

Research Applied Technology Education Service



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William Kirkey, Ph.D.
Chief Research Officer

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Chief Operations Officer

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Project Comptroller

December 12, 2025



About RATES

Turning research and technology into community resilience

History/ Background

1974

Winter Water Sampling



1991

Andy Ernest's Ph.D. Completion
-Water Quality Modeling and Parameter Estimation

1994

Opportunities in Texas



1996-1998 Stormwater TaskForce



- The Task Force was established in 1998.
- As of June 2023, the Task Force has been established as a 501(c)3.
- We currently have 33 members within our coalition.



Community Outreach & Visibility –

Participate in coordinated school presentations, public outreach campaigns, and regional events that fulfill MS4 requirements while elevating your organization's presence in the community.



Regional Collaboration & Support –

Gain access to technical experts, shared training, permit compliance resources, and partnership opportunities that strengthen stormwater management and funding capacity.

2007

**Creation of RATES
and REON**

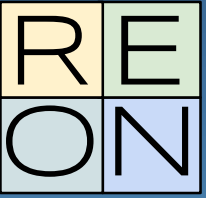
2011

Chris Fuller's Ph.D completion
-Oil Spill Toxicology and Detection

2019

Bill Kirkey's Ph.D completion
-Low-Cost, High Fidelity Sensor
Technology Development

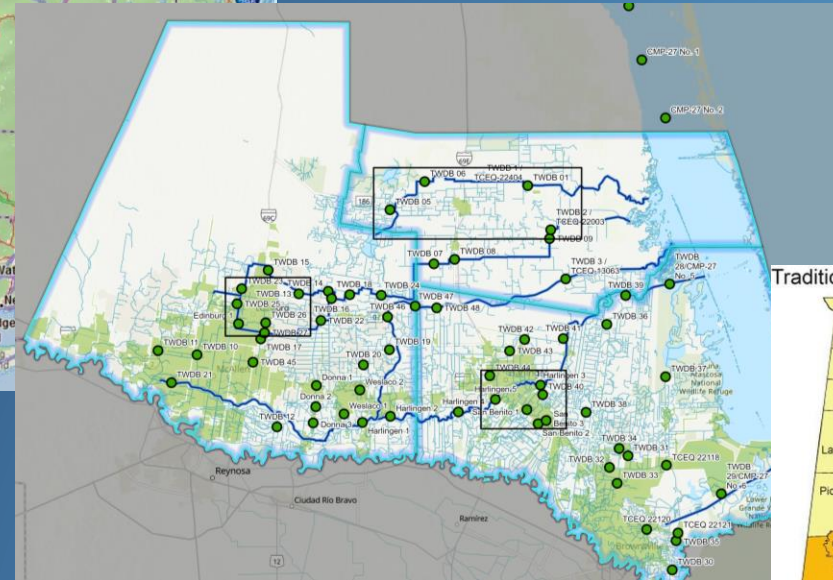
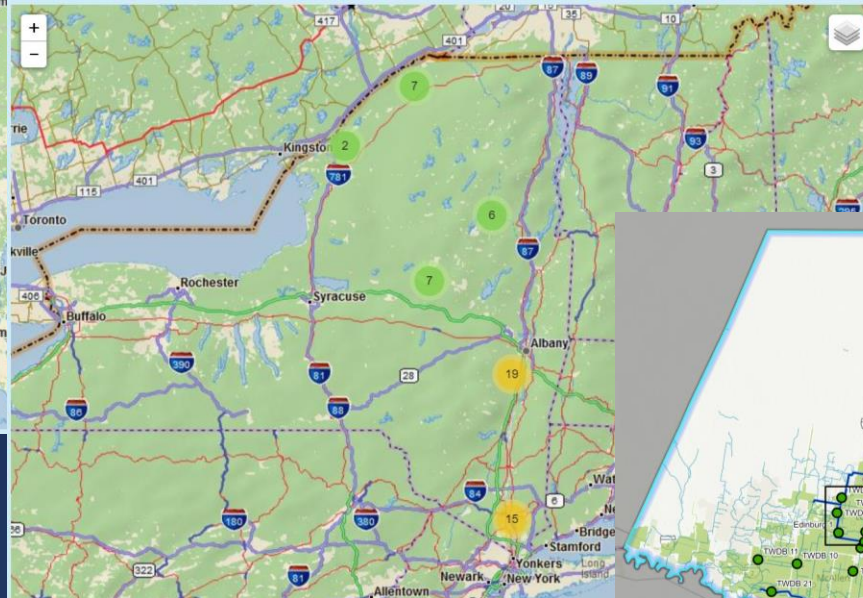
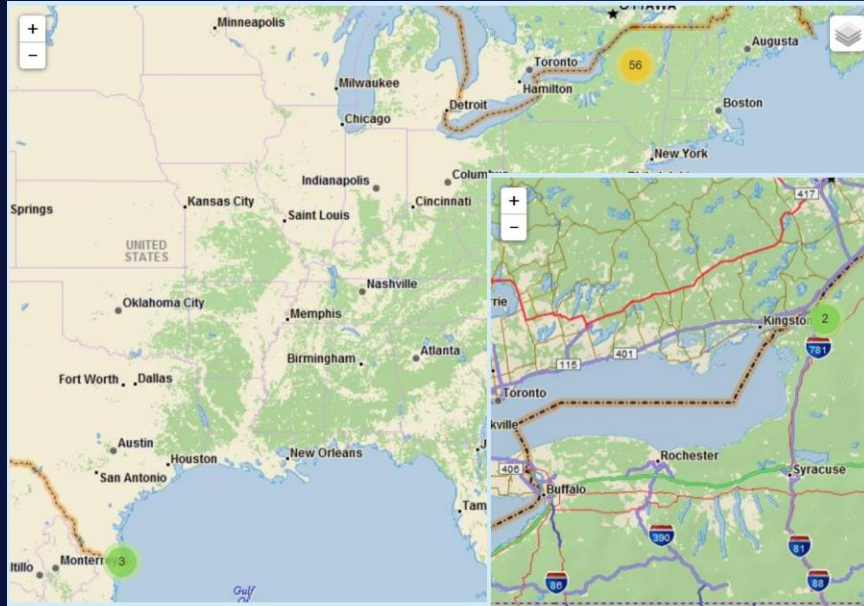
National: 138 (and counting)



New York (66)

South Texas (67)

Alabama (5)



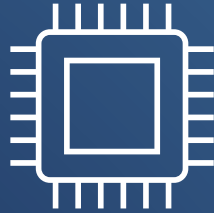
Traditional Counties of the Alabama Black Belt



The Growing REON Network

Monitoring System Components

- Sensors
- Hardware
- Power
- Telemetry
- Data Management / Dissemination / Application
- Processes (Deployment, Maintenance, Quality Assurance, etc.)



Balancing Commercial Offerings with User Designs

- Historically: User-Integrated
- Today: Commercial Subsystems Available



RATES Approach: Use both

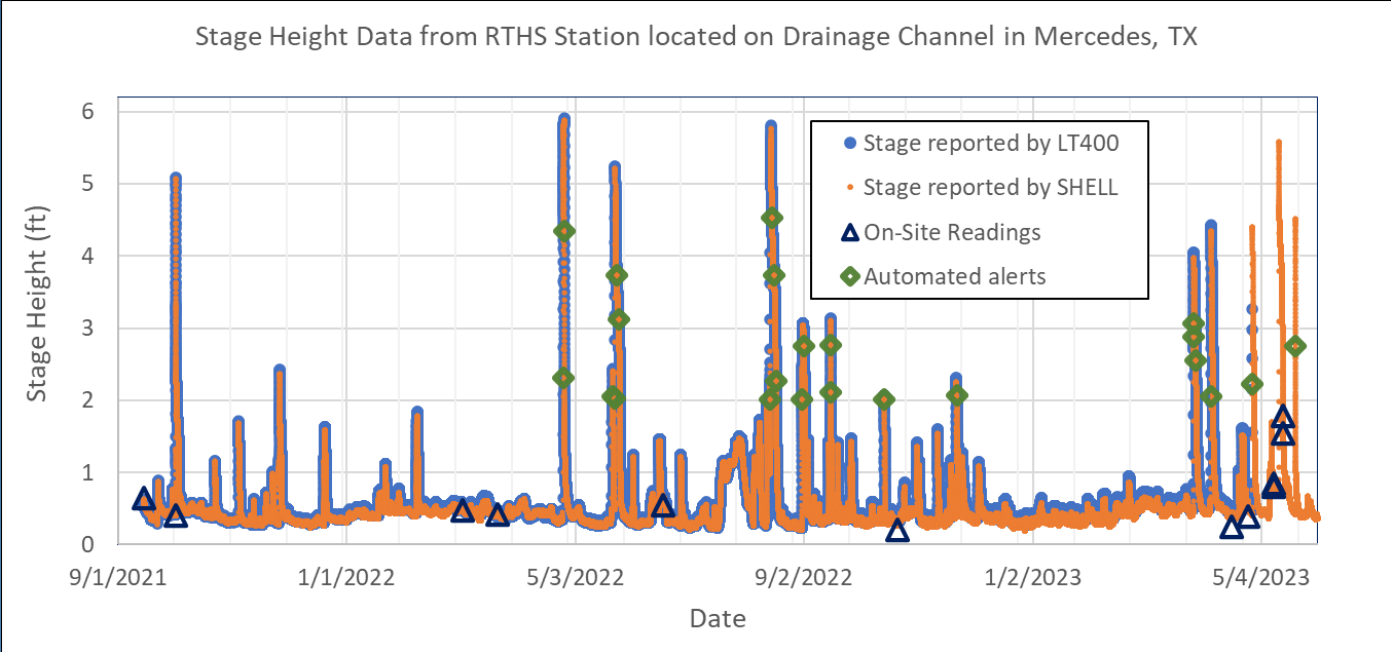
Need to balance: Meeting pressing needs v. Long-term cost-effectiveness



- Example Development: Water Level Sensing
 - Needed (2019): Robust water level sensor for LRGV deployments
 - Parallel tracks:
 - 1) Integrate commercial sensor into RTHS for immediate deployment
 - 2) Design and develop custom sensor

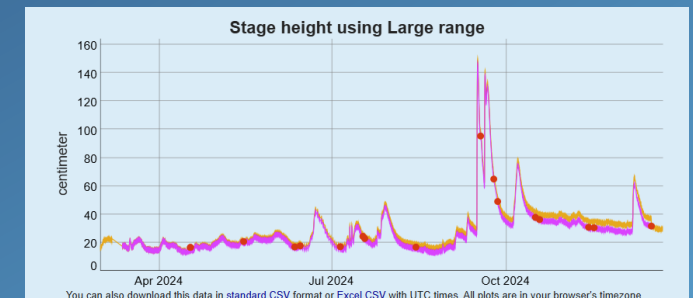
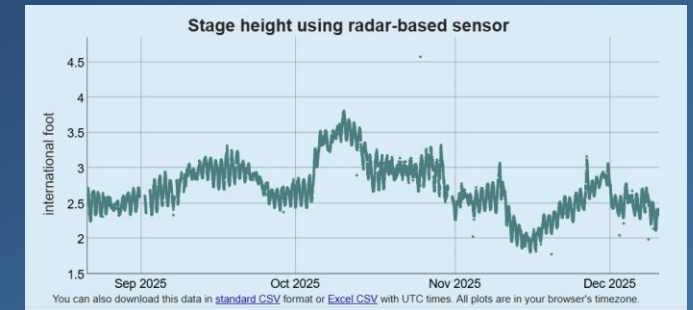
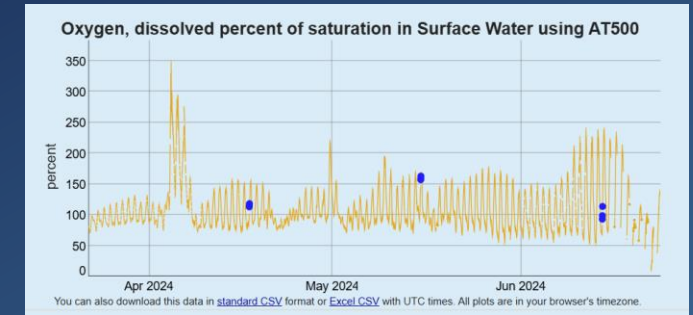
Date	9/14/ 2021	10/1/ 2021	3/3/ 2022	3/22/ 2022	6/18/ 2022	10/21/ 2022	4/17/ 2023	4/26/ 2023	5/10/ 2023	5/15/ 2023
On-site readings (ft)	0.64	0.40	0.48	0.42	0.55	0.21	0.25	0.39	0.80	1.79
SHELL-reported (ft)	0.64	0.42	0.51	0.43	0.60	0.27	0.37	0.52	0.91	1.91
LT400-reported (ft)	0.64	0.43	0.54	0.42	0.63	0.33	0.46	0.60	None	None

- 2021 – 2023: Side-by-side testing:



Ongoing Developments

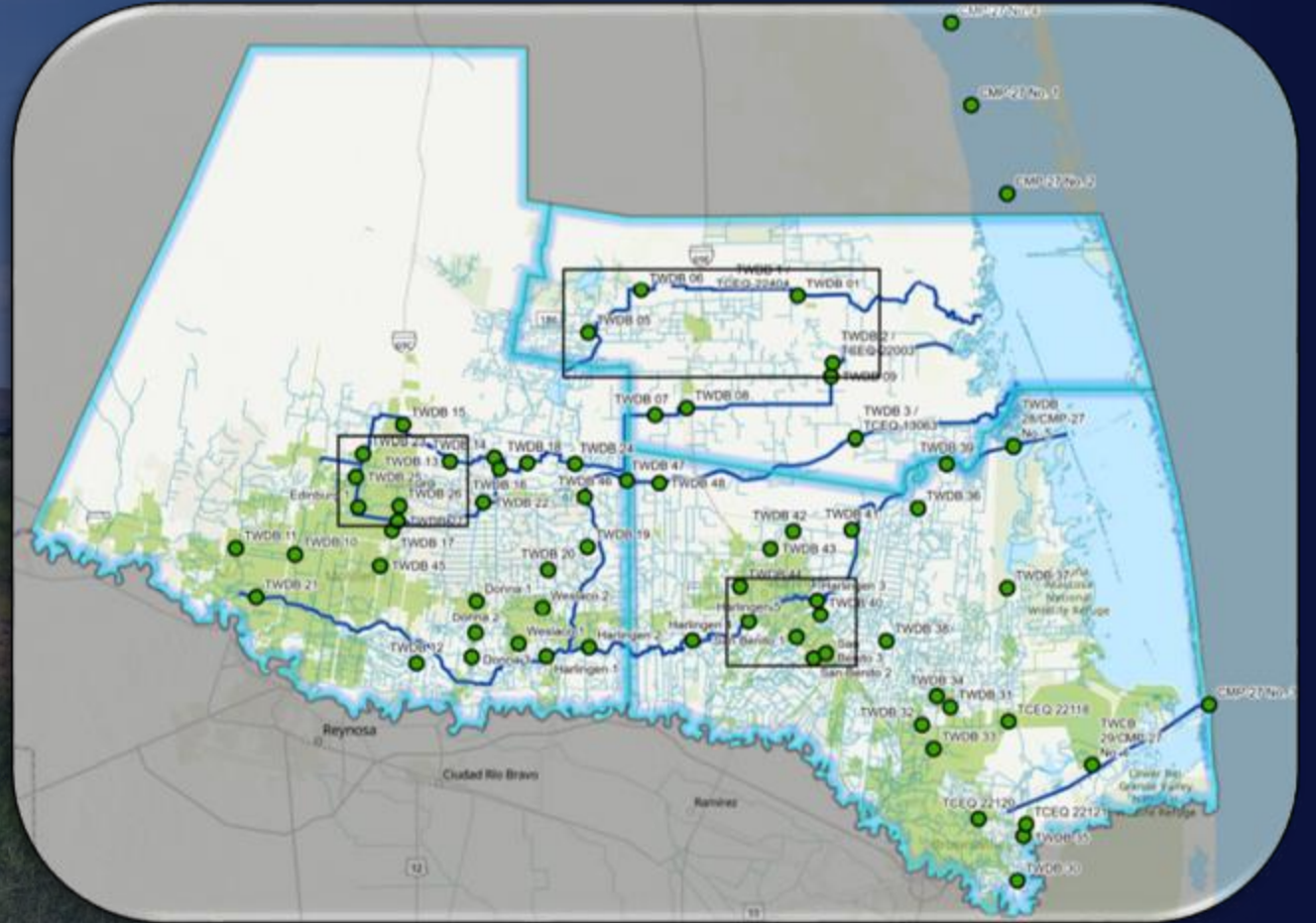
- Integration of additional sensors:
 - Water quality sondes
 - Precipitation gauges
 - Doppler flowmeters
- Integration of data from independent CI platforms
- Water surface elevation above sea level
- QA spot check data integration w/ continuous data
- Drift adjustments
- 60-minute -> 5-minute data blocks
- Partnerships for station operations:
 - Local partner handles on-site activities
 - RATES provides materials, support, cyberinfrastructure



REON RGV



SCAN TO
ACCESS DATA



RTHS STATIONS COMPONENTS

1. SOLAR PANEL

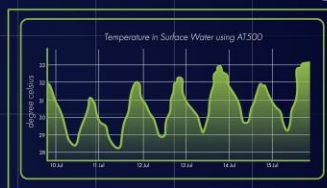
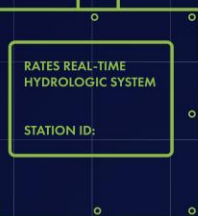
RTHS Stations are fully remote. They are traditionally powered by a 50-Watt, 12 Volt solar panel. This enables 24/7 real time data monitoring anywhere. Our system is designed to be compatible with different power sources to meet the demand of each sonde attached to the RTHS Station.

Environmental data, water surface elevation, and water quality data can be observed and retrieved* via <https://rths.us>.

*Subject to availability where applicable.

2. COMMAND BOX

This is the brain of the station. The 12x12 inch water resistant Contex Box can resist Texas's extreme heat and rain. This enclosure houses a Raspberry Pi computer that can be configured to monitor whatever the project needs. Our RTHS stations can be set up to track water surface elevation, water quality data, flow, and Meteorological metrics.



3. POWERED DATA CABLE

The liquid-tight flexible conduit is buried at a minimum depth of 1'. This cable connects the SHELL sensor to the Command Box and ensures all sondes are powered and reporting.

ABOUT RATES

RATES (Research, Applied Technology Education and Service) is a 501(c)(3) Not-for-profit formed to promote and coordinate the collaborative and cooperative use of technology by and among colleges, high schools, public schools, health care facilities, government offices, business, health and educational professionals, other educational and community service organizations and community residents for the benefit of the collaborating organizations, their clients, and community residents. Furthermore, RATES provides advanced information technology facilities and related services to participating organizations, either directly or through agreements and contracts with third party providers, and in connection with, to provide data, strengthen and expand services, including distance learning, teleconsulting between professionals, professional development, in service training, collaborative research, engineering analysis, and access to shared databases.



Scan the QR
code to access
RTHS

4. VISUAL STAFF GAUGE AND ANCHOR PIPE

The vertical in-situ staff gauge provides quality assurance in the form of a spot check, as well as a quick visual gauge of the water's condition. The staff gauge also serves as a mount for our Shell Transducer, and any other wanted sondes. This gauge is vertically mounted on an anchor pipe that is lodged into the stream bottom.

5. SHELL SENSOR

The submersible pressure transducer (SHELL sensor) is our most common sonde on the RTHS station. Designed to withstand extreme heat, cold, and poor conditions like mud. The SHELL sensor can continuously track water level, with minimal maintenance, for long term. This small, low cost, low power demand sensor tracks a big splash!

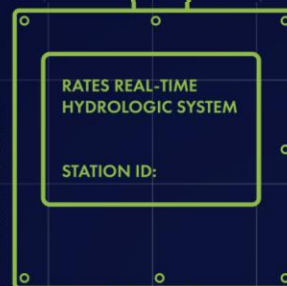


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Where are we now?

- FIF Project of 44 RTHS stations
- Over 15 other privately funded RTHS Sites
- North and Central Phase I and II
 - NOAA GCOOS:
 - HF Radar
 - CMP-27
 - REON

Road
Map

- Department Specialization
- Dumble Drain
- Open Environment
- Open Engineering
- LEAS Solution
- Stormwater Taskforce
 - RATES

Collaboration

- Flood Resiliency
- Alert-based app
 - FEWS
- TX Expansion
- AI Forecasting
- Real-Time Modeling
- Strategic Partnerships



SMART WATERSHED PHASES: THE FUTURE OF THE LRGV



Install stations within hydrologic hotspots

RATES designed low-cost Real-Time Hydrologic System (RTHS) stations that have been deployed at multiple locations across New York, Texas, and Alabama, as part of state or federal funded projects, that collect real-time observation directly from the waterways. The RTHS stations are characterized for being minimally invasive, solar powered, use of cellular modems, and custom-made sensors. As of March 2025, RATES has installed over 60 RATES-designed RTHS stations throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley (LRGV).

Real-Time data collection

Stations feature an operating system which collects data from connected sensors, performs functions such as issuing alerts if data meets certain criteria, and pass the data on to RATES central servers in near-real-time. Stations continuously monitor at minimum, water level and water temperature, where applicable, using sensors are being developed for converting water level into discharge. Some stations (TW081, TW082, and TW083) are presently recording continuous water quality data for various parameters using in-situ based sondes as part of ICEG-funded watershed characterization activities.

Develop hydrologic models using real-life observed data

Hydraulic and Hydrologic (H&H) models are built using different computational software to simulate, such as US Army Corps of Engineers' HEC-RAS, HEC-HMS, and HEC-HAS, Environmental Protection Agency's SWMM, and others that may be applicable. An H&H model is driven by 1) terrain data, 2) stormwater system infrastructure, 3) precipitation data (either real-time observations or historical statistical values), 4) land cover, 5) time-control specifications, and others that might be applicable (temperature, soils, evapotranspiration, snow, baseflow conditions). Knowing this information allows us to understand flow patterns, forecast water supply and discharge within waterways, identify vulnerability areas, assess flood risk (inundation extents and water depths), address the impact of flood mitigation projects (i.e., infrastructure projects or regulatory policies), watershed resilience.

Informed decision-making

Our mission is to make knowledge-based policy and decision making possible with regards to water resource management. In order to achieve this, we have to address monitoring needs of under-served areas to ensure technology and monitoring solutions are available to all. The water and environmental data must be translated to actionable intelligence that can educate decision makers and elected officials to promote knowledge-based decision making. This wisdom will support implementation through facilitation of collaborative efforts between stakeholders such as municipalities, academic institutions, not-for-profits, conservancy and environmental groups as well as state and federal regulatory agencies.

About RATES

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As of March 2025,
RATES has installed **over 60 RTHS**
Real-Time Hydrologic Systems
throughout the Lower Rio Grande Valley, and New York.



Scan the QR code to
find more information
about RATES

Poster made by Rebeca Santos

Democratizing Water Knowledge- Enabled Policy and Decision Making

DATA

Address monitoring needs of under-served areas to ensure technology and monitoring solutions are available to all

INFORMATION

Translate water & environmental data into actionable intelligence

KNOWLEDGE

Educate decision makers and elected officials to promote knowledge-based decision making

WISDOM

Support implementation through facilitation of collaborative efforts between stakeholders such as municipalities, academic institutions, not-for-profits, conservancy & environmental groups as well as state and federal regulatory agencies

The RGV. It's flat!



Flat, engineered watershed

Extremely low slopes, poor soil permeability, and highly modified drains/canals means water doesn't follow neat, natural basins. Instead, it ponds, backs up, and crosses jurisdictional lines.



Cross-county dependence, unequal capacity

Much of the region's runoff must move through resource limited Willacy County, while Hidalgo and Cameron have in-house engineering, creating built in equity and coordination challenges.



Patchwork to partnership

With no historic regional water forum, RWAC and RATES were created to provide a neutral watershed coordinator and turn fragmented projects and studies into a unified, regional approach to flood and water management.

Projects in Texas



TWDB LRGV

- Flood Infrastructure Fund (FIF)
- FWF



TCEQ

- TCEQ 319
- North and Central WPP
- Lower Laguna Madre-Brownsville Ship Channel



TXGLO

CMP-27 Lower Laguna Madre



NOAA GCOOS
HF Radar



City of Harlingen
Hydrologic Unit Code 10
Flood Protection Plan
Study

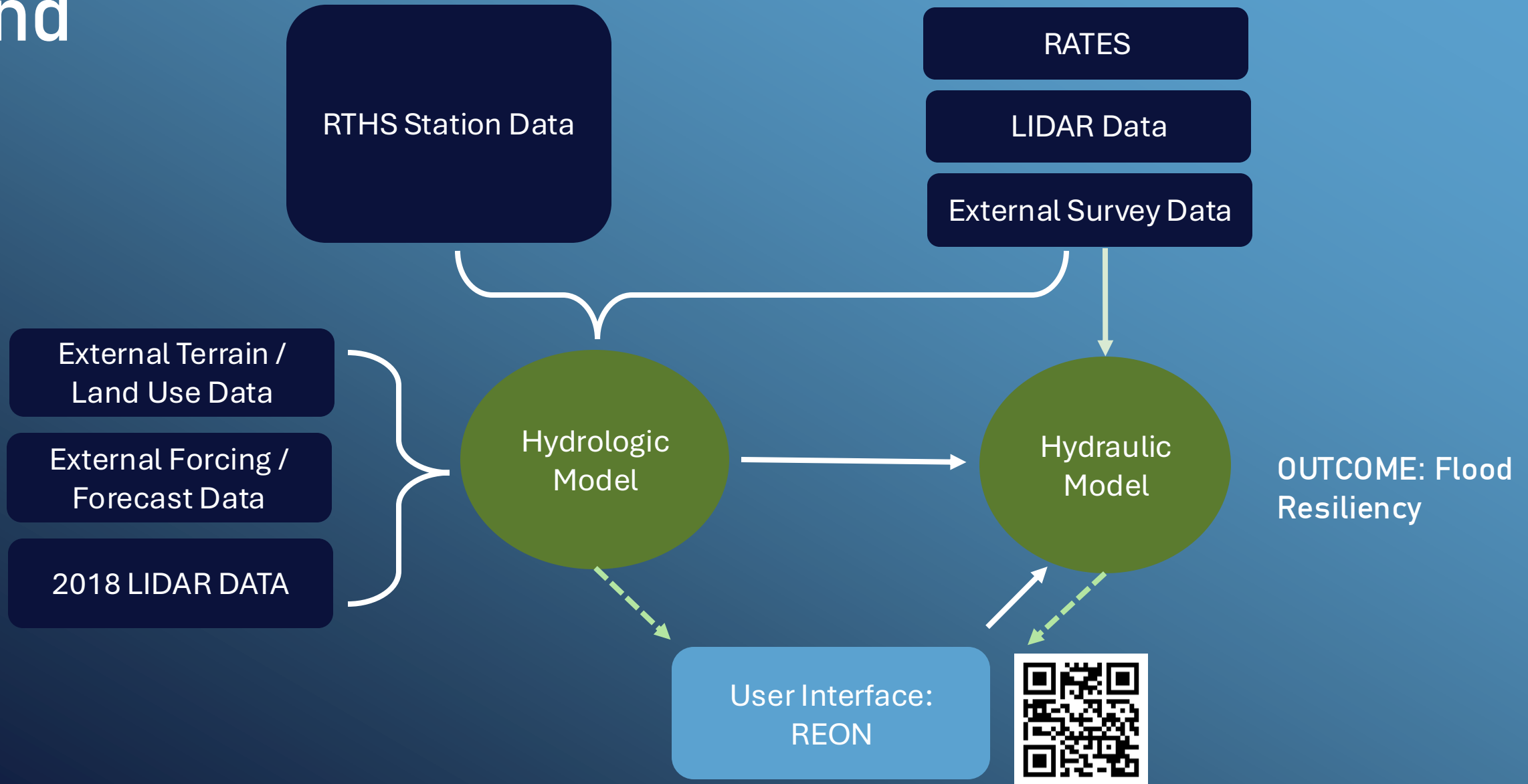


Enhancing Hydrologic
Forecasting in the Rio
Grande Basin



City-funded
projects

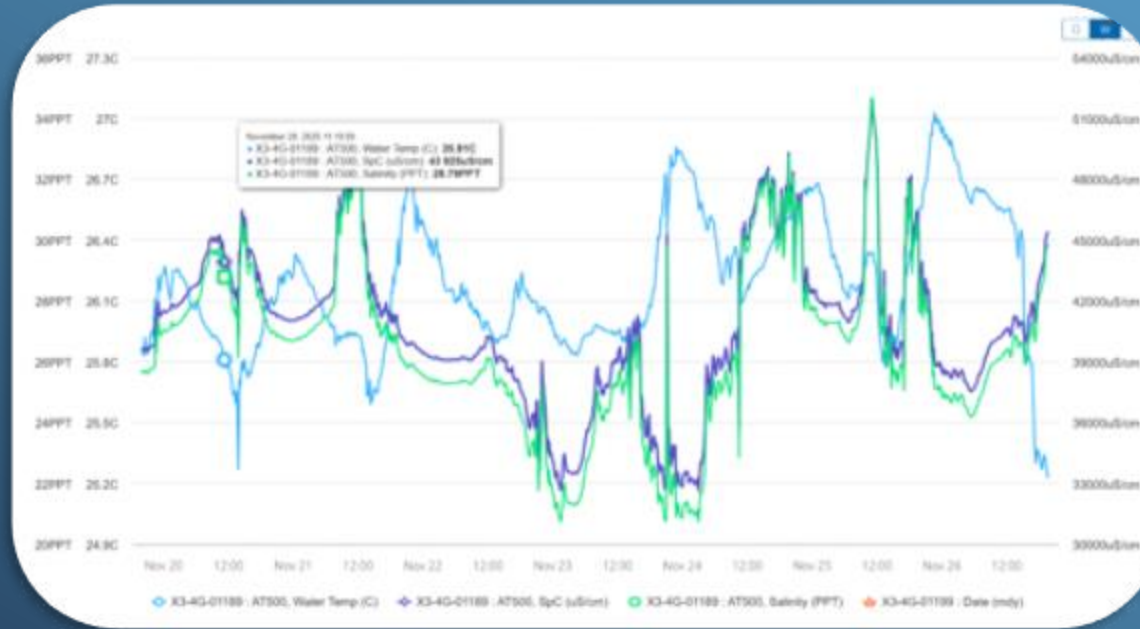
TWDB LRGV Flood Infrastructure Fund



TGLO CMP-27 Lower Laguna Madre Hydrodynamic Characterization

- **PROJECT LEAD:**
Cameron County
- Proposal developed in collaboration with TWDB and USACE
- **TOTAL BUDGET:** \$852,254
- **PROJECT DURATION:** 24 months

ADTH AT500



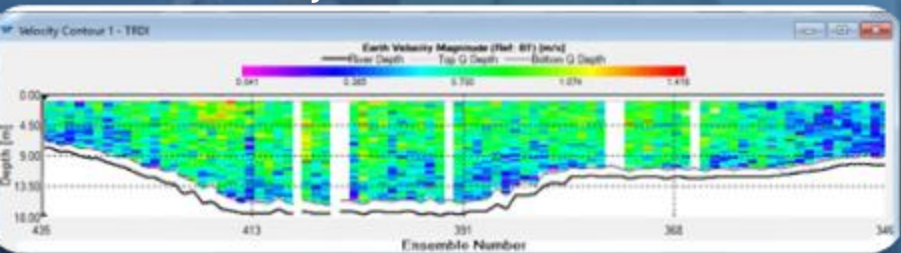
Deploy an integrated hydrodynamic and water-quality monitoring program at six Lower Laguna Madre sites, using existing NOAA CO-OPS infrastructure and two new RTHS stations equipped with continuous CTD and ADCP sensors. The resulting datasets will improve multi-agency models of freshwater inflow, storm surge, oil-spill movement, and non-point-source pollutant transport.

CMP-27 Overview



Data Collection

- Continuous-5 stations
- Quarterly-23 station



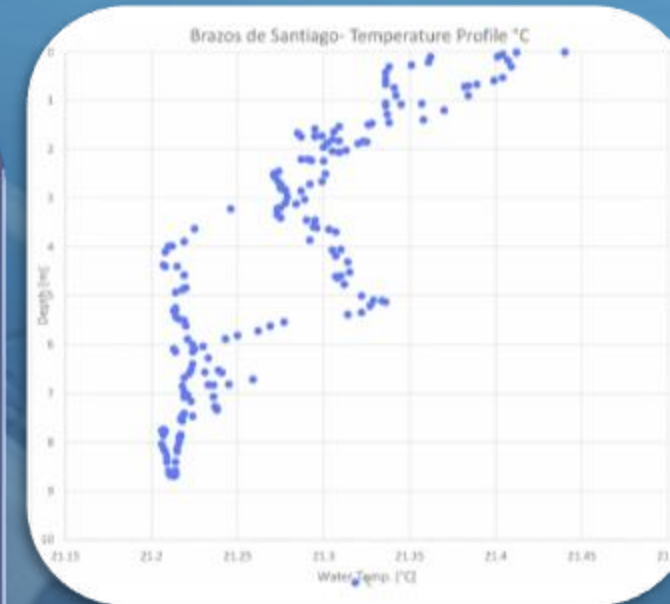
Applications

- Coastal flood, estuarine water quality, coastal infrastructure design



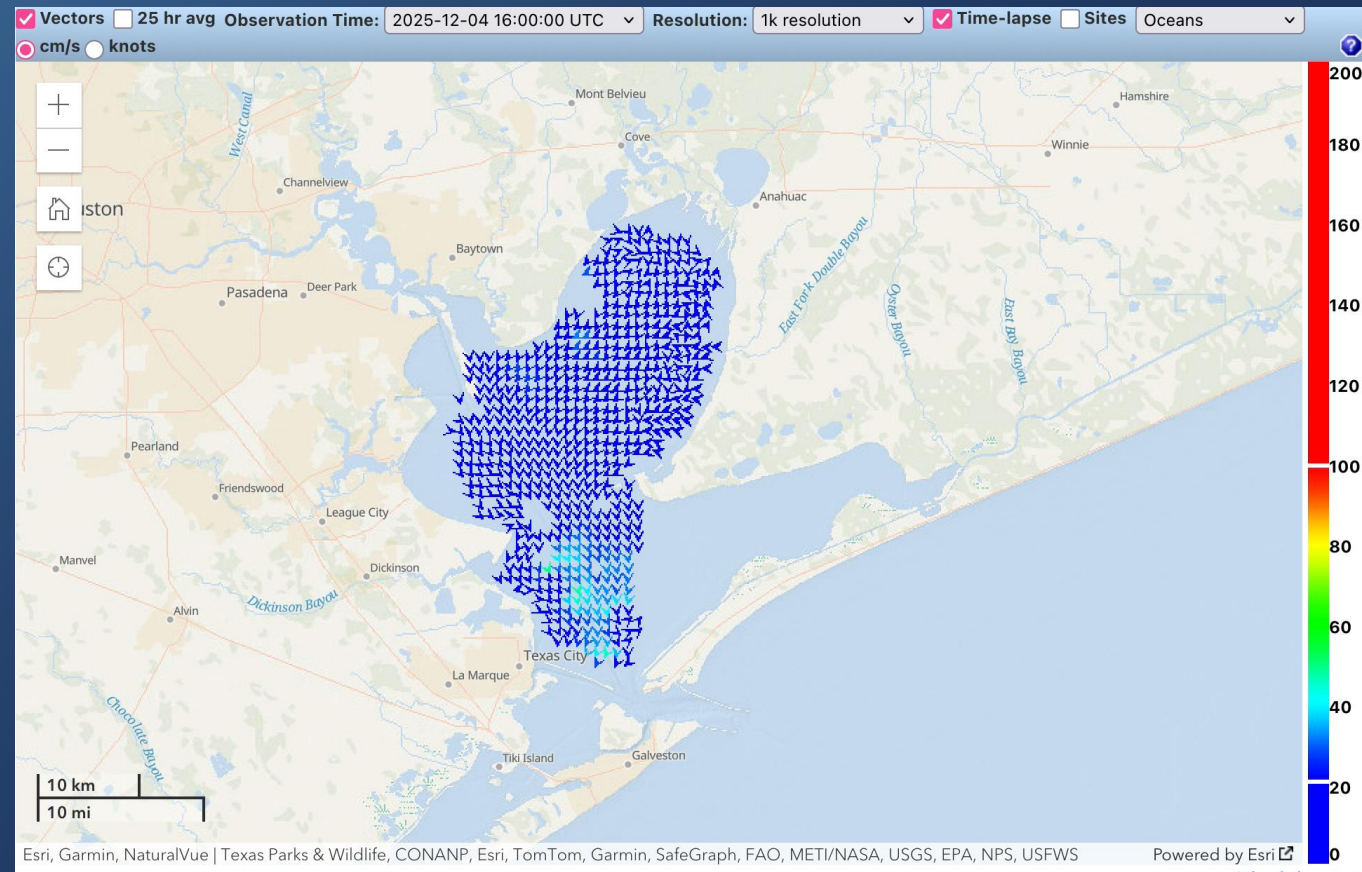
Stakeholders

- TWDB, USACE, USACE, Research



NOAA GCOOS: HF Radar

- Pass through entity: TAMU
- Total: \$650,000
- Sept 2024-Aug 2029
- O&M Funding of assets originally commissioned under TGLO CMP-26 PSM
 - Galveston Bay
 - Sabine Lake
 - Asset value: \$1,5-million
- Near real-time surface currents and waves (H , t , $direction$)
- Applications:
 - Coastal and combined flood modeling
 - Oil spill and contaminant transport modeling
 - Coastal hydrodynamic characterization and modeling
 - Damage assessment
 - Maritime safety
 - Search and Rescue Operation

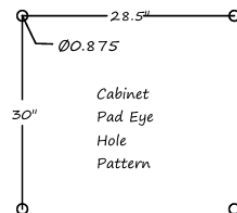
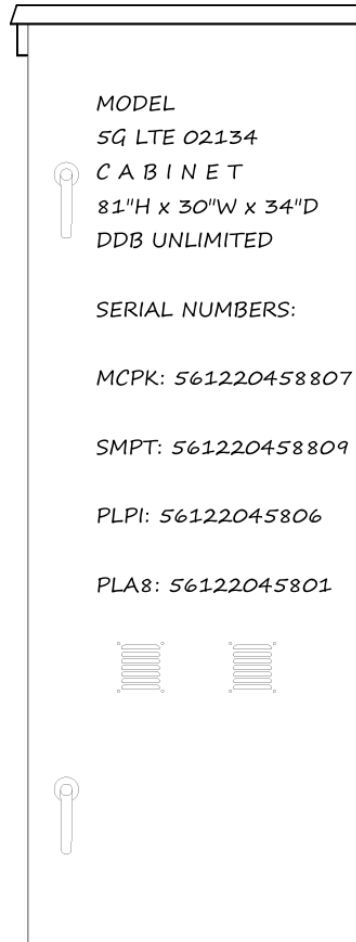


SCAN TO OPEN NOAA

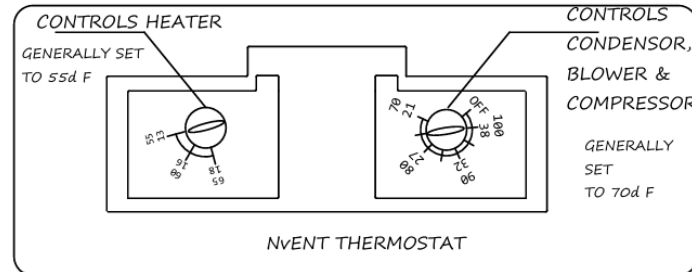
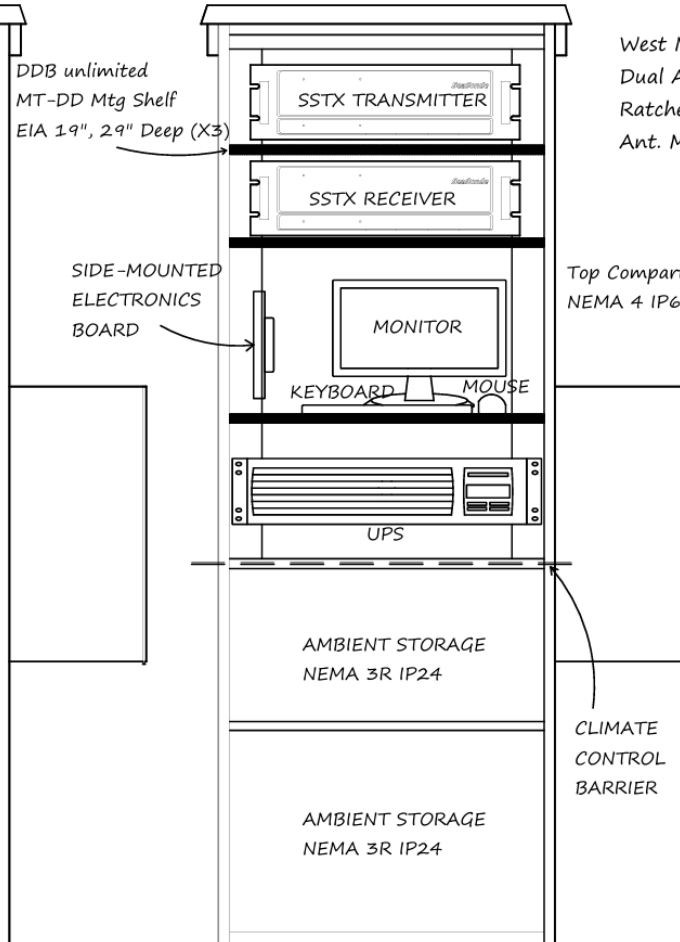


CODAR CABINET OVERVIEW MCPK, SMPT, PLPI, AND PLA8

Front View, Door Closed



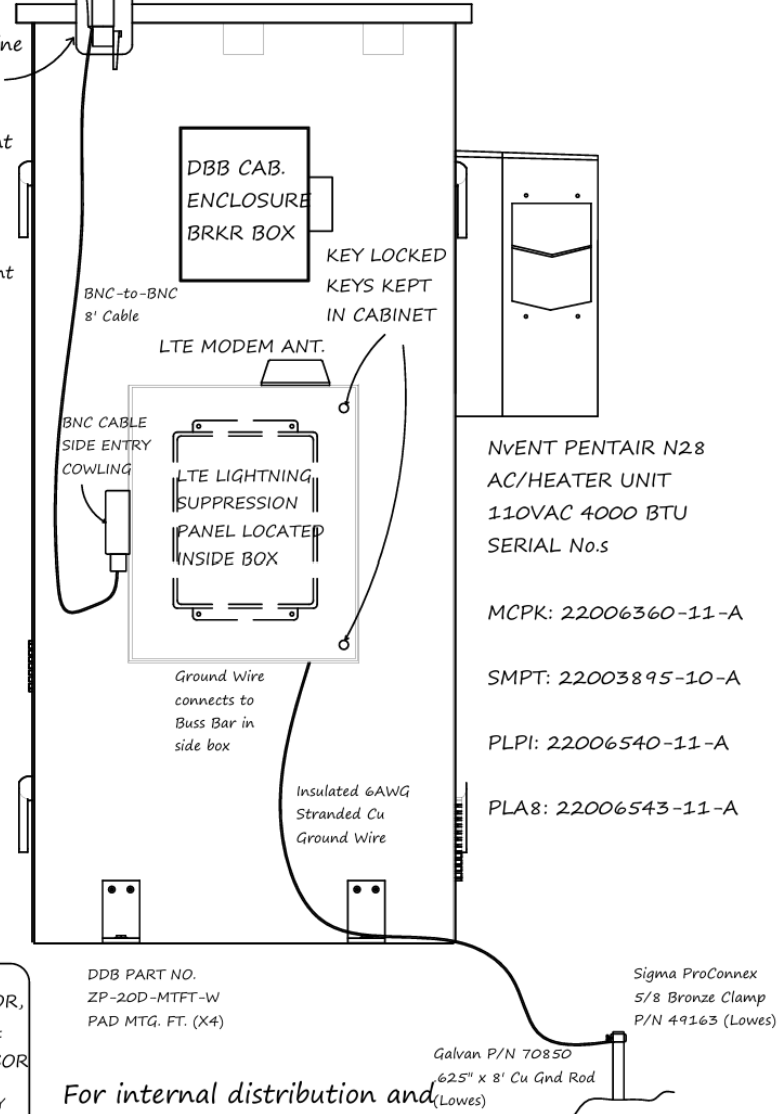
Front View, Door Open



Garmin GA 38
Codar GPS Ant.

West Marine
Dual Axis
Ratchet
Ant. Mount

Right Hand Side View



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document is not cleared for
general release

CMP-26
RATES.org
HF Radar
Texas Bays

C O D A R
Five Station
Drawing Set

East
Galveston
Bay and
Sabine
Lake

Illustrations
reflect status
as of one year
operational
January 2024

RATES RGV
P.O. Box 697
Edinburg, TX
78540

www2.ratesresearch.org
Rev B Drawing Set
Illustrator: Mitch S.





City of Harlingen HUC 10 Flood Protection Plan Study

- **PROJECT LEAD:** City of Harlingen
- **SCOPE:** 5 RTHS Stations upgraded to monitor precipitation and other meteorological parameters along the Arroyo Colorado. Transects and discharge measurements to follow.
- Precipitation Density data gap

TIFF and RATES



Observations & Monitoring Fill Priority Gaps

Waves and
nearshoring
conditions

LONG TERM
Texas Flood Hazard
Quilt
FEMA Estimated Base
Flood Elevation
FEMA National Flood
Hazard Layer
Flood of Factors

SHORT TERM
TxGlo Flood Viewer
TWDB Tax Mesonet
Flood Decision Support
Toolbox
USGS Texas Water
Dashboard

FF GIS Data Hub
RGV Flood
Water Wizard
WQ2 Data Live
Integration
Seads Integration
Del Rio
REON

NOAA GCOOS
HF Radar
FIF Task I
ADV's
CMP-27

USGS TIFF
Coastal
Data
Surfer
(CDS)

Keep data
sets
findable
and
consistent

Bathymetry /
Topobathy
refresh

CMP-27
Transects
from Costal
RTH Stations

NOAA GCOOS
HF Radar
CMP-27WQ
Data Live

Catalog
& API's



Data Management, Standards and Discoverability

Waves and nearshore conditions

Keep data sets findable and consistent

Bathymetry / Topobathy refresh

Catalog & API's

FIF GIS Data Hub
RGV Flood
Water Wizard
WQ2 Data Live
Integration
TDIS
REON

NOAA GOOCS HF Radar
FIF Task I ADV
CMP-27

SHORT TERM
TxDOT Flood Viewer
TWDB Task Manager
Flood Decision
Support Toolbox
USGS Texas Water Dashboard

USGS TIFF
Coastal Data
Surfer (CDS)

LONG TERM
Texas Flood Hazard
Quilt
FEMA Flood Hazard Base
Flood Elevation
FEMA National Flood
Hazard Layer
Flood Factor

CMP-27 work/
Intersect

NOAA GOOCS
HF Radar
CMP-27WQ
Data Live



Science and Tools Library

Waves and nearshoring conditions

Keep data sets findable and consistent

Bathymetry / Topobathy refresh

FIF GIS Data Hub
RGV Flood Water Wizard
WQ2 Data Live Integration
Scada integration Del Rio
REON

NOAA GCOOS HF Radar
FIF Task I ADV
CMP-27

SHORT TERM

- TxGIO Flood Viewer
- TWDB TexMesonet
- Flood Decision Support Toolbox
- USGS Texas Water Dashboard

LONG TERM

- Texas Flood Hazard Quilt
- FEMA Estimated Base Flood Elevation
- FEMA National Flood Hazard Layer
- Flood Factor

- NOAA GCOOS HF Radar
- CMP-27 WQ Data Live
- Water Wizard
- REON

CMP-27 work / Tansect

USGS
TIFF
Coastal
Data
Surfer
(CDS)

Catalog & APIs

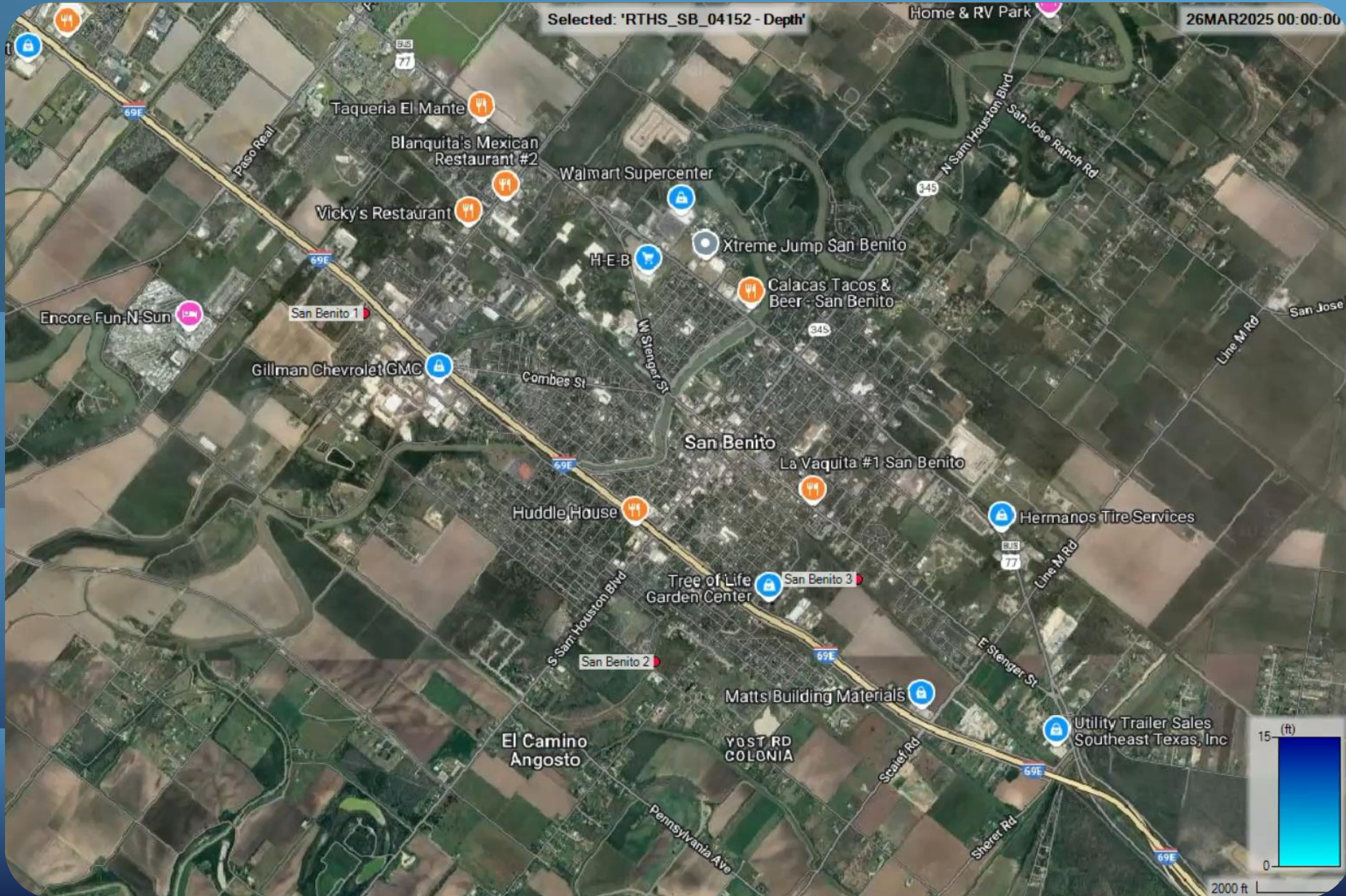


- **AI**
- **Open-Source Community**
- **Commercialization**
- **TDIS**
- **Research Partnerships**
- ...

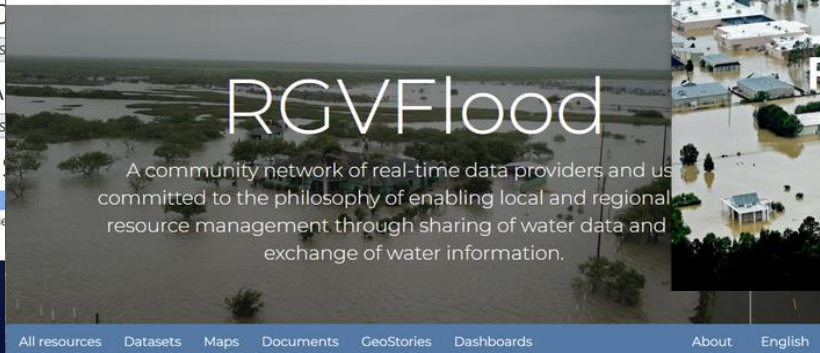
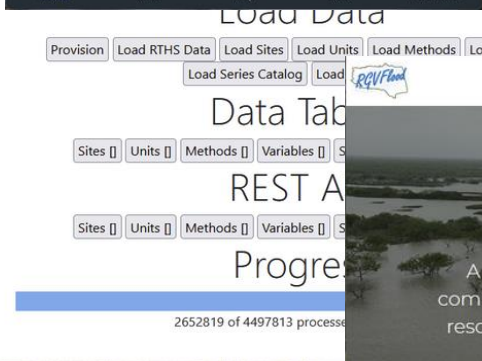
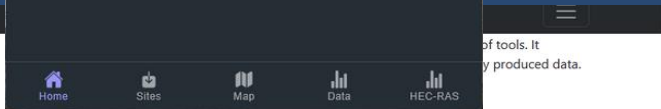
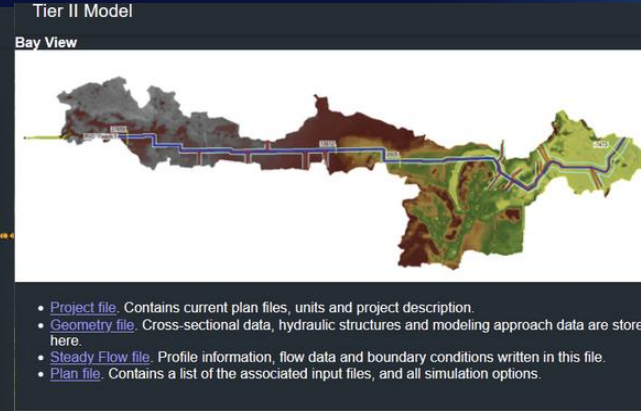
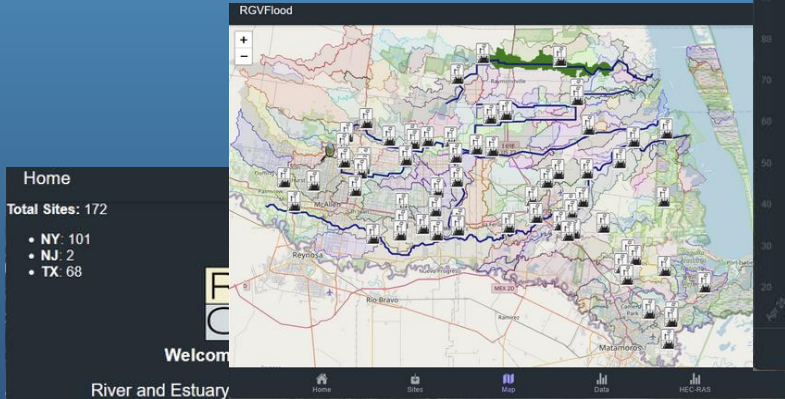


Where do we want to go?

FLOOD MITIGATION PROJECT DEVELOPMENT



WATER WIZARD



Network AI

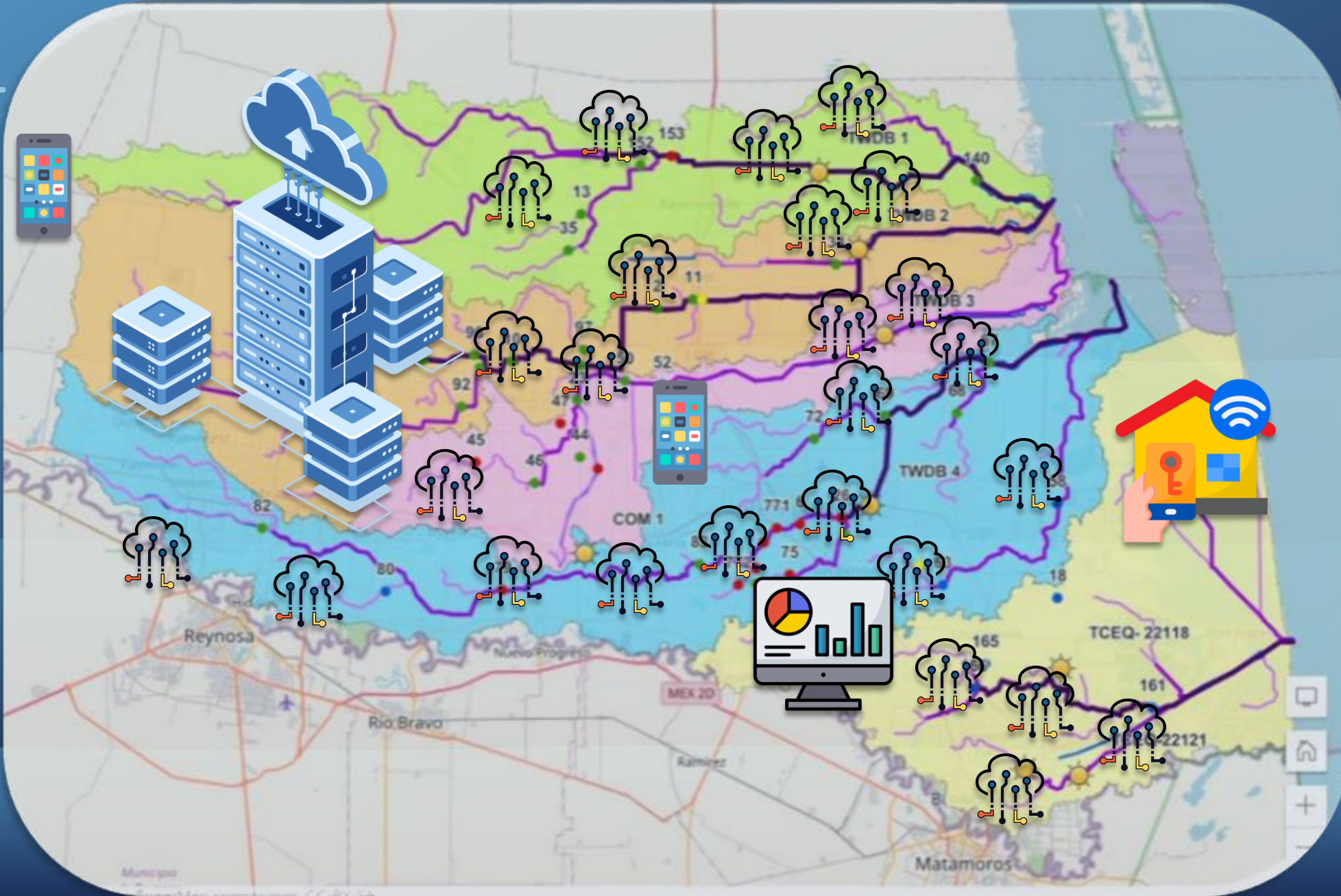
A True Intelligent Watershed



Data Center HPC
Regional Intelligence



Intelligent RTHS
Local Intelligence



Pending FMS Application: LRGV Regional Flood Early Warning System (FEWS)

Application Development

Based on \$5M Cameron County FEWS included in 2024 State Flood Plan

RATES:

- Proposed to Cameron County: Leverage existing RTHS network for FEWS Purposes
 - Expand scope to include Hidalgo and Willacy Counties
 - Reduce budget to \$3M
- Worked with Task Force to promote regional coordination
- Worked with Cameron County to develop applications
 - Abridged Application: April 2024; Full Application: November 2024

Project Scope

- Stakeholder Engagement on FEWS Implementation Design
 - Focus: First Responders, Public Works Personnel
- RTHS Siting/Installation/Commissioning
 - Not-yet-monitored sites for which data would be impactful
 - Transition station “ownership” to local stakeholders
- Cyberinfrastructure Development
 - Back-End: Implementation and testing of FEWS capabilities on FEWS-focused implementation of existing CI
 - Automated validation of alert conditions using data from multiple stations
 - Front-End: Delivery of FEWS alerts/information to Target Users
 - Long-Term Sustainability: Develop platforms and documentation facilitating O&M of stations by local stakeholders

Pending FME Application: Developing a Regional Master Drainage Plan for Cameron and Hidalgo County

**Abridged FME Application submitted April 2024
(FIF SFY 2024-2025 funding cycle)**

- Basis: Cameron County Holistic HUC Flood Protection Study from 2024 State Flood Plan
- RATES:
 - Recommended inclusion of Hidalgo Co.
 - Worked with Cameron County on application development
 - Worked with Task Force to engage communities
- Budget: \$13M
- TWDB prioritization (Feb. 2025): #6/203 statewide FMEs

Project Goals

- Holistic Data-Driven Analysis for Every Community
- Systematic Flood Risk Mapping and Capital Improvement Planning
- Implementing a Coordinated, System-Based Approach for Maximum Regional Benefit

What do we need?

- Investment
- Transferability
- Sustainability
 - Partnerships
 - Commercialization
- ...

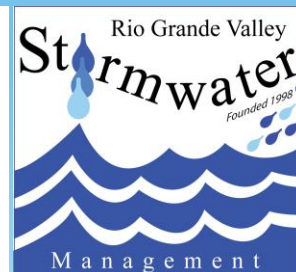


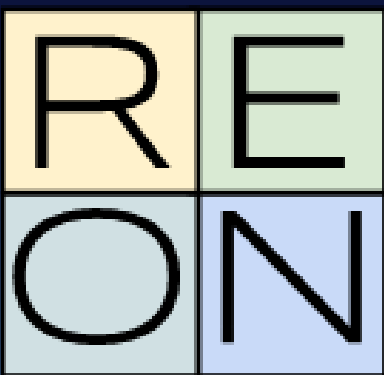
Cameron County proposes:

ACWIRRED

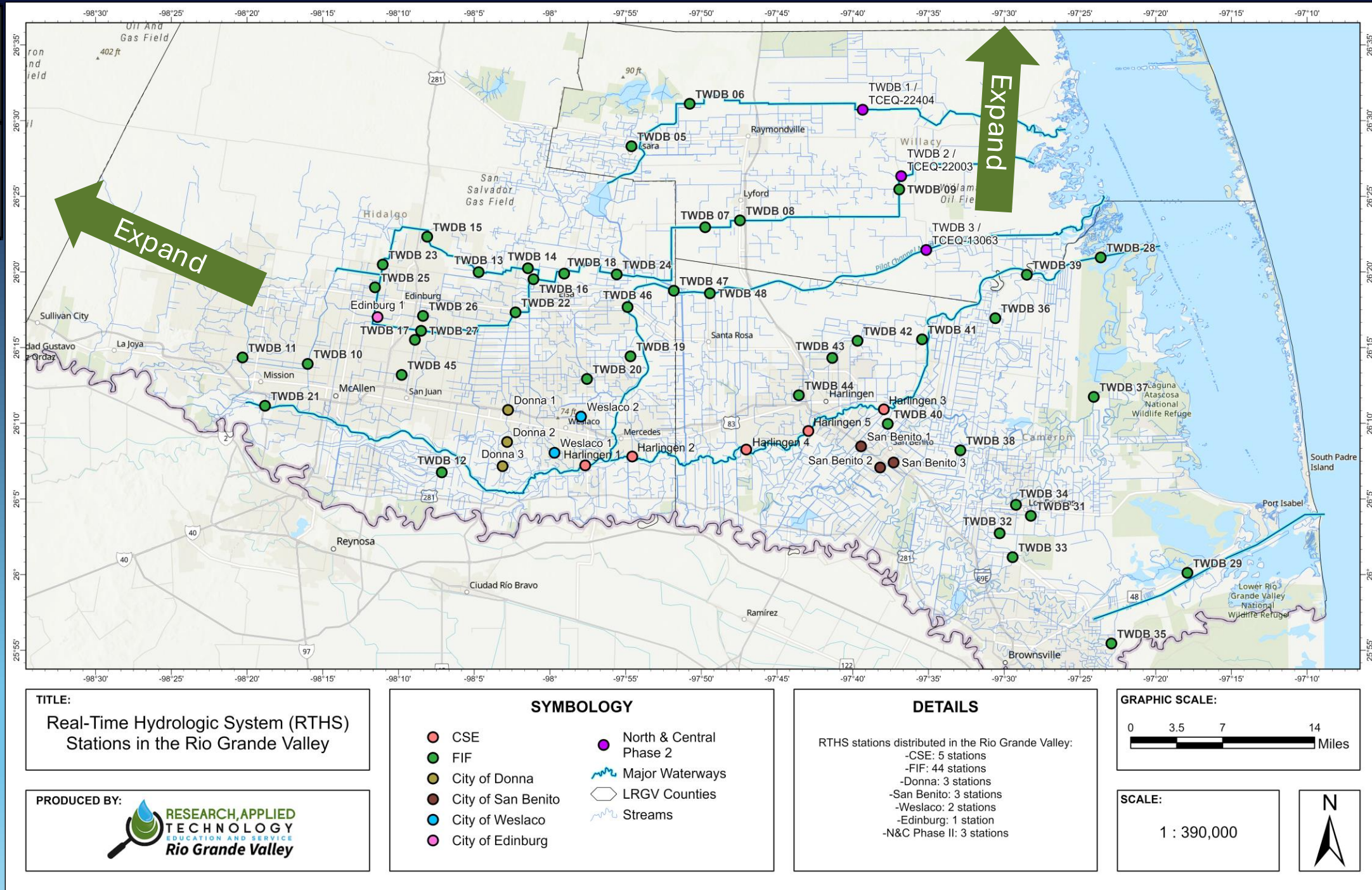
An Institute for

Appled **C**oastal **W**ater **I**ntelligence for
Regional **R**esilience and **E**conomic
Development





RGV
Coastal
Rio Grande
Basin



Value Proposition

Applied Research

- The Need:
Workforce Development  Industry Recruitment
- The Niche:

Embrace the 4th Industrial Revolution

- The Engine:
Institute for Regional Resilience & Economic Development



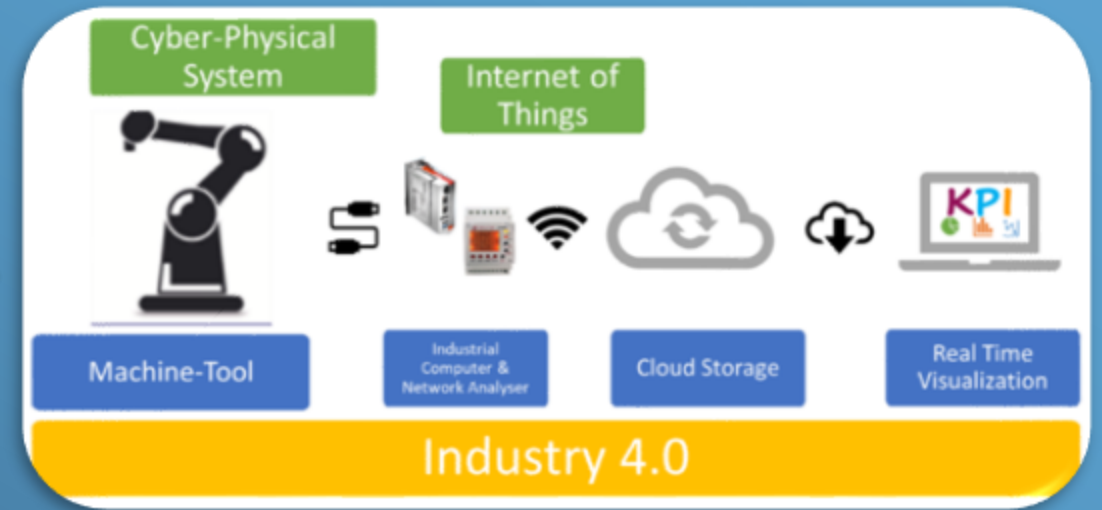
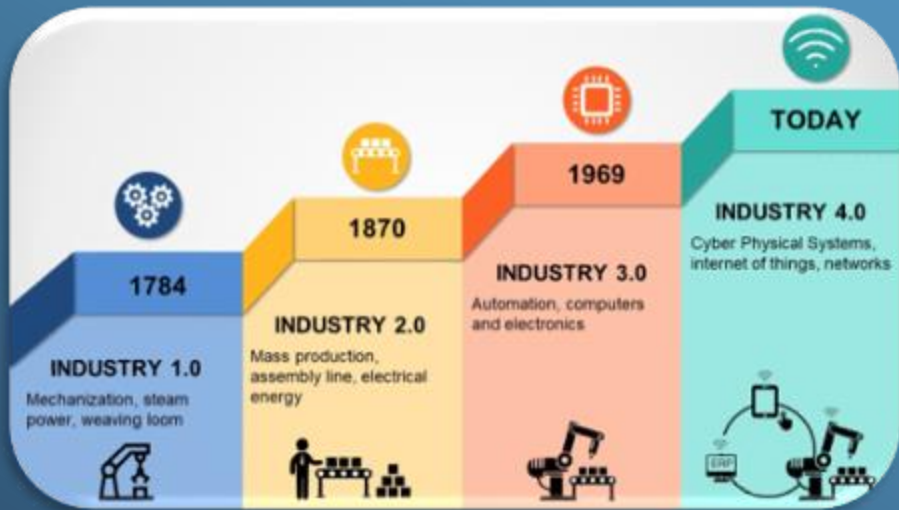
Academy



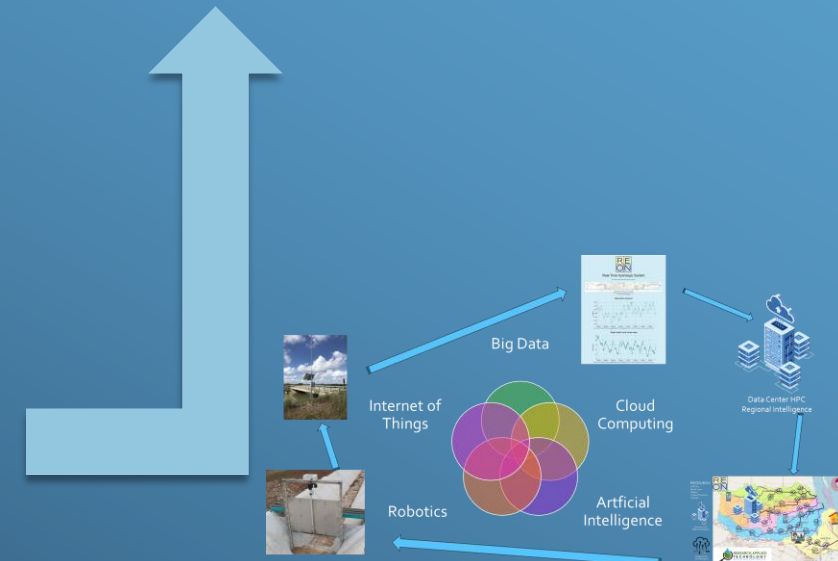
Accelerator



Extension



A banner for the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) featuring the text "Cyber-Physical Systems (CPS)" in large white letters. The background is a collage of scientific and technological imagery, including a brain scan, mathematical formulas, and a person's face. A search bar at the top right says "Search NSF". Navigation links include "Find Funding & Apply", "Manage Your Award", "Focus Areas", "News & Events", and "About". A button in the bottom right corner says "View guidelines NSF 24-581".



ACWIRRED

Cyber-Physical Systems



Big Data



Data Center HPC
Regional Intelligence

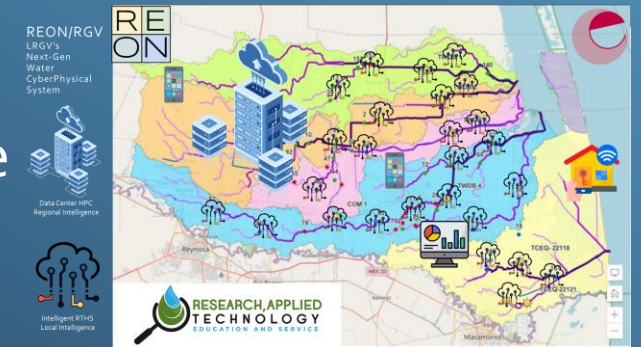
Internet of
Things



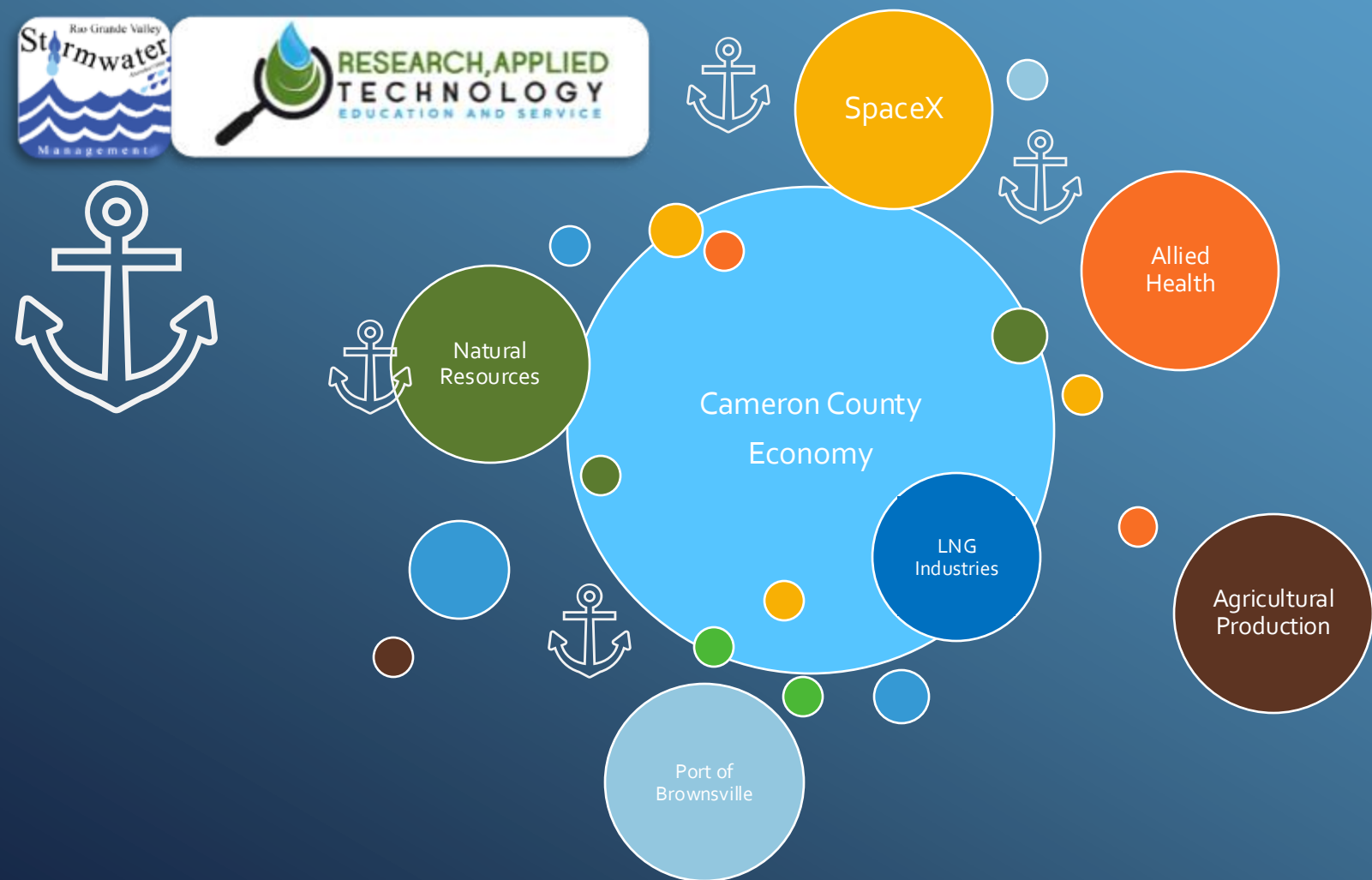
Cloud
Computing

Artificial
Intelligence

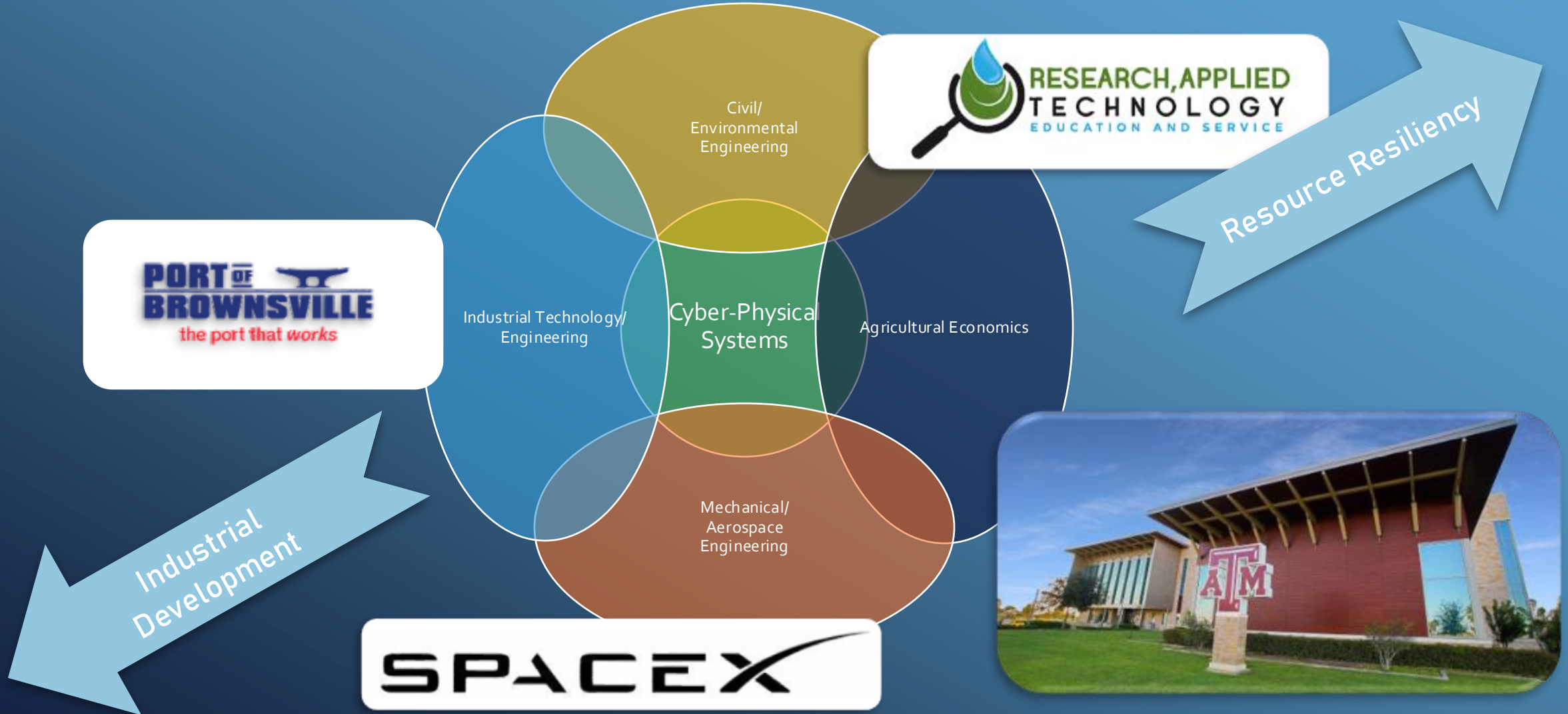
Robotics



Key County Economic Drivers

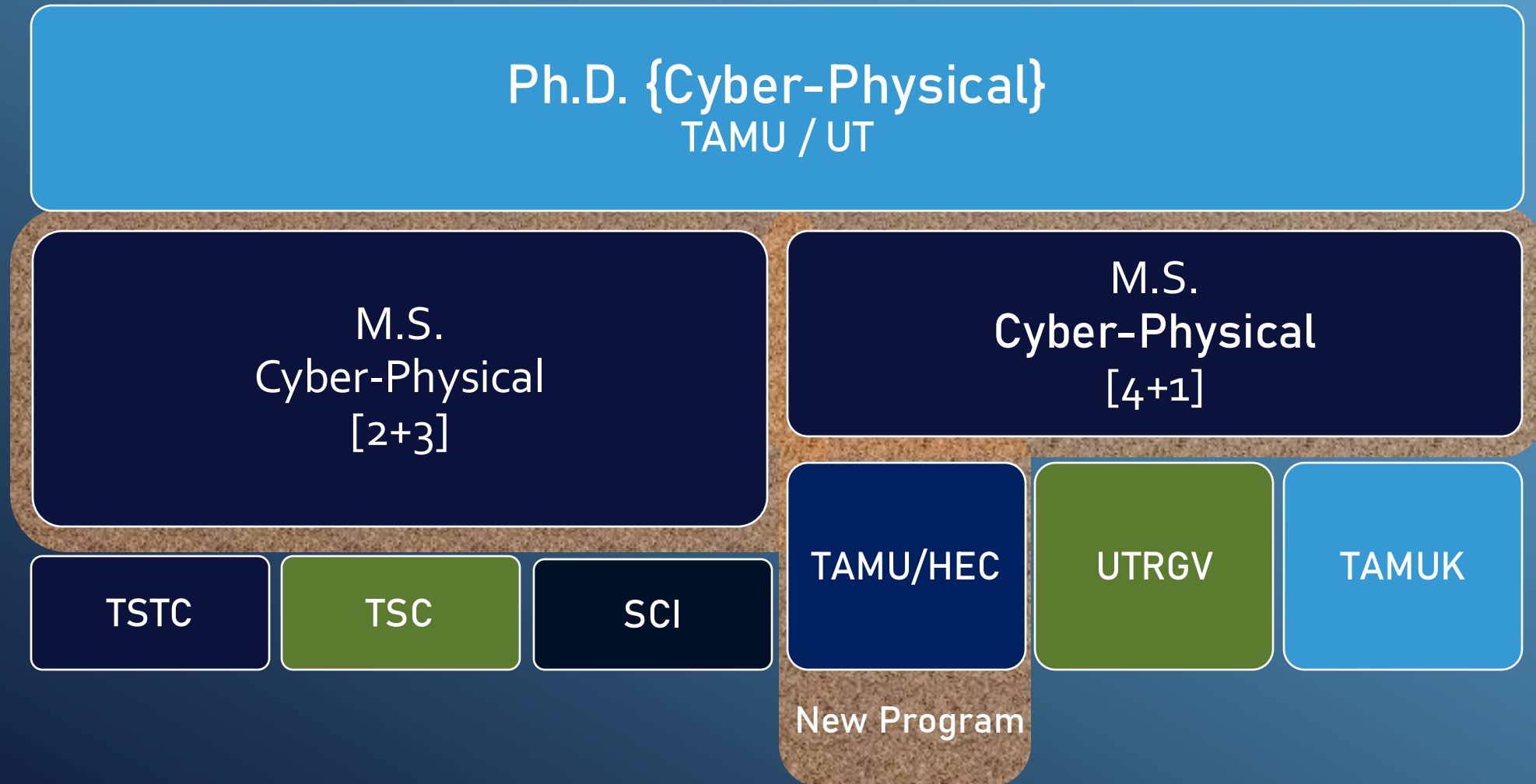


Workforce Needs

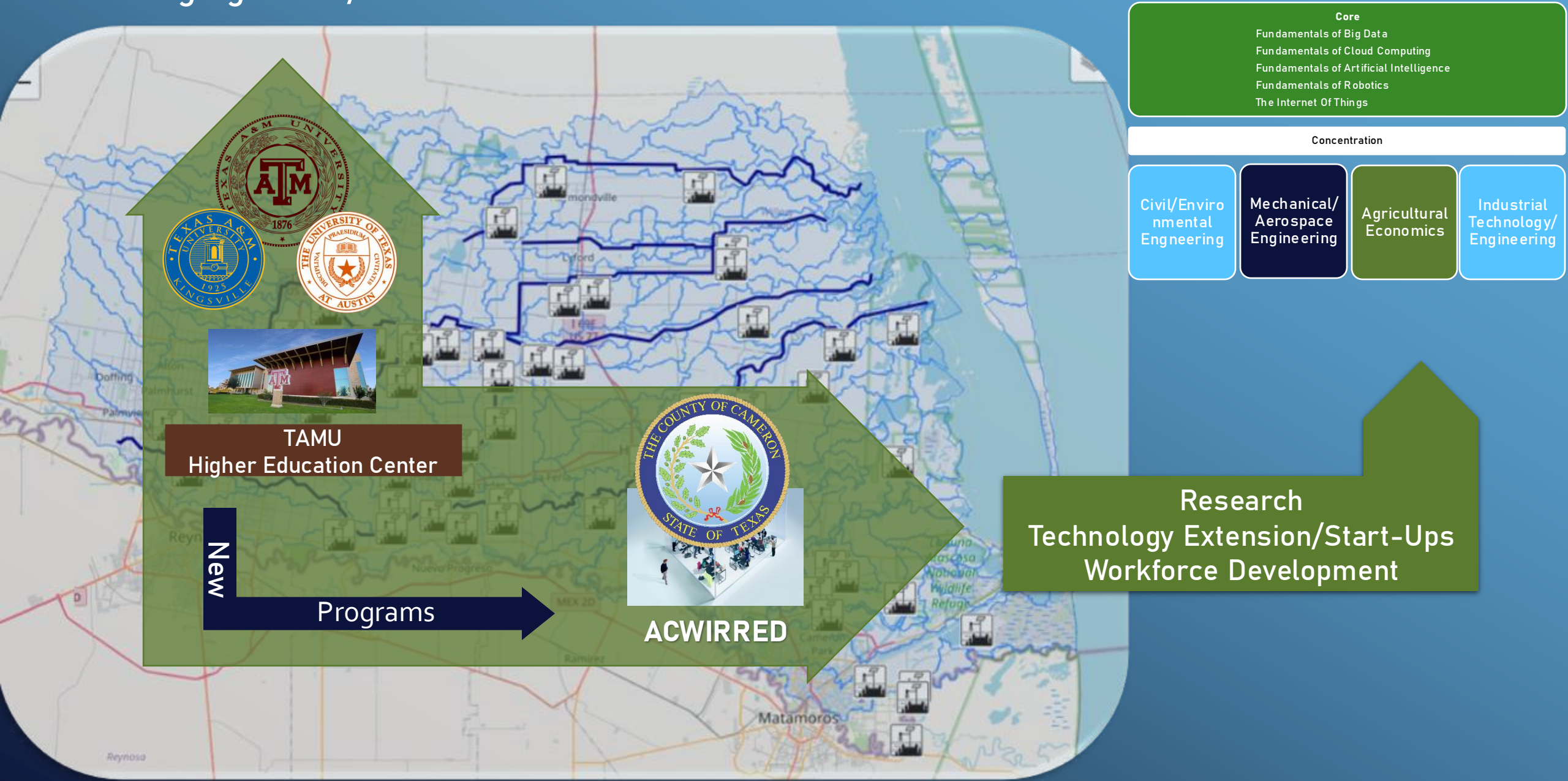


Academic Model . . .

Circa 1990's
TGLO-TAMUS Ph.D. Pipeline
Oil Spill



Leveraging REON/RGV



Economic Consequences of Coastal Storm Surge



Agriculture

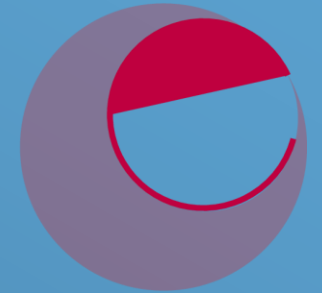
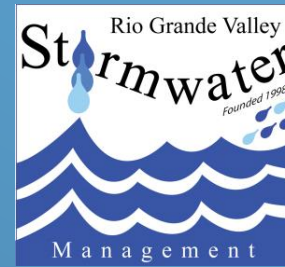


Industry



Institute Acceleration Model





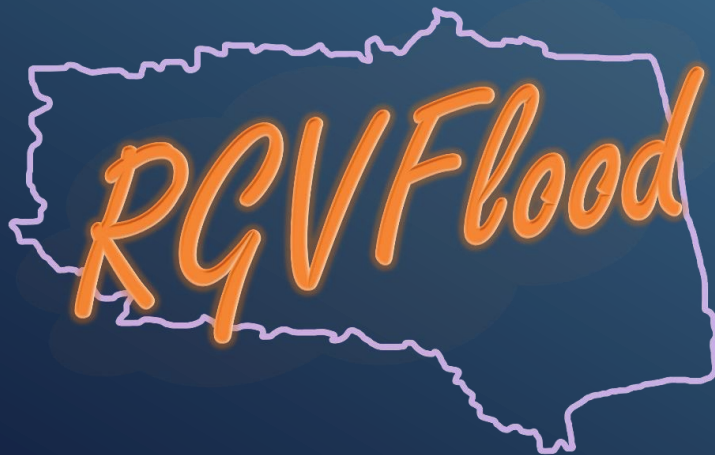
Open Environment, LLC



CYBER-PHYSICAL SYSTEM
FOR
REGIONAL FLOOD MANAGEMENT



Open Engineering, PLLC



LEAS Solutions, LLC

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William D. Kirkey, *Graduate Student Member, IEEE*, James S. Bonner, and Christopher B. Fuller

ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING SCIENCE
Volume 27, Number 5, 2010
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DOI: 10.1089/ees.2010.0006

A Fixed Robotic Profiler System to Sense Real-Time Episodic Pulses in Corpus Christi Bay

Mohammad S. Islam,^{1,*} James S. Bonner,² and Cheryl A. Page³

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Volume 33, Number 4, 2016
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DOI: 10.1089/ees.2015.0564

Impacts of an Extreme Weather-Related Episodic Event on the Hudson River and Estuary

Mohammad S. Islam,^{*} James S. Bonner, Christopher S. Fuller, and William Kirkey

Discover Water

Research

Long-term coastal observatory-high frequency radar: site selection study and considerations

Christopher Fuller¹ · Andrew Ernest¹ · Mitch Scoggins¹ · Liv Haselbach² · Xing Wu² · Cletus Ogbodo³ · Rosa Fitzgerald³

Received: 14 February 2024 / Accepted: 7 November 2024
Published online: 19 November 2024
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CLARKSON UNIVERSITY

New Designs for Submersible Water Quality Instrumentation Which Achieve High *In Situ* Accuracy at Low Total Cost

A Dissertation
by
William Kirkey
Wallace H. Coulter School of Engineering

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, Engineering Science

April, 2019

Journal of Environmental Informatics Letters 4(2) 80-87 (2020)
www.iseis.org/jeil

River & Estuary Observation Network: Refinement of Stage Height Sensor Subsystem for Low Cost and High Reliability

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Estimating Colloidal Concentration Using Acoustic Backscatter

Christopher B. Fuller, James S. Bonner, Mohammad S. Islam, Temitope Ojo, Cheryl A. Page, and William D. Kirkey