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Nature Based Parks

POSITION STATEMENT

The San Antonio River Authority (SARA) firmly supports the health and quality of life benefits of nature based recreation. SARA's goal is to increase the availability of this type of recreation throughout the San Antonio River Watershed by working with citizens to develop park resources along rivers and creeks in the basin and by collaborating with other government entities to promote the use of and connections between recreational facilities that encourage citizens to enjoy the natural resources of the area.

IMPORTANCE TO THE SAN ANTONIO RIVER WATERSHED

The quality of life and health of citizens that live in the watershed can be improved by recreational access to natural areas. With more access, individuals develop a greater appreciation for the natural resources provided by the San Antonio River and its tributaries. This appreciation leads to awareness of the issues affecting the river and promotes increased preservation and conservation of these resources by individuals, businesses and government.

SUMMARY

SARA's district is home to over 1.8 million people (2010 Census), and as development continues to drive local population numbers, there will be a growing need for all types of recreation facilities. Through the use of a Nature Based Park Master Plan, SARA supports connectivity between nature based recreational facilities within regional communities. The master plan was originally developed in 2006 with input from SARA's stakeholder based Regional Parks Coordinating Council and identifies current and future park sites and determines how linkages, use and resources can be best managed to support improved quality of life and enjoyment. The master plan also serves as a regional park plan to assist governmental entities and non-profit organizations seeking funding opportunities. Periodic updates of the plan incorporate changes in the social, economic and political factors in SARA's district and identify new funding sources for plan implementation. SARA pursues these funding sources in both leadership and support roles with other government agencies, non-profit groups and the San Antonio River Foundation.

Based on the recommendations of the original Nature Based Park Master Plan, the SARA Board of Directors approved a "Nature Based Park Model" in 2006 designed around recreational activities that are compatible with SARA's mission to "Sustain and Enrich Life in the San Antonio River Watershed." Today, SARA operates and maintains nine parks and river access sites along the San Antonio River and Cibolo Creek comprised of approximately 715 acres and two paddling trails totaling 18.7 river miles. SARA is committed to completing the phased development of these facilities, which is underway on site-specific development

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master plans that were prepared with public input. In order to increase the passive recreational use of these facilities, SARA regularly promotes the nature based park resources available to the public and frequently hosts events, educational programs and guided walks at these facilities. Where geographically appropriate and when financially feasible, SARA will consider further expansions of its nature based park inventory, with a particular focus on establishing additional paddling trails throughout the District.

Nature based parks also support the native flora and fauna and provide for a healthy and diverse river ecosystem. Proper management of these areas can support a native landscape which reduces the cost of long-term maintenance while providing interpretive opportunities centered on the unique nature of native plants and animals. Furthermore, the San Antonio River Watershed overlays portions of several different ecoregions of Texas, from the headwaters of the Cibolo Creek and Medina River in the Texas Hill Country, through the headwaters of the San Antonio River within a highly urbanized area, to the Gulf Coast prairies and marshes where the River feeds San Antonio Bay. Preserving land throughout these different habitats for nature based parks not only provides educational and ecotourism opportunities specific to the attractions found in these different ecoregions, but also supports the long-term sustainability of the San Antonio River Watershed's diverse riverine ecosystem.

While secondary to implementation and promotion of nature based parks recreation, it is important to note that SARA also promotes the cultural based recreation opportunities found throughout the watershed from the San Antonio Missions National Historic Park to a lower basin tour, which includes numerous points of cultural interest along the historic routes connecting San Antonio to La Bahia/Goliad that were part of the Camino Real.

SARA Executive Committee Approved on April 13, 2012

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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www.sara-tx.org/public_resources/library.php#nature-based

www.sara-tx.org/parks_and_trails/parks/

www.sara-tx.org/parks_and_trails/paddling_trails.php

www.sara-tx.org/parks_and_trails/lower_basin_day_trip.php

www.sanantonioriver.org

