

DOWNSTREAM OF THE POOL

“DOG PARK”

The so-called “Dog Park” is an unintended, but extremely popular destination located just downstream from the downstream dam. While this area does not have an official name, it is popularly called “Dog Park” or “Barking Springs”, because--despite signs prohibiting it--people bring their dogs to play in the rushing water. The spectacle of the dogs and the rushing water attracts more people still, creating a lively and enjoyable scene. “Dog Park” is unsupervised, it is free and it is open year round, uninterrupted by the cleaning and maintenance that periodically closes the Pool.

Both the north and south banks are armored with concrete slabs to mitigate against erosion. The slab on the north shore is studded with protruding rocks as if to discourage comfortable human use. On the north side, official access is from the area above by way of a stone stair. But the traffic is so intense that numerous footpaths have been beaten through the vegetation to make way. Since there is no stair at all on the south side, access is entirely by way of informal footpaths through the vegetation.

Recommendations

Replace the concrete armor with more natural stonework

Replace the existing concrete armor slabs with new stonework laid up in irregular layers that at once make the water easily accessible, while also abstractly recalling shapes of natural stone outcroppings. The stonework on the south bank should incorporate the stream of water spilling from a horizontal slot in the dam to create an animated series of rivulets and pools. While no scientific claims should be made, it might be hoped that these water features would attract aquatic life and perhaps even foster ecological interactions between the Pool and the creek. To replace the armored slopes, use weathered, irregular form limestones, mixing in larger specimen limestone boulders for accents and seating.

Improve stair access down the slope

Rehabilitate the existing stair for safer footing, and add handrails. Build two new stone stairs, one to the north and one to the south. For new stairs, use limestone flags to match or improve upon the stonework of the existing stairs.

Develop the area on the north bank, just below the dam, into an overlook

Consider additional hardscape on the north side of the creek, atop the retaining wall between the steps and the dam. The soil level in this area is lower than the retaining wall,



*“Dog Park”, a lively and enjoyable scene.
Photo: Megan Peyton*

which causes it to drain poorly during wet periods or after floods. Paving the low mud terrace with weathered, irregular limestone flags would let the area work more as an overlook. The stone should be mortared in place to better withstand flooding and so that when the area floods mud can be hosed or swept off. Begin removing invasive trees on the slope between the creek and the playscape, like chinaberries and hackberries, and replacing them with native understory like Carolina buckthorn and blackhaw viburnum.

Define a width for the trail, and replant outside that, to restore habitat

The terrace that begins at the bottom of the stairs and parallels the creek as it flows downstream looks like a wide gravel road. It appears wider than necessary for access to the canoe rental. Defining the path at a particular width – perhaps 14’ wide with provision for a wider turnaround – would make the area appear less like a maintenance access road. The new trail would need to be edged, perhaps with intermittent large boulders, to maintain the newly introduced vegetation. It is recommended that the areas outside the newly defined trail be revegetated according to City of Austin standard specification 609S. Planting a mixed understory of native small trees, shrubs and perennials and adding ‘Mexican’ sycamore, bald cypress and other trees adapted to hill country creeks would be appropriate.

FURTHER DOWNSTREAM

Downstream from the “Dog Park”, the creek flows unimpeded towards Lady Bird Lake. There are trails on both the north and the south banks. The south trail bridges across the Sunken Garden spring run, then connects with the Zilker Trail. The north trail extends past a canoe rental concession and toward the bridge at Barton Springs Road, rising to connect a spur of the hike and bike trail system. This area is also punctuated by numerous stormwater outfalls. The landscape is naturalistic, though the riparian landscape seems generally depleted.

Recommendations

Enhance the Sunken Garden outfall

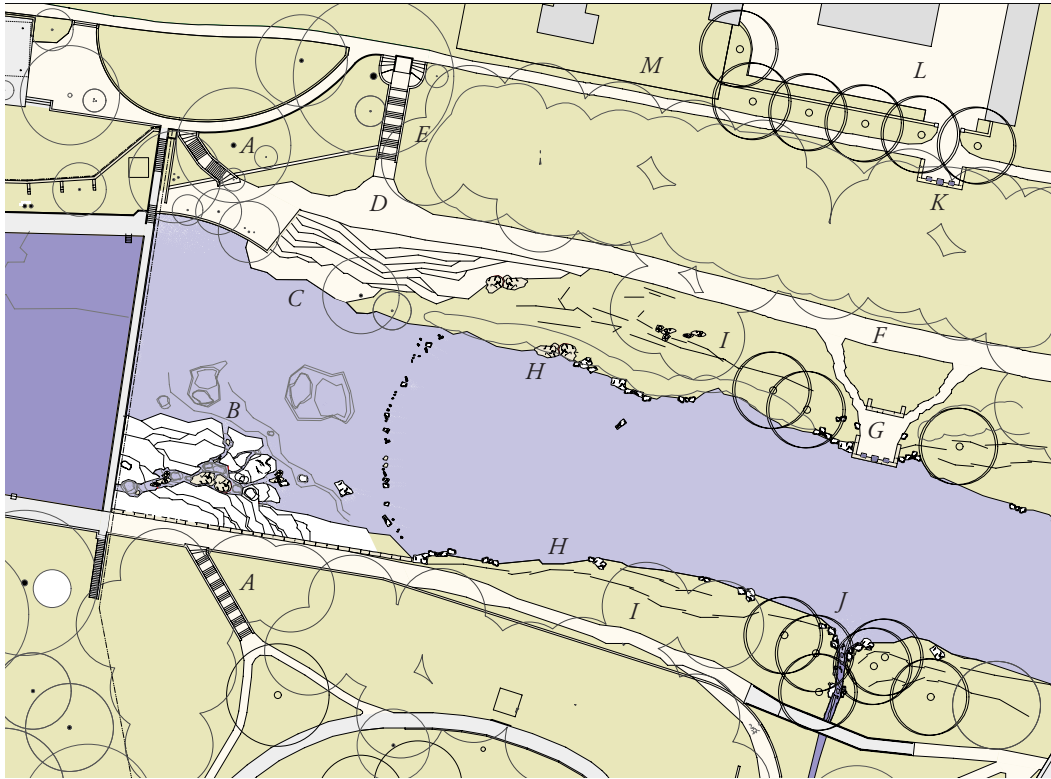
The Sunken Garden outfall is a significant natural event, yet for the casual visitor, it is unclear exactly what it is. It looks like a small waterfall, but it could reasonably be interpreted to be a broken water main. It is simply not clear, which is an unfortunate opportunity lost.

Sunken Garden is, of course, one of the three main springs in the complex. Its outfall should be acknowledged and celebrated. This plan recommends a number of steps:

- Build a viewing area immediately across the creek from the outfall. This area should include interpretative materials to explain the event and its relationship to its larger natural context.

The spilling water effect may bear some resemblance to this Llano River example.





“Dog Park” and Further Downstream

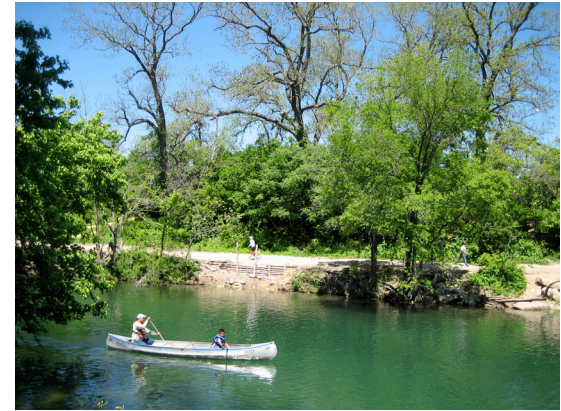
- A. Build new stone stair.
- B. Remove existing concrete and redesign with new stonework for greater comfort and more natural beauty. Using water spilling over the dam, integrate flow into the design to create an attractive “fish ladder” effect.
- C. Remove existing concrete slab and redesign with new stonework for greater comfort and natural beauty.
- D. Add new weathered limestone paving .
- E. Rehabilitate existing stone stair for safer footing, add handrail.
- F. Define a particular dimension to this gravel path using stone edging and the occasional boulder. Revegetate areas outside path with native plants.
- G. Create an overlook to highlight the waterfall spilling from the Sunken Garden spring run. Integrate interpretative graphics into the experience to “tell the story” of Sunken Garden.
- H. Restore riparian vegetation along creek edge, intermingle with boulder groupings.
- I. Reestablish diverse forest along slope of creek bank.
- J. Plant new cypress trees to frame the waterfall.
- K. Take advantage of this elevated position to create an overlook highlighting the waterfall spilling from the Sunken Garden spring run. Thin the tree canopy to encourage viewing--especially during the winter--across the creek to Sunken Garden. Integrate interpretative graphics into the experience to “tell the story” of Sunken Garden.
- L. Adopt a long-term goal of reassigning the buildings of the maintenance yard for more public, park uses. This should include the removal of the wood privacy fence in favor of a low stone wall.
- M. Adopt a long-term plan of relocating the train tracks to the north of the existing maintenance yard. This would allow a widening of the upper path, making biking and walking from the lake to the Pool more enjoyable.



Reestablish diverse forest along slope of creek bank.



Define a particular dimension to this gravel path using stone edging and the occasional boulder. Revegetate areas outside path with native plants.



Restore riparian vegetation along creek edge, intermingle with boulder groupings.

- Also on the north side, build a viewing area at the upper level trail, near what is now the maintenance facility. This should also be appointed with interpretative materials.
- The area around the outfall itself should be planted in distinctive native Texas trees to give subtle, though natural, cues to the visitor that the event is important. We recommend the addition of bald cypress by and across from the outflow of the Sunken Garden spring, to emphasize the almost hidden mouth of the Sunken Garden spring and the point on the trail across the creek from which it is visible.
- Vegetation should be thinned of nuisance species like hackberries, so that the Sunken Garden complex is more easily visible from the north shore.
- Long term, replace the bridge over the spring run with a more attractive, more transparent bridge.



Remove existing concrete and redesign with new stonework for greater comfort and more natural beauty. Using water spilling over the dam, integrate flow into the design to create an attractive “fish ladder” effect.



Remove existing concrete slab and redesign with new stonework for greater comfort and natural beauty. Add new weathered limestone paving at terrace below stairs . Rehabilitate existing stone stair for safer footing and add handrail.



Create an overlook to highlight the waterfall spilling from the Sunken Garden spring run.

Inventory and mitigate storm drainage outfalls into creek

While it is beyond the scope of this plan, efforts should be made to inventory the stormwater outfalls with the goal of developing a plan for making them both attractive and functional. This effort may appropriately include a best-management-practices analysis looking for mitigation opportunities for surface runoff into the creek.

Add native plantings

Along the creek banks themselves, riparian vegetation should be restored, and should be intermingled with naturalistic boulder groupings. Invasive species should be removed and replaced with creek-appropriate native Texas plants and trees.

There are some large pecans in the slopes above the creek and the “Dog Park”, but along the lower trail, additional tree planting is needed. The dramatic fast growing Mexican Sycamore should grow well in this area. In order to reestablish a more diverse forest along the creekbank and on the slope above the creek, a variety of shade and smaller trees should be



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Restore riparian vegetation along creek edge, intermingle with boulder groupings.

introduced. Good choices for shade trees, in addition to the sycamore and cypress, would be cedar elm, Western soapberry and Texas Ash. For smaller, understory trees, planted in groves of 5 or more of a single variety, good choices include Mexican plum, Texas redbud, yaupon holly and Eve's necklace. There is not a functioning irrigation system in this area, but for creekside plantings, the water table may be sufficiently high that fall and winter tree plantings would be successful without additional water. For planting on the slope between the train tracks and the lower trail, locate a hose bib or quick coupler within 100 feet of any additional planting, so that hose end irrigation on a timer can be used to establish new trees.



A Hill Country stream to which local limestone boulders and native vegetation have been added. An example of how a comparatively denuded riparian landscape can be enhanced.

*An example of diverse creekside vegetation in the western Hill Country. A similar mix of diverse native vegetation and boulders would be appropriate and beautiful along lower Barton Creek.
Photo: Rachel Guest*