

Riparian Restoration: Establishing Grow Zones

Introduction

- **Grow Zones (no mow)** are established along streams within specific City of Austin parks to allow for passive (natural) vegetation growth to improve riparian zone function.
- The **riparian zone** is the transition area between the water and the land.
- **Restoration** involves reducing disturbance (e.g. mowing) to improve ecosystem health.
- **Ecosystem Services** are the resources and processes supplied by healthy ecosystems that benefit humankind, like drinking water, shade, pollination, nutrient cycling, etc.

Optimal Riparian Buffer



Healthy Riparian Buffers Provide

- Filtering of overland flow, removing pollutants before they reach the creek.
- Prevention of stream bank erosion.
- Slowing of flow, reducing downstream flooding.
- Absorption of water, providing for baseflow in streams.
- Shade, reducing air and water temperatures.
- Providing habitat and food for a diverse group of animals, both on land and in the water.
- Reduced carbon footprint.
- A greenbelt forest for public enjoyment.

Long-term Goal

- Establish a sustainable riparian forest buffer with diverse vegetation and a dense tree canopy.

What Should Park Users Expect?

- As the plant community recovers, some areas will have tall and “weedy” looking vegetation. It can take between five and ten years to develop a diverse riparian area, so patience is important.
- Continued maintenance/mowing along trails, around infrastructure and access areas.
- Signs posted explaining the effort.

Passive Restoration: Proven Success on Boggy Creek, Austin



Mowed Condition (1997)



Restored condition (2012)

Restoration/Management Approach

- Local stakeholder input and involvement, especially in terms of volunteer opportunities.
- Establish a 25-50 foot “Grow Zone” along both banks of the stream. This is a flexible buffer, depending on trails, park infrastructure, access areas and/or view corridors.
- Allow passive plant growth in entire buffer area, with active plantings where necessary.
- Invasive plant management as needed.

Potential Enhancement Options

- Include rain gardens, vegetation planting/ seeding, fencing and new /improved trails.

Additional Information and Resources

Riparian Restoration

Creekside Story blog

Restoration Techniques

Find Your Watershed

Austin Invasive Plant Information

Texas Invasive Information and Invader App

Keep Austin Beautiful Adopt-a-Creek Program

Austin Parks Foundation Adopt-a-Park Program

www.austintexas.gov/creekside

austintexas.gov/CreeksideStory

www.austintexas.gov/content/1361/FAQ/14739

www.austintexas.gov/GIS/FindYourWatershed/

www.austintexas.gov/invasive

texasinvasives.org/

www.KeepAustinBeautiful.org/Adopt-a-Creek

www.austinparks.org/adopt.html

Questions: John Clement, Watershed Protection Department, 512-974-1475, john.clement@austintexas.gov