The Trinity River in downtown Fort Worth.

expenditures, maintenance. While the USACE and other federal and state agencies have important roles, local governments are responsible for the overall health, safety, and welfare of their own citizens. But local governments cannot and should not act alone; thus the importance of partnerships. Following are examples of state and federal partnerships that have contributed to the success of the COMMON VISION:

Texas Water Development Board has been a very important cost-share partner. The TWDB provided almost half of the local cost-share, in the amount of $1.875 million, for the first phase of the Upper Trinity River Feasibility Study through 1996. In July 2000, the TWDB approved $375,000 for half of the non-federal cost-share participation in the Big Fossil Creek Watershed Study, which is an implementation project in the second phase of the feasibility study.

Texas Parks & Wildlife Department has provided funding directly to various local governments for park and trail activities along the Trinity River.

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality is the regulatory agency for local storm water discharge and other water-quality related permits and has provided opportunities for local stakeholder involvement in its many activities.

Six Federal Agencies and One State Agency work with NCTCOG in a program called the Stream Team. Upon request from a local government or developer, this innovative initiative brings federal and state agencies together to provide technical advice on flooding, stream bank erosion, and similar issues, at no cost, prior to regulatory review. The Team consists of representatives from the following local, state, and federal agencies, including: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, USACE, Texas Parks & Wildlife, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Geological Survey, NCTCOG, and Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has conducted weeklong certification training for local governments in cooperation with NCTCOG. These are unique sessions away from their headquarters; as a result, Texas is now leading the nation in Certified Floodplain Managers.

Progress & Opportunity

The 1990's were a decade of almost unbelievable progress—cooperation on a scale unmatched elsewhere in the nation. Yet our local governments and their federal and state partners recognize that there are incredible opportunities still ahead.

In fact, NCTCOG's Strategic Plan for 1999-2003 establishes a vision of success for watershed management across all four major watersheds of the Upper Trinity. This vision has taken the shape of the broad **Sustainable Environmental Excellence (SEE)** initiative that, among other things, aims to translate the Trinity River COMMON VISION values of safe, clean, enjoyable, natural & diverse into **Safe Clean & Green** regional environmental corridors. While many environmental corridor planning strategies tend to focus primarily on green space issues, the **SEE Safe Clean & Green** initiative takes an integrated approach and examines not only regional greenway issues but also the flooding safety and water quality challenges and opportunities of our region's environmental corridors.

The shared vision of success for 2025 is that all regional environmental corridors are **Safe Clean & Green**. To realize this vision, the plan identifies opportunities for regional cooperation through a series of objectives accompanied by short-range action recommendations to be undertaken in 2003 through 2007. Efforts are currently underway on three such action recommendations—*integrated* Storm Water Management (*i*SWM), Hazard Mitigation Action Planning (HazMAP), and the Center of Development Excellence.

The North Central Texas Council of Governments is the voluntary association of more than 200 cities, counties, and special districts in a 16-county region. NCTCOG is an association of, by and for local governments. NCTCOG is the designated regional planning agency for comprehensive planning as well as functional programs such as solid waste, mobile source air quality, and water quality management. NCTCOG has actively addressed key water resources issues since developing the first area wide water quality plan approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in the nation. Besides sustaining the water quality planning process, NCTCOG coordinates one of the largest urban storm water programs in the country.

North Central Texas Council of Governments: P.O. Box 5888, Arlington, TX 76005-5888; (817) 695-9229; **www.dfwinfo.com:** April 2003

Trinity River COMMON VISION

for the benefit of all North Central Texas

In 1846, when A.W. Moore first saw the Trinity River near present-day Dallas he described it as “a little narrow deep stinking affair." For most of the next 150 years, many civic leaders believed that the economic future of the region depended upon navigation of the "deep stinking affair" from Fort Worth and Dallas southward more than 300 miles to the Gulf. Thus, the ultimate use of the river in the urban area was envisioned to be barge traffic with heavy industry along its banks.

When that dream died in 1981 because of changing federal priorities, it was replaced by unrelated requests for federal permits to reclaim portions of the Trinity floodplain for commercial and residential development. These requests led to studies by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) that showed that the cumulative effects of the various development scenarios would bring massive new flooding. In response, officials from 14 affected jurisdictions, working under the auspices of the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG), came together in 1989 to declare their support for a cooperative, regional approach to manage the Trinity River Corridor, one that aimed to create a safe, clean, enjoyable, natural, and diverse river corridor for the benefit of all North Central Texas. And thus began the **Trinity River COMMON VISION** program.

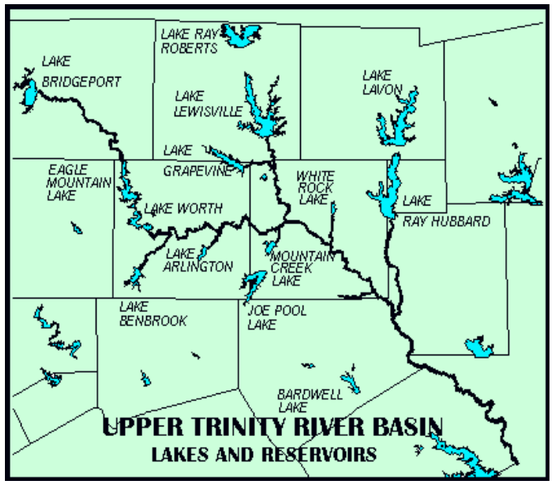
Finding COMMON Ground

With a population of 5.5 million, the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex is the nation's largest inland metropolitan area. To assure an adequate long-term drinking water supply, each of the major branches in the upper watershed has been impounded with manmade reservoirs. Thus the Trinity River as it flows through the urban core faces great extremes, with low flows composed almost totally of treated wastewater to massive floods with the potential for billions of dollars in damages and untold loss of life across its 240 square mile floodplain.

Unprecedented cooperation, combined with state-of-the-art technical tools and on-the-ground implementation projects have produced a decade of stunning achievements—recognized in 1998 by the Trinity River COMMON VISION being named as one of the top 20 Innovations in American Government by the Ford Foundation.

The cooperative regional effort to manage the Trinity River Corridor began in the early 1980's when USACE began working on a *Regional Environmental Impact Statement* (*Regional EIS*) to address the cumulative impacts of individual permitting decisions. A working group of staff from the affected local governments and NCTCOG provided input. The draft of the *Regional EIS* first compared the cumulative impacts of two opposite philosophical approaches for utilizing the river corridor—maximum environmental quality versus maximum development—and found that maximum development would result in flood flows that would overtop existing levees in Dallas and Irving. Given the seriousness of these preliminary findings, a special Strategy Committee of elected local government officials was formed to assist in the development of the *Regional EIS*.

As expected, local involvement in USACE's preparation of the final *Regional EIS* was much more intense, with many meetings and several new development scenarios crafted between the two extremes. The final *Regional EIS* found that these



A map of the Trinity River Corridor. Source: USACE Fort Worth District

more moderate development scenarios would not only result in the Dallas Floodway levees still being overtopped with catastrophic results, but that properties in upstream cities would also sustain considerable flood damages. Thus no city could assure adequate flood protection for itself by itself—only a common approach could be successful.

Although no proof was required, Mother Nature stepped in anyway. Major floods occurred in May/June 1989 in the Upper Trinity River. Over a dozen lives were lost as a result of the floods within the Metroplex and hundreds of millions of dollars of damages were sustained.

In 1989 NCTCOG adopted a *Regional Policy Position on Trinity River Corridor* that affirmed, among other key points, that local governments must be the stewards of the Trinity River Corridor because individual goals can only be achieved through cooperative management and a comprehensive approach addressing flood damage reduction, recreation, and environmental quality must be pursued.

Upon request of the affected local governments, Congress authorized the USACE to undertake a *Reconnaissance Study* to determine if a feasible flood protection plan(s) could be identified to reduce the risk of flooding, as well as address water quality, recreation, environmental enhancements, and other allied purposes. The USACE studied a variety of flood control options and found at least a dozen with positive benefit-cost ratios that merited further attention in the *Feasibility Study* phase.

It was now time for local governments to act. In 1990, each of the nine cities (Arlington, Carrollton, Coppell, Dallas, Farmers Branch, Fort Worth, Grand Prairie, Irving, and Lewisville), three counties (Dallas, Denton, and Tarrant), and two special districts (Tarrant Regional Water District and Trinity River Authority) with development and regulatory authority for the Trinity River Corridor executed interlocal agreements with NCTCOG to establish a formal structure for cooperative planning. A Steering Committee of elected officials was formally appointed to provide policy guidance, along with a staff task force for technical support.

NCTCOG, on behalf of the local governments, was identified as the administrative agent to enter into a cost-sharing agreement with the USACE for the *Upper Trinity River Feasibility Study*. Even at this stage it was recognized that a more comprehensive COMMON VISION was needed and would be pursued not only with the Corps but other local, state, and federal partners.

Upper Trinity River Feasibility Study

In 1990, the first phase of the *Upper Trinity River Feasibility Study* began as an $8 million six-year effort, with NCTCOG responsible for providing the $4 million non-federal match. In turn, NCTCOG negotiated and administered a $2 million grant from the Texas Water Development Board and obtained the $2 million of local funds on a pro-rata annual formula based on the jurisdiction's land area within the corridor. NCTCOG's funding support came from a portion of the local share.

The purpose of the *Upper Trinity River Feasibility Study* is to seek potentially feasible alternatives for implementation by the participating local governments to address flood damage reduction, water quality, environmental enhancement, recreation, and other related needs throughout the Trinity River Corridor.

The Phase I Information Paper released in early 1995 identified potential projects with a preliminary positive benefit-cost ratio. The paper concluded that seven of the 14 structural flood control measures were economically viable, and a total of 11 water quality improvement and 20 environmental enhancement measures warranted further study. In addition, 38 recreational development measures were also found to be feasible, as well as cooperative approaches to watershed management. In all, more than 100 projects were identified that could justify federal cost-share participation.

The Projects

The second phase of the *Upper Trinity River Feasibility Study* is currently in progress. This phase identifies implementable projects through Project Management Plans to reduce flood risks, restore environmental values, and meet other study purposes.

Since 1996, projects totaling more than $12 million have been or are being implemented. For a project to be initiated the local entity with jurisdiction must determine its interest and willingness to share in the cost of the project.

The projects currently underway include:

Arlington Johnson Creek Buyouts: The project includes the demolition of 140 structures, mostly homes, that have experienced repeated flooding along Johnson Creek. As of spring 2003, most have been demolished and native habitat restoration has begun.

Dallas Floodway/Elm Fork Project: As part of the larger city efforts, several floodway initiatives are being investigated by the USACE, including: raising the existing levees, lake development, channel meandering, modification of a bridge, and recreation facilities.

Clear Fork/West Fork Project: Tarrant Regional Water District with Fort Worth Stream & Valleys, Inc. is developing a comprehensive master plan to preserve and enhance over 70 miles of river corridor. Recent developments in this project are the announcements by Pier 1 Imports and RadioShack Corporation of plans to build new headquarters on the edge of the Trinity River in downtown Fort Worth, with possible river realignment under study.

Big Fossil Creek Watershed Project: The nine local governments in this fast growing, 73 square-mile watershed are together evaluating flood damage reduction, ecosystem restoration, water quality, and recreational opportunities.

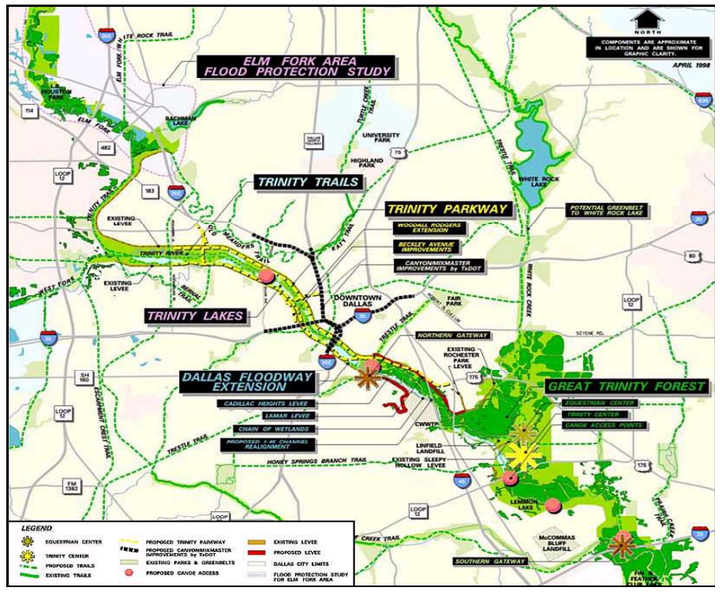
Lake Worth Project: Fort Worth is seeking solutions to water quality and sedimentation problems in Lake Worth.

Trinity Trails System: In 1996 the Trinity Trails Advisory Committee adopted a proposed alignment for the 250-mile “spine” of the regional Trinity Trails System. The project is working to create a continuous recreation corridor with a multi-use trail along the Trinity River Corridor in North Central Texas and northward to the Red River. Significant segments have already been built or are under development.

Corridor Development Certificate Process: The studies called for stricter regulation of development within the corridor to stabilize the flood risks. After several years of detailed discussions, an innovative Corridor Development Certificate (CDC) process emerged in the early 1990's. Local governments still issue the development permit under the National Flood Insurance Program, but common requirements have been added (and adopted by each city in its floodplain ordinance). The CDC process includes USACE review of every CDC request for its flood impact and gives other participating local governments along the corridor 30 days to review and comment upon the development request. While the individual city still makes the final call, it is well understood that a bad decision will land it in court with other cities.

The Partnerships

One key to the success of the Trinity River COMMON VISION program has been meaningful intergovernmental partnerships—among local governments themselves and with federal and state agencies. Whatever is done to reclaim or preserve a river corridor in an urban region requires local government action—zoning, permits, capital



A map of COMMON VISION projects in Dallas.