

Eastside Environmental News

A City of Austin Newsletter from the East Austin Environmental Initiative



MAY 2010
ISSUE 1

Blair Woods Project: Norman Elementary Explores and Restores

At the intersection of Martin Luther King Boulevard and US Highway 183, in East Austin, there is a 10-acre wooded tract, known as Blair Woods, that has been undergoing a wonderful transformation. The Travis Audubon Society owns the property and, over the last two years, they have connected with many organizations and volunteers to restore this area to make it a wild-life sanctuary.

One of the Travis Audubon Society's goals is to develop meaningful work projects that connect children to nature. They strive to educate underserved children about land stewardship, conservation and the environment. With the Blair Woods Project, they accomplish this goal by partnering with East Austin students from Norman Elementary. The project serves to increase awareness and experience of the outdoors through habitat preservation and restoration. It also provides a way for the children to learn scientific data collection techniques and use communication skills to report the data.

The students started by doing activities at school to become familiar with scientific techniques. Their day at Blair Woods was divided into two sections. First, they delved into their science projects. Then they proceed-

ed to mulch the trail, remove non native plants and restore an eroding creek bank, all to further the site's restoration.

Students were divided into four study groups:

- Animal Survey - This group looked for evidence of creatures large and small.
- Plant Survey - Locations of plants were marked on a map with a search for non-native plants high on their list.
- Creek Study - Students recorded erosion, plant growth and general creek conditions.
- GPS Project - This group learned how to carefully record data from previous projects.

Afterwards each group created a poster with information from their project and gave presentations with their findings.

This project strikes at the very heart of the EAEI goals regarding partnership and involvement with the East Austin community. We commend and support the Travis Society Audubon's efforts.

For more information and to volunteer for projects, visit their website at http://travisaudubon.org/home/?page_id=637

Field Notes...



Oscar Garza

"Oh my God, it's hot!" is all I've heard since spring. This record-setting summer certainly put a strain on everyone with the scarcity of rain, burn bans and no fireworks! But in our latest newsletter, you can see that, when it comes to community involvement in East Austin, there is no drought. We have worked with a number of organizations who continue to show support and a whole lot of progress in their involvement with the East Austin community and in trying to improve their neighborhood.

We helped the Travis Audubon Society establish a fantastic partnership with East Austin schools. We've been working with the Montopolis community, who has been extremely busy planning for a hike and bike trail and cleaning up tons of trash and debris (see related articles).

But, keep in mind, that even if you're not part of a group, there are a number of other ways you can participate individually. For example, read how you can pitch in to protect and preserve the environment through the City's programs such as Let's Can It! Austin, the litter abatement campaign, and the Scoop the Poop program. These are things anyone can do on a daily basis to make East Austin a better community (see related articles).

As always, please feel free to contact me, Oscar Garza, at 974-1893 or email at:

oscar.garza@ci.austin.tx.us



24 Hour Pollution Hotline 974-2550
Línea de la contaminación, atiende 24 horas al día

EASTSIDE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS



Let's Can It, Austin!

The City of Austin Watershed Protection and solid waste services Departments kicked off the Let's Can It, Austin! campaign to encourage Austinites to put non-recyclable trash where it belongs...in the trash can. The campaign is an effort to reduce the

amount of litter that must be cleaned up.

Have you ever noticed that our creeks and lakes often look "trashed" after it rains? You've probably seen plastic bags hanging from trees and aluminum cans and Styrofoam™ cups floating in the water. That's because rain washes the litter from our streets and parking lots, down our storm drains, to our creeks and eventually into our lakes.

Each year, City staff and volunteers remove over 250 tons of trash from Lady Bird Lake and over 6,200 tons of trash and debris from roadways – the equivalent of 4,150 average-sized cars! While this expensive effort helps keep our streets and waterways picturesque and healthy, we believe eliminating litter at the source is a smarter and more cost-effective approach.

To bring home the message, the Let's Can It, Austin! campaign includes a television spot, in both English and Spanish, targeted to the 18 to 24 year-old audience who have been identified as the primary source of litter. To encourage people to dispose of trash properly, a talking trash receptacle was placed at Auditorium Shores near the gazebo. Also, signage has been placed at the trash booms (floatable barriers that trap litter) at the mouths of both Shoal and West Bouldin Creeks.

This will make our roadways and waterways look better and protect fish, ducks, turtles and other aquatic life that live in our creeks and lakes. So join the movement for cleaner streets and cleaner creeks and Let's Can It, Austin!

For more information visit our website at www.LetsCanItAustin.org

Restoring the Montopolis Greenbelt

-By Stefan Wray

People in Austin rarely use the words "Montopolis" and "greenbelt" in the same sentence. Everybody's heard of Montopolis. They at least know it's somewhere southeast on the way to the airport. Greenbelts are more common on the west side of Austin.

Yet the thousands who drive everyday on Hwy 183, who cross the Montopolis Bridge and then pass Calahan's General Store also drive right by the Montopolis Greenbelt.

This obscure and somewhat neglected area of undeveloped, mostly forested land, with an old stock pond and

Volunteers ready to remove hundreds of tires from the Montopolis Greenbelt



wet weather creek, started to receive new attention in the spring of 2010.

The creek is a tributary of Carson Creek that flows into the Colorado north of the airport.

Neighbors in the adjacent Frontier at Montana and Riverside Meadows subdivisions began exploring the woods and discovered lots of trash from illegal dumping and storm water runoff, but also lots of potential for a new hike and bike trails and nature trails. They created the Montopolis Tributary Trail Association.

Since then, the association has been working really hard and their results include: Council approved neighborhood plan amendment to include the trail network; Austin Parks Foundation trail grant; National Parks Service's Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program technical support; Texas Parks and Wildlife trail grant; American Youth Works and Keep Austin Beautiful partnerships; and 20 acres of private land donated to the City.

In 2011, the group started organizing cleanups. Hundreds of volunteers have pulled thousands of tires from the woods and begun the long task of removing invasive plant species.

On April 30, 2011, an all day trail design workshop, co-organized with the National Park Service, drew together neighbors, City staff, and other stakeholders at nearby Allison Elementary school for the purpose of turning conceptual trail ideas into concrete plans.

More cleanups, invasive species removal, and eventual trail work is planned. We have only just begun.

For more information go to www.montopolisgreenbelt.org

Leave No Pile Behind -- Poop Pollutes!

Are you guilty of leaving your dog's waste on your neighbor's lawn because you thought you were providing free fertilizer? Perhaps you don't scoop the poop because you think it's downright disgusting! Imagine if all dog owners in Austin didn't scoop the poop. One dog creates an average of a half pound of excrement per day. With 120,000 dogs in Austin, that adds up to 60,000 pounds of dog waste – equivalent to nearly five dump truck loads – produced throughout the city every day!

Pet waste is a subject everyone likes to avoid, but it is more than smelly and unsightly -- it is a health risk to pets and people, especially children. When it rains, pet waste left on trails, sidewalks and grassy areas can wash into the nearest waterway. Even if you can't see signs of water near you, the feces wash into storm drains and then travel to your neighborhood creek or lake untreated. Like human waste, animal waste may contain harmful bacteria and viruses, rendering the water unfit for recreation, or other uses. It only takes one teaspoon of dog feces in a water body the size of an Olympic pool to make the water unsafe for swimming. Pet waste also contains nutrients that will accelerate the growth of nuisance algae in creeks and lakes. So please, Scoop the Poop -- it's the healthy and neighborly thing to do!

Scoop the Poop



Cleaner Creeks, Parks & Feet!

Here's how to help:

- **Bring It!** Carry a scooper bag when you walk your dog.
- **Scoop It!** Use the baggie like a glove, scoop the poop, invert and seal the bag.
- **Toss It!** It belongs in the trash.
- **Place It!** Put a "Scoop the Poop" sign in your yard to encourage your neighbors to scoop it up too! (To request a free sign, call 974-2550 or visit www.cityofaustin.org/watershed/wq_materials.htm)

You can find Scoop the Poop pet waste bag dispensers in some of your favorite East Austin City Parks. If you see one that is empty, call 311 and let them know so they can refill it. You can also request one to be installed at a City Park by calling 311.

SCOOP THE POOP, AUSTIN – for Cleaner Creeks ... Cleaner Streets ... Cleaner Feet!

Visit www.ScoopThePoopAustin.org for more info.

Become a fan of Scoop the Poop on Facebook! Find our page at ScoopThePoop Austin

Holly Power Plant Demolition Begins

Last May, the Austin City Council selected the firm of TRC Environmental Corporation to demolish the Holly Power Plant. A final contract between the City and TRC was executed at the end of June. After their work plan, abatement plan, and various city permits were approved, TRC began work in July. Their current schedule calls for the demolition to be completed in about 18 months. They will demolish the 50-year-old plant and salvage or recycle material such as steel, copper, scrap metals, concrete and asphalt.

For many residents of the largely Hispanic Holly neighborhood, this news does not come too soon. For years, they complained about the noise and pollution from the plant, located on the shores of Lady Bird Lake. There were reports of fuel spills dating back to the mid 1970's. In 1988, polychlorinated biphenyl (PCBs) leaked from storage drums, and two years later, PCBs were detected in Lady Bird Lake, leading to a temporary shutdown of the plant.

Other spills continued, but a fire in 1994, followed by a bigger blaze on Halloween night in 2001, created a greater sense of urgency for neighborhood residents to sharpen their activism skills and protest to have the power plant shut down and decommissioned. In 1995, after decades of neighborhood opposition to its persistent noise, bright lights, fuel spills, and fires, the City Council decided to close it. It took until 2004 to begin phasing it out and the last turbine was finally shut down in September 2007.

Once the demolition is completed on the City plans to convert about 9 acres of the site to a park. Through the course of next year, the City's Parks and Recreation Department will put together a construction plan and schedule for development of the park.

For more information you can contact oscar.backus@austinenergy.com.



Holly Power plants sits silent before it's demolition

EASTSIDE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS



Where to Call
for Pollution
Information & Assistance

CITY OF AUSTIN NUMBERS

General non-emergency
311

Health & Human Services Department
972-5600

Austin Clean Water Partners Program
974-2550

East Austin Environmental Initiative
974-1893

Pollution Hotline (24 Hr.)
974-2550

Household Hazardous Waste program
974-4343

Public Information Office
974-2220

Solid Waste Services Customer Service
494-9400

Stormwater Drainage/Erosion Complaints
974-3355

Austin Water Utility
(sewage complaints 24 Hr.)
972-1000

Zoning and Building Use Complaints
974-2875

Austin Brownfield Revitalization Office
974-1954

OTHER NUMBERS

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
339-2929

Lower Colorado River Authority
473-3307

CITY OF AUSTIN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mayor Lee Leffingwell 974-2250

Mayor Pro Tem Mike Martinez 974-2264

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Chris Riley 974-2260

Laura Morrison 974-2258

Randi Shade 974-2255

Bill Spellman 974-2256

Sheryl Cole 974-2266

Community Corner

Question: "How can the City of Austin help you address pollution concerns in East Austin?"



"By publicizing events or groups for environmental outreach and education."

Randall Holt - Resident Musician



"By educating the student and resident populations on what types of pollution are out there and how to identify them, and what resources are available to address the pollution issues."

Roseanna Lahti- Special Populations Counselor-ACC



"City needs to be more vigilant of hazardous waste that is mixed with trash and litter that is dumped on private property and right of way."

Gary Tharp- Owner, Texas Sausage Company



Join us for the Green City Festival on Sunday, October 23rd.

FREE and fun for all ages. Make art out of old books, learn how to care for chickens and make a rain garden, meet Cody the electric car, and more!

City Hall, 301 W. Second Street – 78701

Noon: Bike & Gowalla Tours

1pm-4pm: Hands-On Activities, Speakers, Giveaways

4pm-5pm: Music

www.GreenCityFest.org

 printed on recycled paper

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