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Trinity River National Water Trail Task Force Meeting (Virtual)

December 13, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

Meeting Summary

1. Welcome & Meeting Purpose

Erin Blackman (NCTCOG) and Steve Smith (Trinity Coalition) welcomed the participants to the Trinity River National Water Trail Task Force meeting. Steve Smith described the history and background of the Water Trail. In 2018, the paddling trail was assembled, consisting of 130 miles and 20 canoe launches that ran from the Fort Worth Nature Center and Lake Lewisville Dam downstream to Dallas. 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 now 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 described the picture on slide eight of the presentation, which shows a roller launch to improve accessibility. Something like this may be feasible for the Trinity River.

Dale mentioned that there are a few new launch sites in various stages of development that will shorten some of the longer distances (e.g., Beltline Road in Grand Prairie, Viridian Development in Arlington, Trinity View Park in Irving, Riverside Park in Fort Worth, and Gateway Park in Fort Worth). Gene Moulden (Irving) mentioned that the Trinity View Park launch site has been approved by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the work is ready to go to bid in January/February. He hopes to have it open in the summer. Irving is also working on an improved portage around Frasier Dam that will go along the Water Trail.

Dale said that 20 of 21 sites are open. The canoe launch at Loop 12 is still closed because of flood damage and safety. The launch site at River Legacy is slowly deteriorating, but they are hoping it will hold up for a few more years. There is now a passage through the blockage at McInnis Trail in Carrollton.

Dale provided information about the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) Conference that took place in Dallas in October. NRPA is a non-profit organization that is



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“...dedicated to building strong, vibrant, and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation.” Trinity Coalition and the City of Lewisville Parks Department offered an off-site institute/mobile workshop to conference attendees to paddle from Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area (LLELA) downstream to the Hebron Parkway lunch site. Canoeing, kayaking, basic paddling, and safety information were shared.

Dale said that for this past quarter, the Water Trail has been usable from September 1 to November 4. The river flow went above 3,000 cubic feet per second, but only for a few days. The sections between LLELA and Hebron Parkway and between Hebron Parkway and McInnish Park have downed trees. Dale provided links to resources where Water Trail information, maps, water levels, hazards, and interest groups may be found. Dale and Teresa Patterson (Trinity Coalition) mentioned races that have occurred on the Elm Fork.

3. Recreation Opportunities in the City of Farmers Branch

Robert Diaz (Farmers Branch) provided information about the Westside Art Trail, John Burke Nature Preserve, and Active Transportation Plan. The Westside Art Trail Project began in 2017 and was identified in the Farmers Branch Trail Master Plan. Due to COVID-19-related delays, the design for Phase 1 began in 2021 and is expected to be completed in 2024. Construction on the trail should begin in Spring 2024 and be completed by early 2025. The Westside Art Trail will connect to the Champion Trail and will follow Mercer Parkway. Steve asked if a launch could be put near the Champion Trail connection (at the John Burke Nature Preserve), and Robert said that is a possibility. Dale stated that there is a shale bank in that area that could act as a natural launch site. Dale will send the coordinates to Robert so that they can look at the location. Steve encouraged Farmers Branch to pursue the shale launch site as it would be the only one of its kind on the Water Trail.

Robert described the John Burke Nature Preserve. It is a 104-acre tract of land that is under renovation and reopened in May 2023. A five-minute video played that offered a look at the amenities of the preserve. Visitors have access to a boardwalk overlook, a granite trail along the pond loop, two new river access points for fishing, wildlife viewing points, rest points, and restrooms (to open soon). Parking for the preserve would be a benefit for users of the Water Trail, particularly if a launch site is added.

Robert also shared information about Farmers Branch’s Active Transportation Plan. Public comment will take place in Spring 2024 and will then be reviewed by Council with adoption by the end of 2025. The goals of the Plan are to complete a bicycle plan map and a pedestrian system map and connectivity. Robert shared a map of the proposed networks.

4. City of Fort Worth Open Space Conservation Program

Brandi Kelp (Fort Worth) shared an overview of the Fort Worth Open Space Conservation Program. Fort Worth’s population is expected to grow by over 270,000 people in the next 24 years and is losing 50 acres per week of natural open space due to development. Fort Worth’s program seeks to conserve high quality natural areas as the city grows to provide environmental benefits and recreational opportunities that support economic development and enhance the livability and desirability of Fort Worth. They formed an Open Space Working Group to support this program to include multiple city departments and other stakeholders.



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Brandi described the difference between open space and parks. In open space, you will experience nature in a natural state, whereas you experience programmed recreation in parks. The priority goal areas for the open space program include ecosystem preservation; stream, river, and lake health; community health; recreation; flood control; equitable access to natural spaces; and economic development. The city gathered feedback from a variety of stakeholders to identify open space priorities – identified as ecosystem preservation and streams, river, lake, and community health. They also found that conservation of natural areas is very important to the public and almost 40 percent of respondents would be willing to volunteer to preserve these areas.

Brandi gave a demonstration of the Open Space Tool, which is made up of over 100 data sets. There are a variety of “context layers” that can be selected to be displayed (e.g., demographics, land use, land cover, etc.). There are also “analysis layers” that display the results based on selected goal(s) (e.g., open space priorities, recreation goal, community health goal, etc.). The city recently closed on a property along the banks of the Clear Fork of the Trinity River and is exploring the possibility of adding a launch site. The site would be a great location to shorten the distance between the Beach Street and Handley-Ederville launch sites.

5. Trinity River National Water Trail Master Plan Update

Jai-W Hayes-Jackson (NCTCOG) said that the Trinity River National Water Trail Master Plan seeks to identify long range actions that advance recreation, tourism, and economic development along the Water Trail. It will be a small-scale Master Plan to help guide communities with developing the Water Trail and allocating resources.

The Master Plan will include sections that provide an overview of the Water Trail, vision and goals, and recommendations based on those identified goals. Erin Blackman mentioned that NCTCOG staff have been meeting with stakeholders to gather input on the Master Plan related to their goals for the Trinity River corridor, points of interest to highlight, and challenges and opportunities. To date, Erin and Jai-W have met with the cities of Farmers Branch, Fort Worth, Grand Prairie, Irving, and Lewisville, as well as Dallas County and the National Parks Conservation Association. Erin said they are meeting with the City of Dallas next week and still hope to meet with other stakeholders.

Jai-W said that Trinity Coalition’s vision is to one day designate it as a National Recreation Area. Steve said the first step to this would be to seek designation as a National Monument as this does not require congressional approval. It does require that the U.S. President sign a document under the Antiquities Act, and Trinity Coalition is working with Congressman Marc Veasey to assist with this.

Jai-W identified the following goals of the Water Trail and mentioned that goals eight and nine resulted from individual meetings with stakeholders.

1. Develop new entry sites to shorten distances between sites.
2. Promote the use of the trail and educate all users.
3. Make the trail more accessible to all.
4. Maintain condition and safety of the existing and future launch sites.
5. Promote stewardship along the Trinity River.
6. Connect the trail to the existing land trails.



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7. Extend the trail further south.
8. Promote the economic benefits of the trail.
9. Highlight the cultural and historical context of the trail.

Jai-W also displayed the various actions that could achieve these goals. He ended the presentation with a look at the Master Plan timeline. NCTCOG will seek to have it finalized by September 2024.

Steve provided an update on a few things that directly relate to these goals and recommended actions. Dale has been working with the Salcedo Group, an engineering company that has experience with hydrology and hydraulics and designing launches, to look into Lock and Dam #1. Steve also said Trinity Coalition identified a consulting company to put together a proposal to help value the economic impact of the Water Trail. There may be an opportunity for communities to cost-share this study. Finally, as most know, Trinity Coalition has been chosen to help with marketing, maintenance, and operations of DFW Discovery Trail and so the signage chosen (receive universal approval by the communities) for that trail could be accessed for the Water Trail.

6. Task Force Roundtable

The following updates were provided.

Eric Manley (Fort Worth) received the green light on the Water Trail signage. He would like a quote on how much it would be. Teresa will provide that information. Dale and Steve would like to work with NCTCOG and the communities to come up with a more cohesive signage (e.g., accessing DFW Discovery Trail signage).

7. Upcoming Opportunities

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 the DFW Air Quality Improvement Plan, funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Climate Pollution Reduction Grants, which will create a roadmap to improve air quality, protect public health, and reduce the impacts of extreme weather events. Erin mentioned that NCTCOG's E&D and Transportation departments are working collaboratively on this and are seeking input from local stakeholders. Erin also shared information about a Prescribed Fire Workshop that the City of Fort Worth is hosting on January 10-11, 2024.

The next meeting is scheduled for April 10, 2024. For information related to past and future Task Force meetings, please visit <https://www.nctcog.org/envir/committees/trinity-river-national-water-trail-task-force>.

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

Erin Blackman, NCTCOG
Mia Brown, Dallas County
Chris Chastain, City of Lewisville
Walter Council, City of Fort Worth
Matt Craig, Half Associates



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Robert Denkhaus, City of Fort Worth
Robert Diaz, City of Farmers Branch
Dale Harris, Trinity Coalition
Jai-W Hayes-Jackson, NCTCOG
Kevin Hill, City of Dallas
Dave Holl, Local Kayaker/Store Owner
Brandi Kelp, City of Fort Worth
Matt Lepinski, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Hermilo Munoz, Tarrant Regional Water District
Eric Manley, City of Fort Worth
Gene Moulden, City of Irving
Carlos Navarro-Servin, City of Dallas
Teresa Patterson, Trinity Coalition
Erika Pelletier, National Parks Conservation Association
Don Raines, City of Dallas
Steve Smith, Trinity Coalition
Joshua Spenser, City of Dallas
Andrew Wallace, City of Dallas
Kate Zielke, NCTCOG