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Trinity River National Water Trail Task Force Meeting (Virtual)

Tuesday, May 9, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome & Meeting Purpose – Steve Smith, Trinity Coalition

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). This Task Force was created to support the Water Trail, with quarterly meetings designed to keep partners updated on its status and coordinate improvement/expansion efforts. Trinity Coalition also communicates and coordinates efforts outside these Task Force meetings to accomplish its goals.

2. State of the Trail – Dale Harris, Steve Smith, & Teresa Patterson, Trinity Coalition

Dale Harris (Trinity Coalition) gave a brief overview of the facts about the Water Trail for the benefit of those in the meeting who may be unfamiliar (e.g., 130-mile trail; one of 35 national water trails in the U.S., traverses nine municipalities, etc.). All but two sections are four to six miles in length. The new sites will shorten some of these distances. Currently 20 of 21 launch sites are open – one launch site on the West Fork is getting difficult to use and the Loop 12 launch site is closed due to flood damage and safety concerns. The portage trail around Carrollton Dam is being used and the paddling community is keeping it clean!

Dale mentioned that several new launches/opportunities for trail additions are on the horizon, which will shorten some of the distances between launch sites. Water Trail additions include new locations at Beltline in Grand Prairie, Viridian in Arlington, Riverside Park in Fort Worth, and Trinity View Park in Irving. The location in Irving will be a fun paddle as the access point takes you right through the confluence of the Elm Fork and the Main Branch.

Dale identified four social media sites that Trinity Coalition maintains: website, Facebook page, meetup page, and Trinity River Paddling Trail Association's Facebook group page. Trinity Coalition's website also includes detailed trail information, an interactive map, and water levels. More information may be found at: <https://trinitycoalition.org>.

Dale provided an update on the Water Trail usage and events that have occurred. The Water Trail was usable this last quarter except February 4 and March 4 – 20. There is a section between the Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area and Hebron Parkway that has a tree blocking the river making it unpassable during very low water flows.

Dale identified a few past and upcoming events. Trinity Coalition hosted the Cowtown Cleanup (May 25), Living with the Trinity (KERA documentary) watch party (April 6), and a corporate cleanup for Half Associates (April 8). They also maintained a booth at EarthX Expo April 21 – 23 to promote the Water Trail. Attendees were able to sit in a kayak in front of a backdrop of the river. Some of the future events include: Trinity Coalition Paddlesports Paddle Party (May 13), Walnut Creek Cleanup (May 20), and Freese and Nichols Cleanup (May 27). Corporate cleanups are becoming more



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popular since Trinity Coalition created an agreement guide to assist with these (e.g., needed supplies, cost, etc.).

3. Paddling Trail Expansion – Dale Harris, Trinity Coalition

Dale identified important discussions and steps to expanding the Water Trail to other areas along the Trinity River. Trinity Coalition has discussed the possibility of adding U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) boat ramps on their lakes. However, the biggest issue is portaging around the dams. NPS recommends portage points at one mile or less, but some would be over a mile. NPS also requires end-to-end continuity of the Water Trail and the only way to get around the dams would be to portage.

Trinity Coalition has discussed the idea of expanding the Water Trail to the Gulf and has developed a possible plan with the Trinity River Authority. The near-term priority would be to focus on the Lower Trinity/Lake Livingston to Trinity Bay. Dale has visited all the access points below Lake Livingston, which are approximately 20 miles apart. Once out of a metro area, camping on gravel bars along the river is expected. This stretch is a beautiful paddle. The next section to target would be Loop 12 to Malloy Bridge/Goat Island Preserve and Riverbend Preserve. This would connect to the current Water Trail; however, there are several obstacles that may take time to overcome (e.g., Lock and Dam #1, small waterfall). Finally, the last section to target would be Malloy Bridge to Lake Livingston.

To overcome the safety issue with Lock and Dam #1, Dale and Teresa Patterson (Trinity Coalition) have drafted a letter to Texas Senators Cornyn and Cruz and Representative Allred to use the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds to remove it. Dale indicated that he has received a few letters of support/acknowledgement from local stakeholders; however, not as many as he hoped for and is looking for more support. These types of letters were helpful when they submitted to NPS to be a nationally recognized water trail. BIL funds are already being requested and used in other states to remove abandoned dams, so time is of the essence.

There was a question if the Henderson Bridge access point is part of the trail; it is washed out and residents have been asking when it would be accessible again. Teresa responded that it is not part of the trail because it is not up to NPS standards. It is a Tarrant Regional Water District-maintained site.

4. Potential Lake Ray Hubbard Paddling Loop – Stephanie Higgins, Patriot Anglers Volunteer

Stephanie Higgins (Patriot Anglers Volunteer) introduced the Task Force to a paddling trail on Lake Ray Hubbard. It is a 6.4-mile loop with a take-out to Paddlepoint Park and an emergency take-out. The hope is to add an additional access point to the future Heroes Bridge Memorial Park in Rowlett. Stephanie displayed renderings of the plans and discussed other developments at the lake that would further enhance the paddling trail. Stephanie indicated that they are working with other cities along the lake to explore expanding the paddling trail around the entire lake.

Dale and Steve mentioned this would be great if the Lake Ray Hubbard paddling loop could eventually link up with the Water Trail. The East Fork of the Trinity River is not part of the NPS-designated Water Trail and Trinity Coalition is exploring if this is possible. There are several log jams from the Lake Ray Hubbard dam to where the East Fork hooks up with the Main Branch, so this would need to be kept up with.



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5. Economic & Quality of Life Benefits of Water Trails – Dave Holl, Local Kayaker and Kayak Store Owner

Dave Holl (Kayak Store Owner) provided a big picture overview of the economic, quality of life, and educational benefits of water trails. The economic benefits include sales tax and property tax revenue. For example, a portion of the sales tax collected from kayak rental companies goes to the local government. He emphasized ensuring that it might be best to avoid companies that require only cash as that can be more difficult to recoup sales tax.

Quality of life benefits include: healthy outdoor activity, seasonal employment for teenagers (with great pay), and programming for groups such as boy/girl scouts, home school, church, and seniors. Many launches are ADA accessible and therefore veteran programs can benefit. Communities with/wanting launch sites may need to think of the future to provide some high-capacity launches with plenty of parking. There are many large groups looking for outdoor activities.

Finally, providing education opportunities is another benefit. Schools are full of great teachers who can easily learn the skills needed to be a great kayaker. Kayakers are not always the best teachers. It is easier for a teacher to become a great kayaker than a kayaker to become a great teacher. That is why it is important to partner with local school districts. There are also opportunities to combine American Canoe Association (ACA) certifications with colleges and universities.

6. Panther Island Paddle Sports – Teresa Patterson, Trinity Coalition

Trinity Coalition was awarded as the outfitter to handle kayak/canoe/paddleboard rentals at Panther Island. As a result, they have created Trinity Paddlesports in coordination with Adventures Unlimited and Backwoods Paddlesports. This partnership and opportunity will allow Trinity Coalition to include outreach at Panther Island to expand their mission to educate the public about the river and promote conservation through recreation.

Teresa mentioned the grand opening is scheduled to occur May 13th assuming the weather cooperates. Trinity Paddlesports at Panther Island will be open 6 days a week April through October and weekends March through November. Trinity Coalition works with other outfitters on the river as well, but the partnership at Panther Island will provide an additional opportunity to promote the entire Water Trail.

7. Panther Island/Central City Flood Control Project – Matt Oliver, Tarrant Regional Water District

Matt Oliver (Tarrant Regional Water District, TRWD) provided an update on the Central City Flood Control project and Panther Island. The Central City Flood Control project is a USACE project that will address Fort Worth's flood risks due to explosive population growth with the city having tripled in size since the current levee system was constructed in 1960. The two main components of the flood control project are: the rerouting of a section of the Trinity River due north of downtown and modifying a large park on the east side of the city to better manage flood events in a manner that will also restore the area. The combination of these efforts will return flood protection to over 2,400 acres of established Fort Worth neighborhoods valued at over \$2.4 billion.

Matt mentioned the project will integrate stormwater management, bridges, bypass channel, isolation gates, dam and channel lock, interior water feature, and Panther Island. Land has been bought by Fort Worth, businesses have relocated if needed, structures have been removed, and sites have been cleaned up to remove any hazardous waste. TRWD is coordinating with the Texas



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Commission on Environmental Quality to ensure sites are being cleaned up to meet residential standards. To create valley storage, USACE has removed dirt to create detention ponds to allow water to naturally flow back in the river. Central City Flood Control project is a \$403 investment that will add: flood storage at Rockwood Park and University Drive; bypass channel at Panther Island; clear fork gate, TRWD gate, Trinity Point gate, pump station; and environmental restoration at Sycamore Creek and Gateway Park. The City of Fort Worth will then add amenities once the project has been completed by TRWD and USACE.

Panther Island is not a USACE project. As part of Phase I, developments are underway and there are plans to include a park system, modern roundabouts, riverwalk, and fixed transit line. Phase 2 will include a promenade, marina, houseboat district, and pedestrian bridges. The City of Fort Worth's Comprehensive Plan calls for sustainable growth in and around downtown Fort Worth. Panther Island, has been rezoned by the City to provide a mixed-used district of greater density. Low impact development and green infrastructure will be required by TRWD to help treat the runoff before it reaches the retention canal within Panther Island.

A question was asked if there will be a constant water level in the bypass channel around Panther Island and the answer is yes. There will essentially be a paddle loop around Panther Island.

More information on the Panther Island and the Central City Flood Control project may be found at: <https://pantherislandcc.com/index.php>.

8. Task Force Roundtable – All Members

No updates were provided.

9. Upcoming Opportunities – NCTCOG Staff

Erin Blackman (NCTCOG) identified upcoming NCTCOG-related meetings/events/opportunities that may be of interest. They are listed in the presentation (slides 49-51). Items of interest include Community Development Webinar, Green Asset Management Workshop, TMDL Coordination Committee Meeting, and NCTCOG Environment and Development Programs Webinar. These events and more may be found at: <https://www.nctcog.org/envir/Events>.

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for August 25, 2023, 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at NCTCOG Offices. NCTCOG staff have also identified a work group meeting for June 29, 2023, 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. at NCTCOG offices to discuss the Trinity River National Water Trail Master Plan. Anyone interested in assisting with the efforts are welcome to attend. Information regarding upcoming Water Trail-related meetings may be found at: <https://www.nctcog.org/envir/committees/trinity-river-national-water-trail-task-force>.

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

Nixalis Benitez, City of Fort Worth
Erin Blackman, NCTCOG
Chris Chastain, City of Lewisville
John Clarkson, Greater Dallas Planning Council
Matt Craig, Half Associates
Robert Denkhaus, City of Fort Worth



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Dale Harris, Trinity Coalition
Jai-W Hayes-Jackson, NCTCOG
Stephanie Higgins, Patriot Anglers
Dave Holl, Local Kayaker/Store Owner
Brandi Kelp, City of Fort Worth
Kristi Kerr Leonard, Trinity Coalition
Matt Lepinski, USACE
Eric Manley, City of Fort Worth
Edith Marvin, NCTCOG
Tina Nikolic, TRWD
Matt Oliver, TRWD
Teresa Patterson, Trinity Coalition
Liliana Rivera, Visit Dallas
Steve Smith, Trinity Coalition
Joshua Spencer, City of Dallas
Dana Woods
Kate Zielke, NCTCOG