



City of San Marcos

City Council Work Session

September 5, 2023



Presentation Item 1

Receive a staff presentation regarding the San Marcos Natural Areas Land Management Plan, and provide direction to the City Manager.

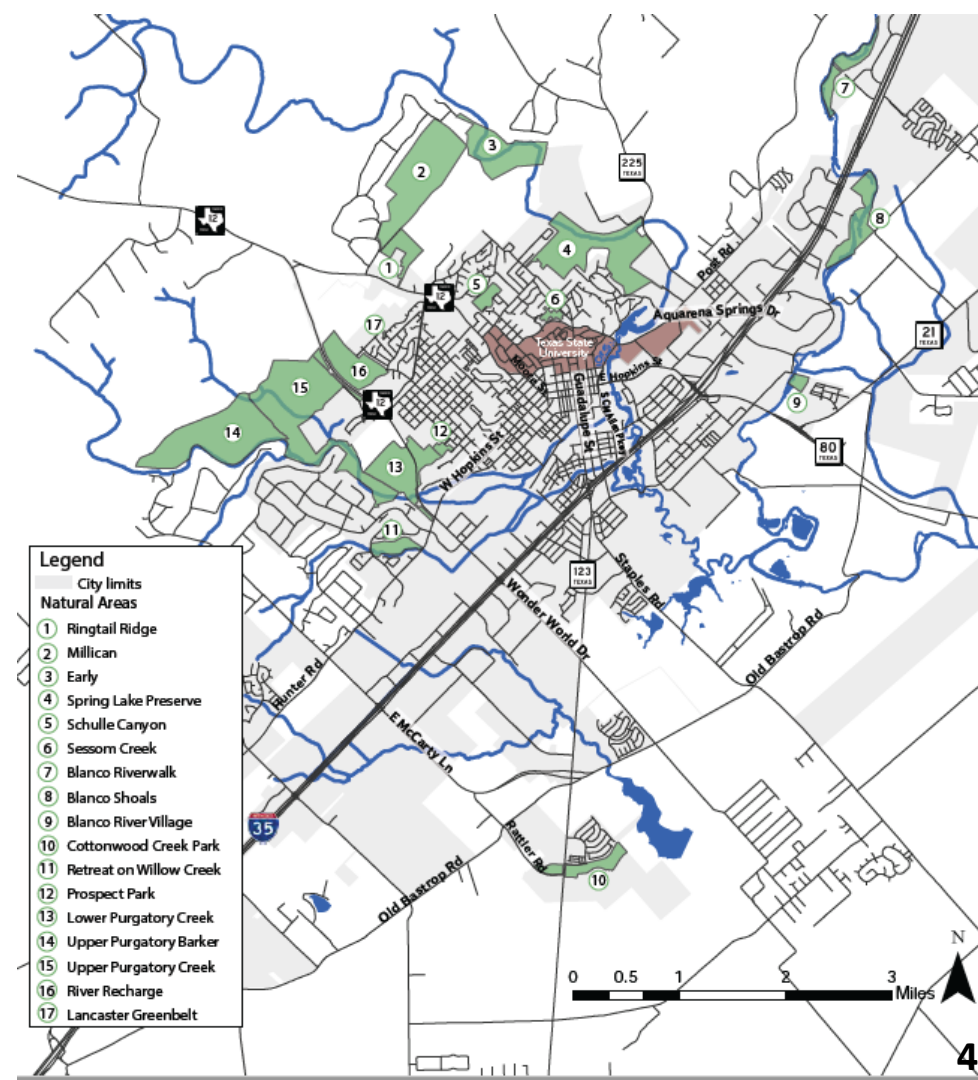
Overview



- **Purpose**
- **Process and Framework**
- **Goals**
- **Implementation**
- **Next Steps**

Purpose

- Identified objective within the 2019 Parks and Open Space Master Plan
- Currently 17 Natural Areas totaling 2,149 acres +/-
- 1,685 acres fall within the Edwards Aquifer Recharge, Contributing or Transition Zones



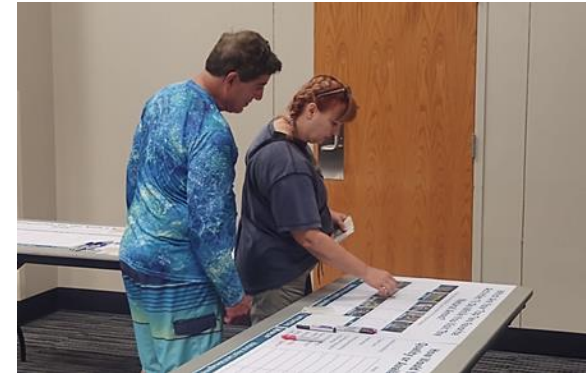
Purpose



- The terms “greenspace” and “natural area” are used somewhat synonymously in the City’s 2019 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, but the term “natural area” connotes that the land is not only left undeveloped but is actively managed to restore and enhance the land’s native ecosystems.
- This plan serves as a technical guide to aid in the management of current and future areas.

Process

- Kicked Off in March 2022
- Stakeholder meetings
 - San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance
 - San Marcos River Foundation
 - Trust for Public Land
 - Great Springs Project
 - Emerald Crown Trail Work Group
 - Council of Neighborhood Associations (CONA)
 - City Staff and Emergency Response Personnel
- Public Open House



Framework of Plan



- Introduction and Planning Purpose
- Benefits and Statement of Goals
- Environmental Overview
- Standards and Management Recommendations
- Implementation

Vision Statement



- “The San Marcos natural areas are treasured natural spaces that have thriving ecosystems comprised of diverse communities of native plants and animals, well performing watersheds, and opportunities for people to safely enjoy, connect with, and learn about nature.”

Plan Goals

- It is the intention of this land management plan to reflect and support the vision statement by offering recommendations for the ongoing management of San Marcos' treasured natural areas.
- The three overarching goals of this plan are:
 - Natural Resource Preservation
 - Natural Resource Management
 - Use, Safety, and Connectivity



Implementation



- It is through action, decision making, coordination, and monitoring that plans come to fruition. Though this land management plan functions as a guide for city staff, there are a few key next steps that should be undertaken or considered.
- Next steps listed in the Implementation and Prioritization Table within the plan are classified under the following broad categories:
 - **Action.** These initiatives may include undertaking a new project, expanding upon existing programs, or conducting a study.
 - **Policy.** Official procedures or policies used to make decisions.
 - **Partnership.** These initiatives will include two or more entities working close together to serve as champions of the plan.

Implementation



- The assigned time frame identifies when recommendations should be initiated based on existing knowledge:
 - **(0-2)**. Next steps should be initiated within the next one to two years although completion may extend across a larger time frame. These are the top priorities for implementation.
 - **(3-5)**. Next steps which may be initiated within the next three to five years.
 - **(Ongoing)**. Next steps may also be ongoing where they represent a policy or practice that should begin immediately and occur on an annual or scheduled basis.

TABLE 5.1. IMPLEMENTATION AND PRIORITIZATION



NEXT STEPS	ACTION TYPE	TIMEFRAME (YEARS)			INVOLVED DEPARTMENTS (AND PARTNERING ENTITIES)
		0-2	3-5	ON-GO-ING	
Natural Resource Management					
Conduct wildfire hazard assessments for each natural area. Prioritize Upper Purgatory Creek, Lower Purgatory Creek, Spring Lake, the Western Loop Unit, and Schulle Canyon due to Wildfire Risk Index.	Action	0-2			PARD and FD
Create Community Wildfire Protection Plans for each Natural Area. Prioritize Upper Purgatory, Lower Purgatory, Spring Lake, the Western Loop Unit, and Schulle Canyon due to Wildfire Risk Index.	Action/ Partnership	0-2			PARD, FD, and owners and occupants of adjacent properties
Establish standard operating procedures for management activities. Provide for compliance with TCEQ EAPP regulations where applicable. Include a process for record keeping of natural area land management activities. Require all staff and volunteers to complete the required forms for record keeping. Train volunteers and staff on procedures.	Policy/Action	0-2/ Ongoing			PARD and Volunteers
Identify and create an initial inventory of areas in need of revegetation/stabilization measures; for each area, create a revegetation/stabilization plan; prioritize the plans and implement revegetation/stabilization projects.	Action	0-2			PARD, SWD, and Volunteers
Identify and create an initial inventory of trails or areas in need of erosion control measures; for each area, create an erosion control plan; prioritize the plans and implement erosion control projects.	Action	0-2			PARD, SWD, and Volunteers
Conduct comprehensive invasive species surveys for all natural areas. For each area where invasive species are present, create a plan for invasive species management.	Action	0-2			PARD and Volunteers
Prioritize the plans and implement invasive species control projects. For suitable projects, use EDRR methodology.	Action	0-2			PARD and Volunteers

Involved Departments and Partners

- PARD: Parks and Recreation Department
- FD: Fire Department
- PD: Police Department
- CoSM: City of San Marcos
- Volunteers: Volunteer groups such as SMGA
- PADS: Planning and Development Services Department
- SMU: San Marcos Utilities
- SW: Stormwater Division

Implementation



- Funding for improvements to and maintenance and management of the natural areas has primarily involved funds from the General Fund appropriated to the Parks and Recreation Department.
- Staff also seeks grants for development of trails and forgivable loans for acquisition.
- Creating event fees for trail races within our natural areas will aide staff in ensuring trail maintenance following a race is supported fiscally.
 - Purgatory Trail run (Annual event in January)
 - Tejas Trails run (October 2023)

Implementation

- The City's 2019 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan includes a recommendation to "Add a water quality land manager for the natural areas". To assist in carrying out the next steps for implementing this plan, the City may wish to consider funding this position within the next 3 to 5 years if capacity allows.



Next steps



- **August 24** – Parks and Recreation Board adopted Recommendation Resolution 2023-02RR recommending adoption of this plan to City Council.
- **September 19** – City Council will consider adoption of this plan.



Questions