Mission

COMM ITED TO SAFE, CLEAN, ENJOYABLE CREEKS AND RIVERS

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It is an exciting time for parks in Karnes County! The San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) is staying true to the “enjoyable” part of our mission by actively supporting two parks in Karnes County. The River Authority has issued a $25,000 challenge grant to help revitalize Veterans Memorial Park in Falls City which was heavily damaged in the 2002 flood. The Falls City Lions club has been leading the fundraising efforts and held their first BBQ Cook-Off fundraiser at the park on September 7th. There were sixteen participants in the 5-category competition of Chicken, Pork Ribs, Brisket, Beans, and Dessert. Live music by Junction 541 and Chance Cochran Band provided a festive ambience to the cook off and children’s activities included a moon-bounce, mini corn hole game, and miniature golf. Many community members and leaders turned out in support of the restoration efforts. The Lions Club raised nearly $8,000 from the BBQ event, bringing their fundraising total to slightly over $13,000. To donate please contact the Falls City Lions Club at fallscitylionsclub@gmail.com or send a check to Falls City Lions Club P.O. Box 534 Falls City, TX 78113.

The second park the River Authority is supporting is the much-anticipated Escondido Creek Parkway in Kenedy. Utility lines have been installed and the contractors are hard at work grading the entire site to make way for all the exciting amenities! Residents and passerby will really start to see the construction ramp up now that a $500,000 matching grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) has been received. The playground, splashpad, pavilion, amphitheater, and trails are projected to open late summer of 2020. When the park opens, the River Authority will operate and maintain the new facilities and provide park programming.
As another year ends and the next chapter opens, there is a tendency to race ahead, and in doing so, we risk quickly filing away 2019 with other years past, because the lure of the New Year and all its potential is strong. Yet, before we shelve 2019, let’s pause and think about the stories to keep and retell from this year; stories that shouldn’t be put away just yet.

Documented as far back as some 36,000 years ago, storytelling is one of the oldest art forms, an intrinsic human characteristic coded in our being. Storytelling helps make us human, gives us compassion, and creates community. Our river facilitates storytelling, rippling with life, nourishment, and adventure, carrying stories of history and culture, of memories and family, of exploitation and destruction, and of restoration and revival. Our river tells stories that are wild and beautiful, stories that bring living color and laughter to our hearts, stories that inspire us towards greater things. The river is our community’s heartline that circulates cherished stories from the past alongside newly sprung current events.

Engage with the river in new ways and help write our community’s story. The work of the River Authority and River Foundation creates the platforms for citizens to create new stories to be shared for generations. The creeks and rivers of the San Antonio River Basin breathe life into our region, making San Antonio and the surrounding communities of South Texas a special place to live and so easy to call home. Please join us in writing the next stories of our river by getting involved and supporting the San Antonio River Foundation at sariverfound.org/give.

FRATES SEELIGSON, SAN ANTONIO RIVER FOUNDATION EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

What’s Your Story?

HECTOR MORALES, BOARD MEMBER, BEXAR COUNTY, AT-LARGE

As you read in this edition of the River Reach, San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) staff are working to limit the negative influences non-native invasive species may have on the San Antonio River’s aquatic ecosystem. The River Authority’s staff are passionately committed to the health, safety, and enjoyment of our creeks and rivers and mitigating the negative impact of non-native invasive species is a key effort in this regard. Multiple River Authority departments assist with the mitigation efforts including the women and men of the Watershed Parks and Operations, Environmental Sciences, and the Intergovernmental and Community Relations departments.

When the City of San Antonio drains a portion of the San Antonio River Walk this January, River Authority staff will be the lead biologists protecting and relocating native species and appropriately removing the non-native invasive species.

As you may imagine, working in a wet and muddy riverbed in early January takes dedication and commitment! One of the privileges of being a River Authority board member is witnessing firsthand the commitment, expertise, and professionalism the staff displays every day.

It’s also the Board’s privilege to have recently paid tribute to the prestigious service careers of several retiring senior River Authority staff including Steve Raabe, Director of Technical Services, Ernest Moran, Stormwater Investigations Supervisor, Delmiro Villanueva of the Watershed Parks and Operations team, and Gilbert Jimenez with the Real Estate department. Their combined service to the community was 131 years and their tenures at the River Authority ranged from 27 to 35 years.

As we ring in the new year, please join me in thanking the dedicated staff of the River Authority. To learn more about the River Authority and the River Resolutions you can make in 2020 to show your river pride, visit sara-tx.org.
The San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) announced the creation of the Be River Proud kayaking event series on the San Antonio River at a kick-off event that took place Saturday, October 5 on the San Antonio River Walk Mission Reach Paddling Trail. The River Authority operates close to 45 miles of paddling trails throughout the San Antonio River Basin, including maintained put-in and take-out access points. The Be River Proud kayaking event series will include paddling trips on all the River Authority paddling trails to give the public the opportunity to engage with the river and learn about the parks and trails that are operated by the River Authority throughout its four-county service district.

“As part of the River Authority’s commitment to safe, clean, and enjoyable creeks and rivers, we are hosting paddling events to encourage residents to experience the recreational value of the river,” said River Authority’s General Manager Suzanne Scott. “The more residents can enjoy all the benefits of the river and its ecosystem, the more they will grow in their love and pride of this treasured resource. We invite everyone to come have fun on the river and help us protect it.”

There are 10 Be River Proud kayaking events planned for the inaugural Be River Proud kayaking event series from October 2019 to June 2020. As part of the Be River Proud kayaking event series, the River Authority will be giving away a new kayak, including a paddle and a personal flotation device (life jacket), on June 30, 2020. To be eligible for the free kayak give-away, individuals must sign-up and participate in at least one of the Be River Proud kayaking events.

The River Authority will provide kayaks and a shuttle service for several of the kayaking events. Online registration is required to have access to the kayaks and shuttle service, which is available on a first-to-register basis on the River Authority’s website. A deposit will be required at the time of online registration to hold your kayak and shuttle reservation. The deposit will be returned when the participant signs-in at the event to use the kayak and shuttle service. Participants can also bring their own paddling equipment, but to have access to the shuttle service, and be entered into the kayak give-away drawing, day-of registration is required.

To see the full list of upcoming Be River Proud kayaking events and learn more about the River Authority’s paddling trails, please visit the River Authority’s website that also features interactive content like a virtual tour of the river, videos, and quizzes at sara-tx.org.
Part of the San Antonio River Authority’s (River Authority) commitment to protecting area creeks and rivers includes monitoring and managing the aquatic and riparian ecosystems. One way the River Authority protects ecosystems is by leading restoration projects which typically include the installation of native plant species and development of habitat features that protect and enhance the ecosystem for native wildlife.

Another vital component of ensuring a thriving ecosystem is to control non-native invasive species, which can spread rapidly and decrease biodiversity. Non-native invasive species often lack natural predators and frequently outcompete native species for resources. This creates an overabundance of the non-native invasive species, which can cause a shift in ecosystem communities and is often followed by an alteration in the local food web or a reduction in native species richness and abundance.

River Authority staff are constantly on the lookout for non-native invasive species and will take appropriate actions to help control their spread. For example, when the San Antonio River Walk is drained this January, River Authority staff will undoubtedly remove two non-native invasive fish species: Plecostomus (suckermouth catfish), which is a tropical fish from the armored catfish family, and tilapia, which is a fish native to Africa and is part of the cichlid family. These two non-native invasive fish species have long been a nuisance in the River Walk and other sections of the San Antonio River. Unfortunately, a new non-native invasive species, the Apple Snail, was discovered in the River Walk this October. A native of South America, these snails can grow to 6 inches and their presence is often indicated by the bright pink egg sacks that can contain thousands of individual eggs. River Authority staff removed 79 egg sacks from the River Walk on October 31 and plans are in place to find and remove the actual snails during the January River Walk draining.

How did the Apple Snail or Plecostomus find their way into the San Antonio River, you may ask? These aquatic species are found in many home aquariums. So, it is most likely that these non-native invasive species got into the river because someone decided they no longer wanted to care for their home aquarium and dumped its contents into the river. Citizens are encouraged to help stop the spread of non-native invasive aquatic species by never dumping aquarium contents in a Texas river, lake, or natural body of water.

There are other non-native invasive species to consider as well. You can minimize the impact of non-native invasive bird species by not feeding the wildlife and you can help stop the spread of non-native invasive plant species by only planting native species around your home. To learn more about how to stop the spread of non-native invasive species, please visit texasinvasives.org.

Community members who recreate along River Authority parks and trails can also help by reporting any sightings of non-native invasive species to the River Authority’s Environmental Investigations Team at sara-tx.org. To the right are some examples of the invasive species to be on the lookout for.
Zebra Mussels
(Dreissena polymorpha)
Tip: Clean and dry your water craft thoroughly before entering another body of water.

Apple Snails
(Ampullariidae)
Tip: Never dump aquarium contents into the river!

Egyptian Geese
(Alopochen aegyptiaca)
Tip: Do not feed the wildlife!
**Anhinga (Anhinga anhinga)**

Winter is peak season for migrating birds to visit the San Antonio River, and it is a perfect time to partake in birdwatching as you stroll along its banks. Watching carefully, you may also see something that strikes you, at first, as an unusual snake. You’ll note the head held high and pointedly in an “S” curve above the water. However, your gut tells you it is not a snake. It is the magnificent Anhinga.

Anhinga (Anhinga anhinga) are water birds that are a little larger than a duck but smaller than a goose. Unlike ducks and geese, they do not have oil on their feathers to repel water. This trait, along with dense bones, allows this diving bird to submerge underwater to hunt its prey consisting of fish, small turtles, snakes, and even baby alligators. The bird’s unique “S” neck anatomy allows it to quickly spear its prey, before swallowing it whole. Immediately afterward, the Anhinga must dry it feathers to gain warmth and the ability to fly, and it will unfurl its striking black and silver plumage to capture the wind and sun’s rays to do so. You’ll see, too, that its tail is long and curved, and resembles a turkey’s tail.

The Anhinga is a distinctly special bird to San Antonio, for according the Payaya, the Anhinga is responsible for the creation of all life around the Yanaguana, also known as San Antonio River. The Payaya were the earliest recorded indigenous peoples around the San Antonio River, that spoke of the spiritual waters of river’s headwaters, also called the Blue Hole, that manifested into the Blue Panther. The Anhinga would dive into the water to receive nourishment from the spirit in the water. One day the Blue Panther chased the Anhinga out of the Blue Hole. As it opened its wings to fly, water droplets fell from its feathers, creating the flora and fauna throughout the landscape around the river.

Anhinga can be found from the San Antonio River headwaters all the way to the coast, and if we all help keep the creeks and rivers safe, clean, and enjoyable for this charismatic bird to thrive, we might find our spirit nourished, as well.

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**Participate in the Backyard Bird Count along the San Antonio River, February 14 - 17, 2020. No experience required! Learn more at gbhc.birdcount.org**
The San Antonio River Authority Board is comprised of two At-large members from Wilson, Karnes, Goliad, and Bexar counties and one member for each of the four River Authority districts in Bexar County, which mirror the four Bexar County Commissioners districts. The Board terms are for a period of six years, and there are no term limits. These twelve engaged public servants provide governance for the River Authority and set policy and budget for the agency.

This past November, there were two board positions up for election in Bexar County and one each in Wilson, Karnes, and Goliad counties. In Bexar County, Mr. Jerry G. Gonzales won reelection in District 1, and Ms. Lourdes Galvan ran unopposed for the District 2 seat. In Wilson and Karnes counties, Dr. Darrell T. Brownlow and Mr. Gaylon J. Oehlke both ran unopposed, and in Goliad County, Dr. James Fuller was reelected. Each of the five new Board terms will expire in 2025.

Following each election, the River Authority Board reviews the Board committee membership and selects new Board committee assignments. For the 2019-2021 term, Darrell T. Brownlow, Ph.D. will remain Board and Executive Committee Chair; Mr. Jim Campbell was appointed Board Vice-Chair; Ms. Lourdes Galvan remains the Board Secretary; Mr. Michael W. Lackey, P.E. was selected as the Board Treasurer and Chair of the Fiscal Committee; Ms. Deb Bolner Prost was selected as the Chair of the Operations Committee; and Ms. Alicia Lott Cowley will continue to Chair the Communications Committee. Below is the full slate of committees and the board membership of each.

The Executive, Operations, Fiscal, and Communications committee meetings, as well as the monthly Board meeting, which is held on the third Wednesday of every month (excluding July), are open to the public. If you are interested in learning more about the River Authority Board of Directors, please visit our website at sara-tx.org/about/board-directors.

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<td>John J. Flieller</td>
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Learn more about the River Authority’s Board of Directors by visiting sara-tx.org or these popular social media sites.

@sanantonioriver
My journey with the San Antonio River Authority (River Authority) started back in April 2013, working as a Riparian Technician on the newly constructed Mission Reach section of the San Antonio River Walk. I had recently moved to San Antonio from the west side of Washington State, and to be honest, the difference in temperature and humidity sure took some adjusting to. When I saw the Mission Reach for the first time, the project was still in the early stages of being completed. It was a bit intimidating not knowing what types of trees, flowers, and grasses were native, not only on the Mission Reach, but all-over South Texas. Luckily, I was surrounded by passionate and knowledgeable individuals who were kind enough to allow me to “pick their brains” and learn as much as I could in a short amount of time.

A little over a year with the River Authority, I was given the opportunity to work on the Mission Reach as a Riparian Landscape Foreman. Before interviewing for the position, I remember taking a moment and really contemplating if I was ready to take on the responsibility of this amazing project and leading the team that makes it great. After examining the river channel and thinking of the possibilities, I really wanted to help make a difference and find creative methods to promote the importance of inspiring actions for healthy creeks and rivers.

By sharing the same vision that is had throughout the organization and having the privilege of working with a diverse team with great ideas, we are able to find creative ways to enhance ecological and recreational opportunities on the project for the public to enjoy. For me, the most rewarding aspect of the work is being able to share the importance of the project and creating a space for others to enjoy all aspects that the river has to offer. Interacting with the volunteer projects, educational programs, and seeing members of the community enjoy the spaces that the River Authority offers shows that we are creating spaces for others to be inspired.
Having recently taken on the role of Engagement Coordinator for San Antonio River Authority’s volunteer program, my hope is to offer many new and exciting opportunities for citizens to be engaged with the River Authority and the San Antonio River.

Recently, groups of volunteers showed their river pride by volunteering at events like National Public Lands Day 2019, American Rivers Workday, and a post-storm clean up event at Acequia Park, while enjoying the benefits of being outdoors.

The volunteers collected trash from the water and on land, planted native Texas grasses essential for habitat restoration, and filled up garbage bags full of invasive plants. At other volunteer events, they made citizen scientist observations on the Mission Reach and had successful post-storm clean-up days. River Authority volunteers also help partner organization like the City of San Antonio at the National League of Cities, City Summit 2019 assisting visitors and attendees from all over the country to enjoy the conference.

Great leaders and philosophers have known for years about the surprising benefits of volunteering- it may make you feel more ‘time affluent’, help you develop new skills, build new experience, and offer health benefits. Most surprising of all was the research about the relationship between volunteering and measures of happiness. Researchers found that the more people volunteered, the happier they were. Now who doesn’t want that!

Below are some pictures from our most recent volunteer workdays, and we invite anyone fifteen years and older from Bexar, Wilson, Karnes, and Goliad counties to show your river pride and sign up at sara-tx.org/volunteer to join the River Authority’s volunteer program.

Coming up soon will be new training opportunities to learn more about the San Antonio River and ways that you can engage with and support the work done by the River Authority. You will surely be making a difference in our community while perhaps seeing benefits for yourself. We look forward to meeting you!
Thoughtful Growth for Our Watershed

SUZANNE B. SCOTT, GENERAL MANAGER

Do you remember 1970? The San Antonio Spurs were still three years from moving to San Antonio and were known as the Dallas Chaparrals. The greater San Antonio metropolitan area had a population of approximately 655,000 people. Today, the Spurs have won five NBA titles, and the population of the greater San Antonio area is approximately 1.53 million. It has taken nearly 50 years for San Antonio to grow by 900,000 people; however, the Texas state demographer projects that the San Antonio region will grow by another million people by 2040. In 20 short years, there will be another million people in the San Antonio area! This isn’t just an urban growth issue. The Texas state demographer’s data for 2010-2019 shows Wilson County’s percent growth at 19%, which by growth percentages ranks the county in the top 25 fastest growing Texas counties.

The exponential growth we’re experiencing in the watershed brings tremendous economic development opportunities, but it also presents threats to our land and water resources including our creeks and rivers. More people mean more roadways, rooftops, and businesses all with increased pavement and impervious surfaces with less green space creating potentially more and faster runoff and increased pollution flowing into our waterways.

It is worth remembering that as the City of San Antonio grew in the 1980s and 1990s, water quality in the San Antonio River actually improved because of better technology in the treatment of our wastewater and increased controls over industrial point source pollution. The threat today is more disbursed as the sources of pollution come from many places such as roads, yards, and parking lots as well as increased litter, pets, and other causes that are directly related to urbanization and population growth. These disbursed, non-point sources require thoughtful approaches to maintain and improve water quality.

The true measure of economic success is finding the right balance between profit, people, and the planet to preserve our quality of life and ensure a future for the region that is safe, resilient, and inviting to residents and visitors. To reach that balance, the River Authority has been on the front line proactively working to educate and advance more sustainable development approaches. We strongly advocated for the recently approved state flood planning process and the establishment of the Flood Infrastructure funding approved by Texas voters. River Authority engineers and scientists created strategies adopted in both the City of San Antonio’s SA Tomorrow long-term development plan and the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan that, if implemented, will mitigate the impact of development on our creeks and rivers. We are also actively involved in projects that incentivize the use of green stormwater infrastructure, promote the reduction of “heat islands,” restore natural ecosystems, preserve floodplains, and improve flood safety.

Although our efforts continue to be effective, it is vital that the region “not put off until tomorrow what we can accomplish today.” The future of our creeks and rivers depends on it.