ENGINEERING & CIP

MEMO

TO: Honorable Mayor & City Council
FROM: Melani Howard, Habitat Conservation Plan Manager
THROUGH: Bert Lumbreras, City Manager
Joe Pantalion, Assistant City Manager
Laurie Moyer, P.E., Director of Engineering & CIP
DATE: January 19, 2022
RE: Implementing River Fence, Visibility, and Public Outreach Recommendations

At the December 7, 2021 City Council workshop, recommendations were proposed by Council Members about the possibility of replacing the river fences, increasing the aesthetics of and visibility through the riparian corridor, and implementing a public outreach program regarding Edwards Aquifer Habitat Conservation Plan (EAHCP) Conservation Measures. This memo describes how those recommendations will be implemented. The amendment that initiated this discussion is currently scheduled to be considered at the February 1 Council meeting.

River Fence Replacement:

- Purpose: Replace existing EAHCP fence and thin vegetation behind said fence along the riparian buffer to increase aesthetics and river visibility.

a. Fence replacement
   i. EAHCP fencing along the riparian buffer was originally installed to protect newly planted native seedlings and to minimize bank access for the purpose of preventing erosion, soil compaction, loss of vegetation and destruction of native aquatic plant stands. Geographic Information Systems (GIS) measured 3,764 feet of EAHCP fencing, including the fence located in upper Sewell Park on Texas State University property (Figure 1)

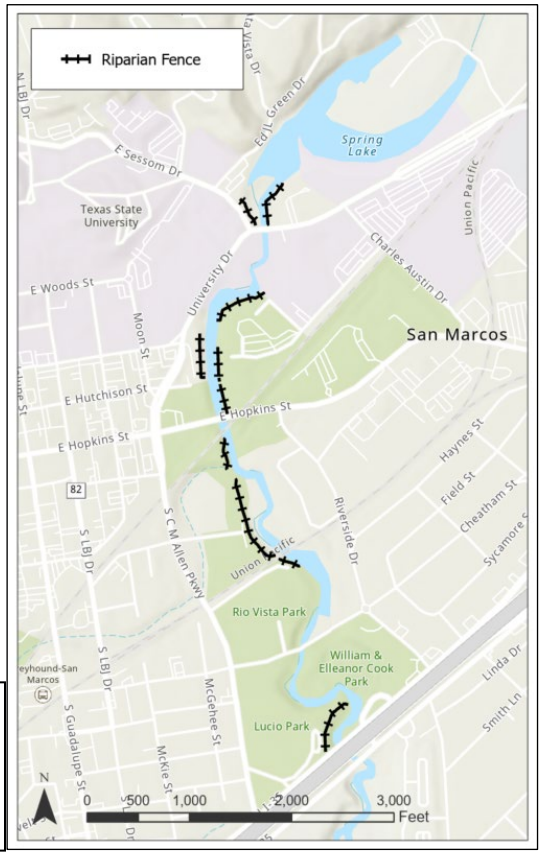

Figure 1. Locations of proposed riparian fencing along the San Marcos river. Click to view larger.

ii. We will follow the precedent established by Texas State University in using a wrought iron fence in upper Sewell Park (Figure 2) with an added bottom gap for wildlife such as turtles and rabbits, that runs parallel to the river between access points but leaves the ends open. This encourages river users to enter the river via the access points but does not exclude use of the riparian zone. Initially, replacement fencing would be installed in one location, such as Bicentennial Park, and monitored as described below.

Figure 2. Texas State recently installed 133 feet of wrought iron fence along upper Sewell Park (west bank) at a cost of $98.00 per linear foot.

iii. Given the possibility of public use impacts to the riparian zone, initially one section of river park EAHCP riparian buffer fence would be replaced, and that section's buffer zone would be monitored using vegetative transects for one year looking for changes due to accessibility. The remaining fence would be left in place until the impacts of fence replacement have been determined.

iv. Funding for the existing fencing was provided by the Parks Maintenance account. A funding source for replacement fencing would need to be identified through the upcoming budget process.

<u>Vegetation Management:</u>

b. Vegetation Management

i. In the buffer zone behind the fence replacement section (i.e., Bicentennial Park), the first tier of branches will be pruned on selected trees to increase visibility of the river throughout the buffer zone located behind EAHCP fences.

ii. In that same area, non-native and unintended native grasses will be removed to improve aesthetics, i.e., Johnson grass, ragweed, Bermuda.

Public Outreach:

- Purpose: Conduct public outreach to ensure continued awareness of the unique San Marcos springs ecosystem, why there is an EAHCP, what are the EAHCP conservation measures and their benefits through:
  a. Postings on Keep San Marcos Beautiful (KSMB) Facebook - monthly short videos (English/Spanish) focused on the river, conservation measures, etc.
  b. Fact Sheet (English/Spanish) that includes background; elements of the program; outcomes to achieve; purpose of the EAHCP to be available at library, tourist information center, activity center, etc.
  c. Signage (English/Spanish) for the upper river section using fencing and kiosks for display.
  d. Activity Guide – a coloring/drawing guide for all ages that educates as it entertains during a walk along the San Marcos River.
  e. Events: Create interactive elements, such as a rainwater simulator and the aquifer recharge table, for use at city events, neighborhood-focused events, and school programs. Also have quality/sustainable give-away products with website link for information.
  f. A variety of signage along the river as shown below:

Example of one of the signs that will be placed either in a kiosk or on the riparian buffer fence

Other questions posed by council members concerned the impact of cans on Texas wild rice and the need for permits to manage the vegetation as described. First, the EAHCP litter collection contractor will be interviewed to gather his observations of litter in the upper San Marcos River, specifically in regard to the impact of cans on the success of Texas wild rice. Second, the proposed canopy-thinning and grass removal would not require state or federal permits.

Finally, these recommendations and their implementation do not impact the Texas State University/City of San Marcos interlocal agreement proposed amendment that is scheduled to be considered by City Council at its February 1 meeting. The amendment only adds text describing the EAHCP manager position and extends the contractual deadline to meet the actual Incidental Take Permit deadline.