



With support from:



Trinity River National Water Trail Task Force Meeting (Virtual)

April 10, 2024 at 10:00 a.m.

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome & Meeting Purpose

Erin Blackman (NCTCOG) welcomed the participants to the Trinity River National Water Trail Task Force meeting. Steve Smith (Trinity Coalition) reviewed the purpose and history of the Water Trail. In 2020, the Trinity River Paddling Trail was awarded the National Water Trail designation by the National Park Service (NPS). Steve explained that the Trinity Coalition is charged by NPS to meet their water trail standards and new launches should meet best management practices. However, Trinity Coalition does not own any of the launches, cities do, thus coordinating and connecting with them through these quarterly task force meetings are important. Steve gave an overview of the agenda for today's meeting.

2. State of the Trail

Dale Harris (Trinity Coalition) provides an update at each meeting on the state of the trail. The first few slides provide information about the Water Trail for the benefit of those new to this task force or those who are unable to attend every meeting. The Trinity River National Water Trail is the only nationally recognized trail in Texas and is one of 35 in the nation. There are 21 official launch sites that traverse nine municipalities, including Dallas and Fort Worth and as far north as Lewisville. All but two sections are four to six miles in length (one section is 12 miles and one is 24 miles).

Dale provided an update on any closures, hazards, new launch sites, and upcoming special events. Loop 12 launch site remains closed, the launch site at River Legacy is deteriorating, and there is a trash boom stretching across the river at I-35 and Elm Fork. New launch sites in various stages of planning, include Belt Line Road (Grand Prairie), Viridian Development (Arlington), Trinity View Park (Irving), Riverside Park (Fort Worth), and Gateway Park at 1st Street (Fort Worth). The Irving site's construction plan will be reviewed internally in May and both the Fort Worth sites are included in Tarrant Regional Water District's (TRWD) Master Plan. Dale identified the several river clean ups and other events coming up. The special event to note is a paddle party demo day at Panther Island Beach.

Dale said that the Water Trail has been mostly usable for the last quarter. The downed tree between Hebron and McInnish Park has washed downstream. Due to the recent rain, most of the lakes are at conservation pool level or above, and water in the Elm Form and Main Stem are expected to be elevated. Dale mentioned the user-friendly information (trail information, interactive launch site map, and water levels) and resources (Facebook pages, Meetup Page) available to help folks plan their trips.



With support from:



Teresa Patterson (Trinity Coalition) gave an update on Paddlesports at Panther Island. Last year, TRWD awarded Trinity Coalition the contract to operate an outfitter on Panther Island. This is the start of their second season, and they are seeing a huge jump in online searches and page views, as well as in-person interactions as compared to last year. Steve mentioned that Paddlesports recently established a board for Panther Island to improve the brand and marketing efforts.

The Cowtown Great American Cleanup was the most recent large event. In other news, a fish study was recently done showing 20 unique species in downtown Fort Worth within the confluence. Teresa also shared a recent article that highlights the work done on the Water Trail by Trinity Coalition.

A question was asked how Trinity Coalition does search engine optimization (SEO) analysis, and Teresa responded that they hired a group to handle that.

3. What's Next for the National Water Trail

Steve mentioned that the Visit D-FW effort is indirectly attached to the Water Trail but will bring attention and tourism. Trinity Coalition secured the domain for Visit D-FW, which will soon be live to identify nature-based tourism opportunities in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. Steve believes this area to have one of the largest collections of nature-based experiences in the world (e.g., hike/bike trailheads, nature centers, golf courses, etc.) in close proximity to the Water Trail, plus easy access to the area with 1,800 flights per day.

Steve presented a number of maps that were created by a mapping professional through their partnership with Texan by Nature. These maps identify details on kayak launches, hike/bike trails, golf courses, parks, nature preserves/centers, etc. Steve said the next step would be to work with tourism groups to promote these nature-based tourism opportunities.

A question was asked why Trinity Coalition wants to shorten the distances between launch sites. Dale said partly to follow state/national standards, but to also improve the user experience. The average speed of paddling is 2 mph, which can make a 24-mile stretch without any put ins or take outs a long outing for families.

4. City of Carrollton's Parks Amenity Fund

Kim Bybee (City of Carrollton) shared information on the city's report card process for parks and recreation facilities. The goal of the report card is to prioritize facilities in need of repair/enhancements. It is a three-to-four-year process and includes creating/defining categories and forms, forming committees, conducting site visits, compiling the data, and prioritizing projects.

The facility categories focus on the places people use, and include Athletic Fields, Aquatic Facilities, Concession/Restroom Buildings, Courts (outdoor basketball/tennis), Parking Lots, Pavilions, Playgrounds, Trails, Rec Centers, Tennis Center, Nature Preserve, and Bridges/Piers. The scoring criteria are based on age (20%), appearance (10%), functionality (20%), safety (30%), and structural (20%).

Committees were formed and used to conduct the site visits where data were collected based on the scoring criteria. Over 20 sites needed to be evaluated, which took about a month. Staff then compiled the data from these site visits and created an A to F grading system.



With support from:



Kim said that when prioritizing facilities to repair, they started with those that scored a D and F. The Parks Department receives a \$500K amenity fund annually that helps save maintenance funds. Approximately 95 sites have been addressed within the last 10 years, and the percentage of facilities scoring an A has increased and the percentage scoring a D or F has decreased.

Dale mentioned that using this system for the Water Trail's launch sites would be a great idea.

5. Developments on Lake Ray Hubbard Paddling Loop

Dave Holl (Local Kayaker and Kayak Store Owner) gave an overview of the Lake Ray Hubbard Paddling Loop. It is not currently part of the Water Trail but would add to the nature-based opportunities in DFW discussed by Steve. Dave's Lake Ray Hubbard group is working with lake front cities to establish Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) paddling trails around the lake. Their Steering Committee applied to TPWD to extend the existing paddling trail south to I-30. They identified a TPWD grant to fund a launch site. Dave recommended attendees view a video about the existing trail (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gD01aFhfgUg>).

Dave said they have created a Facebook page and are renaturing Paddle Point Park to establish no mow zones within 3 feet of the water's edge and planting water grasses next to the shoreline. He mentioned volunteer opportunities are available and on April 16th a Team River Runner Safety Standdown at Kayak Crossing Outpost will occur.

6. Trinity River National Water Trail Master Plan Update

Jai-W Hayes-Jackson and Erin Blackman (NCTCOG) provided an update on the Water Trail Master Plan. The goal of the Master Plan is to identify long-range actions that advance tourism, recreation, and economic development and to provide resources to help communities maintain and develop the Water Trail. Over the past several months, NCTCOG staff met with cities, counties, and nonprofits to seek feedback on their goals for the Trinity River Corridor, points of interest to highlight near the Water Trail, and challenges and opportunities with maintaining/developing the Water Trail.

Draft vision statement, mission statement, and goals were developed as a result of these meetings. The vision includes what the Master Plan seeks to accomplish, and the mission identifies how the vision will be achieved. Nine goals for the Master Plan were identified and are described below. Sample draft recommendations and action items were also presented.

1. **Develop new entry sites to shorten distances between sites.** Strategically identify, plan, and implement additional access points and launch sites along the Trinity River to reduce distances between sites on the Water Trail.
Recommendations: Identify locations and plan and design future launch points
Action Items: Complete priority gaps along the trail and identify common priority projects to leverage maximum joint investments
2. **Promote the use of the Water Trail and educate all users.** Increase awareness, utilization, and understanding of the Water Trail. National water trails represent scenic and recreational waterways with cultural, historical, and natural significance to its area.
Recommendations: Conduct community outreach and events and online and social media campaigns
Action Items: Establish regularly scheduled trail focus meetings and increase sharing of information

3. **Make the Water Trail more accessible to all.** Ensure that the Water Trail becomes inclusive and welcoming to individuals of diverse abilities and backgrounds.
Recommendations: Evaluate existing barriers, implement universal design principles, install accessible signage and information, and collaborate with stakeholders
Action Items: Identify ADA accessible launch sites, ensure best practice design standards are being used, involve individuals with disabilities or advocacy groups to improve accessibility, and conduct outreach to raise awareness of trail usage
4. **Maintain condition and safety of the existing and future launch sites.** Ensure an overall well maintained and safe network of launch sites by providing recommendations that preserve future and existing infrastructure, keep users safe, and minimize environmental impact.
Recommendations: Conduct regular inspections and maintenance and educate the public on user guidelines
Action Items: Identify and document best management practices for trail construction and maintenance, enhance tools to collect and report trail conditions, maintain cohesive signage, and identify hazards
5. **Promote stewardship along the Trinity River.** Cultivate a sense of responsibility, care, and active engagement among communities and individuals towards the environmental health and overall quality of the Trinity River.
Recommendations: Conduct river cleanups and water quality monitoring
Action Items: Develop and implement volunteer programs, work with different groups, and distribute information to educate visitors about the ecosystem, conservation practices, and the importance of responsible behavior
6. **Connect the Water Trail to the existing land trails.** Creating a seamless and integrated recreational network that enhances accessibility and promotes a holistic outdoor experience.
Recommendations: Identify connections to land trails and showcase community points of interest
Actions: Create a regional map that includes the Water Trail, land trails, bike paths, and points of interest, and create signage guidelines that show these connections
7. **Extend the Water Trail further south.** Expand the reach of the existing Water Trail to the Gulf Coast.
Recommendations: Assess the existing trail network
Actions: Collaborate with other councils of governments and communities
8. **Promote the economic benefits of the Water Trail.** Showcase the positive economic impacts that the Water Trail system can bring to local communities, businesses, and the broader region.
Recommendations: Develop a tourism marketing campaign, conduct economic impact studies, and promote trailside businesses and services
Actions: Complete studies on the economic impact and value of the Water Trail, collaborate with tourism bureaus, local businesses, and vendors
9. **Highlight the cultural and historical context of the Water Trail.** Enrich the Water Trail experience by bringing attention to the rich heritage and historical significance embedded along its route.
Recommendations: Collaborate with local historians and community leaders and incorporate the legacy of the river into the Water Trail
Actions: Work with indigenous populations, schools and universities, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Cultural Resources Report to capture the cultural and historical context of the Water Trail



With support from:



Jai-W identified challenges and opportunities that were important to local communities, including safety markings and communication plans, design best practices, maintenance plans, signage, political support, user promotion and education, economic development and tourism, and funding. He also outlined the Master Plan timeline with the goal to finalize it by September.

Steve recommended that staff engage with the City of Fort Worth to see how they monitor water quality during the summer months when a weekly concert series at Panther Island takes place. Steve also mentioned that at the Master Plan subcommittee meeting that took place at the end of March, signage of bridges was discussed. He investigated the number of bridges and found that over 50 bridges cross over the Water Trail. It would be great if NCTCOG could help identify steps/funding to having Water Trail signs installed.

7. Task Force Roundtable – All Members (10 Minutes)

Mia Brown with Dallas County mentioned they are hosting their last public meeting for the Parks and Open Space Plan tonight and invited stakeholders.

8. Upcoming Opportunities – NCTCOG Staff (5 Minutes)

Erin provided links to where information on NCTCOG and Trinity Coalition-related events and opportunities can be found (<https://www.nctcog.org/envir/Events> and <https://trinitycoalition.org/events>). She highlighted two Urban Forestry Stakeholder Workshops (May 14th and June 5th) identified on NCTCOG's events page. Both workshops are hosted by the Texas Trees Foundation and Texas A&M Forest Service. Meeting 1 will focus on supporting communities wanting to create Urban Forestry Master Plans. Meeting 2 is for communities who are not ready for master planning, but still want information on increasing their forestry activities.

The next meeting is scheduled for August 13, 2024. For information related to past and future Task Force meetings, please visit <https://www.nctcog.org/envir/committees/trinity-river-nationalwater-trail-task-force>.

Meeting Attendance. The following members participated in the virtual meeting.

Susan Alvarez, NCTCOG
Erin Blackman, NCTCOG
Mia Brown, Dallas County
Kim Bybee, City of Carrollton
Richard Clarke, City of Carrollton
Dahalia Coone, City of Dallas
Walter Council, City of Fort Worth
Rob Denkhaus, Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge
Ryan Edmondson, Texas A&M Forest Service
Heather Firn, Trinity River Authority
Jai-W Hayes-Jackson, NCTCOG
Dave Holl, Local Kayaker and Kayak Store Owner
Brandi Kelp, City of Fort Worth
Matt Lepinski, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Lexi McCalip, Tarrant Regional Water District
Alexander Neal, Texas Water Resources Institute
Teresa Patterson, Trinity Coalition



With support from:



North Central Texas
Council of Governments

Erik Peters, City of Grand Prairie
Liliana Rivera, Visit Dallas
Steve Smith, Trinity Coalition
Dana Woods, City of Grand Prairie
Kate Zielke, NCTCOG