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SPRING 2018

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The founding of cities often follows the flows of healthy rivers. As the City of San Antonio celebrates its Tricentennial this year, it is a wonderful time for all of us across the basin to reflect upon how a river not only helps found a city, but can also sustain it for centuries. Goliad invites visitors to travel downstream to celebrate local Tricentennial events, and while you’re here, you can explore a bit of the old, the new and the serene we have to offer.

Goliad, one of the original settlements in the state of Texas, was first established by Spanish explorers in 1749 with the construction of the Presidio La Bahía. Due in part to the San Antonio River flowing through the town, the ground was found to be fertile for agriculture and the location was deemed strategic for defense. This site went on to act as a base of operations, supply fort, and sometimes as a target for battles fought in multiple wars, including the Revolutionary War, Mexican War of Independence and the Texas Revolution. A drive through the City of Goliad reveals a unique setting of modern establishments including parks and paddling trails, local restaurants, boutiques and a brewery, paired with awe-inspiring backdrops including the Mission of Nuestra Señora del Espíritu Santo de Zuñiga (at Goliad State Park & Historic Site), Presidio La Bahía, Fannin Memorial Monument, the Zaragoza Birthplace State Historic Park and the Goliad Courthouse. Winding through the city are serene stretches of the river that started it all.

With support from the San Antonio River Authority (SARA), two of Goliad’s annual events celebrating local history are official Tricentennial events. SARA encourages community members to enjoy the 300 events throughout the basin, from San Antonio to Goliad, to celebrate the history of the river and how it has connected communities in our watershed through the centuries, and continues to connect us today.

2018 Tricentennial Events in Goliad
- Annual Goliad Massacre Reenactment and Living History Program at the Presidio La Bahía, March 24-25, 2018
- Annual Río! Río! Festival at Goliad State Park, November 10, 2018

To learn more about these events, visit www.sara-tx.org.

By Jim Campbell, Board Member, Bexar District 4

The San Antonio River Foundation, with help from the San Antonio River Authority, is gearing up for the 3rd annual Mission Reach Flotilla Festival. The Flotilla is a family-friendly, Fiesta-inspired event hosted each year on the Mission Reach of the San Antonio River. In classic Fiesta style there will be food booths, music, drinks and Flotilla Fiesta medals. The unique Flotilla tradition continues with a two-mile paddling water parade down the Mission Reach.

This year, not only can contestants participate by dressing themselves instead of their kayaks, they also have a unique opportunity to dress up their pets in their Fiesta best for the competition and take them along on the Flotilla paddle. Judges will be looking for the most creative costumes in the person and pet categories. Those interested in competing in the annual costume contest can sign up to rent a kayak from the San Antonio River Foundation for free while supplies last.

There will be no shortage of entertainment at this year’s event. Emceeing throughout the day will be San Antonio’s own Cleto Rodriguez. Concert headliners will be Amanda Solis, a Selena tribute artist out of Houston; Bombasta, a South Texas “barrio-big-band;” and local artists Finding Friday. In addition, local community acts will be performing throughout the day. Expect to see the San Antonio Mariachi Academy, Folklorico de Bendiciones, Danzavida de San Antonio Dance Company and many more.

This free festival will kick off with the paddling parade at 11 a.m. on April 21, 2018 at the Mission County Park Pavilions. It is a great opportunity to bring family and friends to relax and celebrate along the river, Fiesta style. As an official Tricentennial event and a Fiesta partner event, this is definitely one you won’t want to miss!

For more information and to register for the Flotilla Water Parade please visit www.sariverfound.org/flotilla.
For nearly 12,000 years, the San Antonio River supported indigenous populations. However, it was when Spanish colonial settlers formally named the area Villa de Béjar on the 5th of May, 1718, that the City of San Antonio was born. Fray Celiz wrote in his diary that day, “This site is henceforth destined for the civil settlement and the soldiers who are to guard it, as well as for the site of the mission of San Antonio de Valero....”

Shortly after the city’s founding, Mission San Antonio de Valero (The Alamo) was moved from its original location along San Pedro Creek to the banks of the San Antonio River. The Spanish and Mission Indians continued to build dams and acequias utilizing the river to support the rapidly expanding city. The past, present and future success of the city is indelibly entwined with the health and value of its namesake, the San Antonio River.

During this Tricentennial Year, it is vitally important to recognize and honor the significance of the San Antonio River and its tributaries, after all, it is why the Spanish, and the indigenous peoples before them, settled in this area. The San Antonio River Authority’s (SARA) Tricentennial celebrations will promote the river’s role in the region’s history and the importance of protecting the river and its tributaries for the benefit of future generations. This is part of SARA’s commitment to safe, clean and enjoyable creeks and rivers.

SARA is hosting and supporting numerous Tricentennial events and projects in San Antonio and Goliad (see page 3).

A few of the larger Tricentennial activities supported by SARA include:

- Presenting Sponsorship of the Witte Museum’s exhibit, Gathering at the Waters: 12,000 Years of People, which runs from January – June 2018;
- Participating in a fireworks program funded by Bexar County along the Mission Reach section of the San Antonio River Walk on May 4, 2018;
- Co-hosting, with Bexar County, the Grand Opening of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park on May 5, 2018.

Additionally, SARA produced the San Antonio River Basin Guide which recognizes the rich natural and cultural history of the entire San Antonio River Basin. The map promotes over 70 destinations along the river and in communities throughout the basin.

To see the full list of SARA’s Tricentennial activities, to download the San Antonio River Basin Guide or to learn more about the San Antonio River’s history, visit SARA’s website at www.sara-tx.org.
Whooping Crane Season *Grus americana*

By Itzel Rosales-Salazar, Education Coordinator

There is a call like no other that sounds through the San Antonio Bay area each winter, turning a rather earthy-colored landscape into one of vibrancy. Every October, the endangered Whooping Cranes begin a journey of more than 2,400 miles from the Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada to the Aransas Wildlife Refuge along the San Antonio Bay on the Texas Gulf Coast. Out of all the places in the lower latitudes, the Whooping Cranes arrive in the San Antonio Bay area specifically for its freshwater-saltwater ecosystem.

The San Antonio Bay ecosystem, which sits below the confluence of the San Antonio River and Guadalupe River watersheds, provides the Whooping Cranes with all of their basic survival needs: food, water, shelter and space. These large birds depend on a diet filled with blue crab, wolfberries and acorns. A critical component to the survival of these birds and their diet is fresh water. Bay-area plants and wildlife depend on the fluctuations in salinity, or the concentration of salt in the water. High precipitation years cause the salinity to decrease while drought-ridden years increase the salinity in the bay.

These ecosystem observations are important to note, as the endangered Whooping Crane had a total world population of a mere 21 in the 1940s. The Whooping Cranes narrowly escaped extinction thanks to scientific observations and collaborative work of watershed stakeholders to bring back this important native crane. Last year, scientists counted a total of 431 Whooping Cranes that completed the Aransas-Wood Buffalo migration. The San Antonio River Authority continues to support scientific research in the bay to further understand how these changes affect wildlife populations.

Whether you live 10 miles or 240 miles away from the San Antonio Bay and the Aransas Wildlife Refuge, you can help this endangered species by protecting our streams. Simply keep the land free of pollutants such as lawn chemicals, oil, litter and pet waste before a rainstorm carries them to waterways like the San Antonio River that are connected to the bay. Please visit the International Crane Foundation’s website at [www.savingcranes.org](http://www.savingcranes.org) to learn more about other things you can do to protect these amazing birds.

**Fun Fact:**

Adult Whooping Cranes stand at five-feet tall and have a wingspan of seven feet making it the tallest bird found in North America.
The Transformation of San Pedro Creek

By Suzanne Scott, General Manager

San Pedro Creek has been a place of natural beauty and human occupation for millennia. Bexar County and the City of San Antonio originated on the banks of San Pedro Creek with the founding of Mission San Antonio de Valero on May 5, 1718. Three-hundred years later, San Pedro Creek prepares to celebrate a milestone anniversary with a new look: a restored natural creek habitat and world-class linear park.

Bexar County and the San Antonio River Authority (SARA), in conjunction with the City of San Antonio, partnered to transform San Pedro Creek from a concrete-lined drainage ditch into an urban green space that represents and celebrates San Antonio’s unique history and culture while improving flood control, restoring natural habitat, improving water quality and stimulating economic development. The highly anticipated San Pedro Creek Improvements Project officially broke ground in September 2016. With construction currently underway, the first segment of the project will officially open on May 5, 2018 to celebrate Bexar County’s 300th Anniversary, introducing the community to the beginning of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park.

The four phases of the San Pedro Creek Improvements Project span 2.2 miles through the west side of downtown, beginning at IH-35 at the flood tunnel inlet at N. Santa Rosa Street and ending at the confluence of the Alazán and Apache Creeks at IH-35 to the south. The first soon-to-be-completed segment includes the first four blocks of the project from the tunnel inlet at IH-35 and N. Santa Rosa Street to Houston Street. Construction continues on the remaining phases of the project.

In total, the project will add more than 60,000 linear feet of new walls, replace eight street bridges and all associated utilities and add four miles of walking trails and 11 acres of landscaping. Additionally, the project will deepen and widen the existing channel, removing 30 acres to contain the 100-year floodplain within the San Pedro Creek banks.

The project will advance the water quality of San Pedro Creek through the use of low impact development features, including bioswales, and aquatic plantings to improve water quality and natural habitat. The project will include the removal of floatables, which helps to ensure the sustainability of our biotic habitats. The project design adds gates to
impound the water and creates rippling water features, bringing the sound and flow of water back to the creek.

The creek is will also serve as a catalyst for economic development, extending the city's extensive network of linear greenways that connect neighborhoods and enhance our quality of life.

Once completed, the creation of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park is expected to spur a $1.5 billion economic impact by creating 2,100 new housing units, 1,428 new downtown employees, 7,300 new downtown residents, a 150 percent increase in new property value and $227 million in ad valorem tax revenues.

The transformation effort doesn’t end there, the San Pedro Creek Culture Park will also invite the people of San Antonio to reconnect with a place of great historical and cultural significance through a series of temporary and permanent artworks, artistic design treatments, interpretive signage and performances. Several permanent artworks have been commissioned for the first segment of the San Pedro Creek Culture Park. Four San Antonio-based artists – Adriana Garcia, Katie Pell, Alex Rubio and Joe Lopez – each created murals based on four distinct themes that commemorate the rich and interweaving cultures that define San Antonio and Bexar County. Their work will be translated into ceramic tile through a digital transfer process to ensure durability and longevity. Artist Michael Menchaca created 16 tile patterns that will be featured on benches throughout the park, in addition to ceramic artwork by Diana Kersey that will be displayed on each of the street bridges in the first segment of the project. There will also be storytelling through historical text and poetry lining the walls of the creek, as designed by John Phillip Santos.

The San Pedro Creek Culture Park grand opening event on the evening of May 5th is open to the public and will include food, live music, a grand opening ceremony and more. For more information about the San Pedro Creek Culture Park and the May 5th celebration, visit www.spcproject.org. Questions can be directed to the Project Information Line at 210-302-3625 or email at SanPedroCreek@sara-tx.org.
Ecological Benefits of Prescribed Burning

By Justin Krobot, Landscape Superintendent

South Texas has historically been dominated by plains and prairie ecosystems. These grassland ecosystems relied on regular low-intensity fires and other natural processes to reduce competition from taller plants and woody species. Plains and prairie areas have diminished over time due to increased urbanization in South Texas, suppression of fire and other natural processes, and the introduction of non-native species.

One technique land managers sometimes use to restore their land and accomplish land management objectives is through prescribed burning. Prescribed burning is a controlled, planned, and scientific management tool widely used to manage vegetation under very specific and safe conditions. This beneficial tool allows for the controlled introduction of fire into a managed ecosystem. When used effectively as part of a comprehensive program, prescribed burning can enhance restoration and land management practices and result in an overall healthier landscape by reducing fuel load, restoring nutrients to the soil, and suppressing woody encroachment and invasive species. After a prescribed burn, it is common to see a greater diversity of insect and wildlife species. Plant species, including grasses and flowering plants, will exhibit more growth and additional diversity from the structural changes that are accomplished during a prescribed burn. The new plant growth is more palatable and nutritious to wildlife.

Wildlife may be temporarily displaced during a prescribed burn, but will quickly return to browse on regrowth. In addition, research from Texas Parks and Wildlife shows “about seven times more insects are usually found in burned native grass areas compared to unburned areas.” The increase in insect populations means more available food for birds and other wildlife. Maintaining a diverse habitat is critical for different wildlife and pollinator species that may rely on specific types of habitat to feed or reproduce.

Follow SARA on social media for updates about land management including prescribed burning.

South Texas Natives

Mexican Firewheel (Gaillardia pulchella)

By Itzel Rosales-Salazar, Education Coordinator

Imagine walking through a meadow full of wildflowers along the banks of the San Antonio River. You notice as sunlight strikes the flowers at just the right angle: the riverside looks like it is on fire! The warm colors of the petals gently sway with the breeze making them dance like flames at your knees.

Mexican firewheel, the common name for Gaillardia pulchella, perfectly describes the rich color pattern of these native wildflowers. Beautiful red petals with yellow tips encircle the dark brown and purple center of this annual, reminiscent of a campfire. Found across Texas, Mexican firewheels not only resemble the flames of a fire, but actually benefit from fire. That’s right, you read “benefit from fire.”

This hardy, drought-resistant flowering plant is perfectly adapted to the climate of South Texas, where nature intended to have fires once in a while. Ecologists and land managers will sometimes utilize a land management best practice called prescribed fire or controlled burning that mimics these natural fires (see above article). These thoroughly planned and controlled fires improve ecological function by removing invasive plant species, debris, pests and disease, as well as restoring nutrients to the soil.

“But wait!” you might say, “Wouldn’t these annuals just burn in the fire?” Well yes, Mexican firewheels are not fireproof and they will catch on fire. The magic begins as the land recovers because the improved ecology offers better growing and germinating conditions for Mexican firewheels.

During the months of April through June, I encourage you to look for this wheel of fire on a stem the next time you are recreating along the San Antonio River. The Mexican firewheel provides seeds and nectar to birds and insects, making it a critical part of a balanced and sustainable food web. Keep an eye out for it, because this wildflower is on fire!
Cibolo Creek is a major tributary to the San Antonio River and a valued resource for local residents and landowners who live in its watersheds. However, the creek has been listed as impaired and needs help from the community to improve water quality.

The headwaters of the Mid and Lower segments of the Cibolo Creek watershed are located in the developing I-35 corridor located north and east of San Antonio. The creek flows 90-miles south before its confluence with the San Antonio River in Karnes County. The watershed also includes Martinez Creek, Salatrillo Creek and Clifton Branch.

In 2004 and in 2014, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) listed the Lower Cibolo Creek as an impaired water body for primary contact recreation due to elevated levels of E. coli bacteria. The Mid and Lower Cibolo Creek watersheds also have concerns for elevated levels of nitrate, total phosphorus and depressed dissolved oxygen levels, which can hinder aquatic life.

To address these concerns, the Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) is working with the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) and Texas A&M AgriLife Research Extension to receive the highly valued input of local stakeholders in order to develop a Watershed Protection Plan (WPP).

The purpose of a WPP is to improve, restore or maintain good water quality in a particular watershed. A WPP identifies potential sources of water quality impairments and addresses water quality issues across multiple jurisdictions. SARA’s jurisdiction includes three of the four counties in which the Mid and Lower Cibolo Creek watersheds are located – Bexar, Wilson and Karnes counties. The watersheds are also in Guadalupe County.

After potential sources are identified, a WPP presents best management practices that can be implemented to reduce pollutants from entering the creeks and eventually the river. Additionally, the WPP schedules milestones and lists how progress will be measured and recorded.

Local meetings are being held to collect stakeholder comments for the Mid and Lower Cibolo Creek WPP. The plan is expected to be submitted to the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB) this year for review.

This effort was funded through a State Nonpoint Source Grant Program from the TSSWCB, and TWRI will work with local stakeholders to identify and secure funding to implement the WPP after it is approved. For more information about the plan and future meetings, visit the project’s website cibolo.tamu.edu.
The State of Texas has empowered the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) to preserve, protect and manage the resources and environment of the San Antonio River and its tributaries. One way SARA protects waterways in the basin is with its environmental investigation team.

The San Antonio River and its tributaries are patrolled by SARA’s environmental investigations team and frequently visited by other SARA staff members, including water quality scientists, biologists, and operations and maintenance crew members. However, with the San Antonio River Watershed containing 4,194 square miles of land that drains into the river, it is highly valuable when the community helps by reporting environmental concerns to SARA’s investigators.

When an illicit activity is found by SARA staff or reported by a concerned citizen, an investigation takes place to identify harmful impacts to water quality and aquatic and riparian habitat, as well as to human health and safety in the basin. SARA’s environmental investigators, Ronnie Hernandez (rhernandez@sara-tx.org) and Amanda Nasto (anasto@sara-tx.org), research issues such as fish kills, spills, floodplain violations, unauthorized activities and one of the most pressing concerns in the basin - illegal dumping. Illegal dumping can pollute water quality in the creeks and rivers, which harms aquatic habitat and wildlife that depend on the water source. Even if a waterway is dry, flood waters during a rain event can carry trash and hazardous waste downstream, causing pollution and potential flooding issues across an even wider area.

“We strive to quickly address concerns raised by community members, either through SARA’s resources or by connecting community members to the appropriate resource to help answer questions or resolve the issue,” said SARA’s Senior Environmental Investigation Specialist Ronnie Hernandez.

If you see illegal or hazardous dumping in the river basin, first call your local law enforcement. Then, contact SARA’s environmental investigators who can be reached by calling SARA’s main toll-free line at (866) 345-7272.

To learn more about SARA’s environmental investigators and other ways our environmental sciences team protects and manages waterways in the basin, please visit sara-tx.org.
How I Inspire Actions

By Katie Peché, Environmental Data Specialist

When I was a child, my family would take trips to different state and national parks where I loved exploring nature: examining minerals in rocks, looking far up at the tops of beautiful pine trees, and feeling the rush of excitement whenever I’d see a bright red cardinal, a tiny chipmunk, or any wildlife I was lucky enough to spot. I believe these experiences had a significant impact on me, inspiring me to write to the President in the sixth grade about how we need to save the environment (I was even more excited when I received a response), and placing me on the path to receive my bachelor’s degree in geography, a master’s degree in environmental science, and eventually to be in the environmental career field with the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) today.

As an environmental data specialist, I provide data and maps so that informed decisions can be made to protect our watershed and natural resources. I participate in SARA’s Avian Study, where I help collect data on observed bird species, provide datasets, and create story maps to share this valuable effort.

Additionally, I lead the Green Initiative Team which aims to implement sustainable practices internally within SARA. With this group and my own actions, I try to set an example of environmental stewardship by recycling, reducing and reusing when possible to not only lessen my footprint, but hopefully inspire others to do the same. By doing this collectively, we can reduce our impact and create a more sustainable world for both wildlife and our communities.

Through these projects, I inspire actions for conservation so the habitat, wildlife and environments we know presently may be preserved and sustained for future generations. In doing so, we will all be able to enjoy these irreplaceable natural wonders for years to come.
In May 1718, some 300 years ago, the initial settlements of San Antonio de Béxar were founded along the banks of the San Pedro Creek. Over the years, generations of residents have experienced the transition from a natural flowing creek into a concrete drainage ditch. Bexar County recognized several years ago that San Pedro Creek had greater potential and much more to give to future generations, so they chose to invest in bringing life back to the creek. The San Antonio River Authority (SARA) has enjoyed serving as a partner with Bexar County and the City of San Antonio to realize the vision for the improved San Pedro Creek.

As detailed within this issue of River Reach, the project is designed with purpose: from enhancements to flood control and water quality, to the creation of a downtown San Antonio destination, to the enjoyment of nature while experiencing local art and culture. The first segment of the project will open as the San Pedro Creek Culture Park on May 5, 2018. The experience at the Culture Park will be different from anywhere else in the city. Visitors will see colorful tile work, learn about local history, and experience a restored creek and ecosystem. Although just the first four blocks of the park are opening in May, you will get a flavor of the quality and beauty that will be seen as we complete the remaining phases of the project.

Please mark your calendar for May 5th and come celebrate the anniversary of the founding of Bexar County and the City of San Antonio with a stroll along the San Pedro Creek Culture Park. A full day of events are planned, including live music, historic reenactments, activities for children, and interaction with featured local artists. There will be food and fun for the whole family. Visit www.spcproject.org for more details on the Culture Park and grand opening celebrations.