 5

*Andrea Bourgeois-Calvin: We base removing our impairments on fecal coliform results. We also test for Enterococcus. In some marine environments we test for *E. coli* and Enterococcus, but those don't determine removal of impairment status.*

**Question 6**

(Unknown): Could you talk about source removal in the lakes?

Answer 6

Andrea Bourgeois-Calvin: We coordinated with state agencies; our rivers were having issues. We had to go about it in a systematic way to try to make a difference in the watershed. We started biweekly sampling at 10 sites along the river, hitting all the tributaries. We saw where our counts jumped, and that determined where to focus our efforts. We went and looked on-site for the sources, finding evidence. We approached the small plant owners and talked with them about how to clean up their systems. We had many conversations like this. The plants were permitted by our Department of Health and Hospitals, but the discharge should be permitted by the Department of the Environment (DEP). Many did not have those permits and they were not maintained. There were hundreds of these small plants we had to talk to and look at. Once we looked at all those, we worked with DEP to do a sweep and find out what is going on, then our focus shifted to the homes in the unsewered subdivisions. Our soil here is high in clay content, so traditional septic systems don't work. Homes need a special system. We worked with them to get things cleaned up.

Question 7

Helena Solo Gabrielle: We have been visited by the Dutch group about the sea level rise in Miami. I went to a watershed event, and there are so many jurisdictions involved, which is critical. How did your foundation do that?

Answer 7

Andrea Bourgeois-Calvin: Part of the goal during the creation of our foundation was to have a single voice. We had to rein in all the many jurisdictions. When we would come into an area to try to foster that cooperation, it wasn't always easy, especially in the beginning. It takes time. We have a task force and meet with them on a monthly basis. That helps get people talking regularly and feeling more comfortable around each other, which makes it easier to discuss the issues. Having that type of group is important. You need to keep people coming to the table.

Question 8

(Unknown): You are talking about places where TMDLs [total maximum daily loads] were set. How does the implementation aspect work with your foundation?

Answer 8

Andrea Bourgeois-Calvin: We partner with the watershed programs and we created watershed implementation programs, which can drive the TMDLs.

Question 9

(Unknown): I think it's great that EPA wants clean water for everyone, but agriculture is an issue. Do you have a relationship with the USDA [U.S. Department of Agriculture] that the states could model as well?

Answer 9

Ellen Gilinsky: Since I've been with EPA for the past 5 years, we have had a relationship with USDA. Through our nonpoint source program, each state has selected three watersheds in their state; they work with a conservationist, and money goes to help those priority watersheds. You can see it through the Farm Bill. Ohio was one of the states where we really focused our efforts because of Lake Erie. It was important to figure out where the priority watersheds are.

**Comment 9**

Bill Kramer: I manage EPA's eBEACHES system. The public face is BEACON [BEach Advisory and Closing Online Notification], but it rests on three databases, which BEACON integrates. I only own one, and the others I collaborate on with others. There is an environmental exchange network which we work on together. The jurisdictions in this room are part of that collaboration. For example, California submitted over 15,000 water quality samples into the system.