



Eastside Environmental News

20th ANNIVERSARY

A City of Austin Newsletter from the East Austin Environmental Initiative

Fall/Winter 2013



Families enjoy "stream time" at Clean Creek Camp

Clean Creek Camp – Summertime Fun for Families!

When you were a kid on summer vacation, did you explore the outdoors and splash in creeks? Today, kids typically spend their free time exploring new apps on electronic devices and diving into the newest updates on social media. At Clean Creek Camp, held in June and July, families replaced "screen time" with "stream time" by spending three days learning about and exploring East Austin's creeks and watersheds (areas of land that drain into a creek or river). Camp kicked off with a nature scavenger hunt at Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Park, a hike to the Wildlife Sanctuary, and a litter cleanup of Secret Beach. Over the next two days, families hiked and waded in Onion Creek, learned what the presence of aquatic bugs tells us about creek water quality, took a boat ride on Lady Bird Lake, and cleaned up along the river's shoreline. Campers had a great time learning about nature and ecology and were really happy to see the positive impact they could make on the areas they visited.

Clean Creek Camp is a free summer program hosted each year by the City's Watershed Protection Department.

www.austintexas.gov/watershed/youthed

EARTH CAMP – 5th Graders Explore and Learn Outside!

Students in many East Austin schools (including Andrews, Blackshear, Brooke, Campbell, Govalle, Ortega, Pecan Springs, Sims, Winn and Zavala) are participating in an exciting outdoor learning program this school year! The 5th grade classes are enrolled in Earth Camp, the Watershed Protection Department's field science program, where they will learn about watersheds, the Edwards Aquifer, and water quality protection. Students will hike along a creek, explore a cave, identify water-dwelling macroinvertebrates (small animals that have no backbone and can be viewed by the human eye), and practice "green" (chemical-free) gardening! Earth Camp takes place during school hours for four days. In addition to the highly experienced youth educators who run the program, water quality scientists share their specific expertise and excitement about science. Students finish Earth Camp with great memories, an increased understanding of Earth Science, and enthusiasm to protect Austin's treasured creeks, river, aquifer, and springs.

For more information on Earth Camp, please visit www.austintexas.gov/EarthCamp.



Oscar Garza

Field Notes... 20 Years of Environmental Service

Welcome to the Fall issue of the Eastside Environmental Newsletter!

Two themes stand out to me in this issue: community responsibility and education, both of which have long-standing value in East Austin neighborhoods. East Austin has a rich history of community pride and involvement in civic and environmental issues. Activities such as the Austin Youth River Watch's cleanup events at Montopolis Bridge, community groups' construction of rain gardens, and the Watershed Protection Department's youth and family education programs show that this tradition of active participation and learning still thrives.

This issue also includes information to help East Austin residents save water and reduce risks from potential wildfire - very important topics during this time of drought!

As always, please feel free to contact me:

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Oscar.Garza@austintexas.gov

If you would like to receive this information electronically twice each year, please visit

www.austintexas.gov/PollutionPrevention – in the Public Awareness Programs section (middle of page), click the "Subscribe to the biannual newsletter" tab.



24-Hour Pollution Hotline 512-974-2550
Línea de la contaminación, atiende 24 horas al día

East Austin Celebrates the Opening of Roy Guerrero Park

After more than 15 years of planning and improvements, East Austin residents eagerly attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Roy G. Guerrero Colorado River Metropolitan Park on July 1. The expansive (nearly-400 acre) park, located at 400 Grove Boulevard, runs along the south bank of the Colorado River, just downstream of Longhorn Dam.

An appreciation of nature and conservation is apparent throughout the park, which boasts more than two miles of trails, plus open space and wildlife habitat. Native and drought-tolerant plants are prominent throughout the park. The irrigation system, created by Austin Water, uses reclaimed water and will save an estimated 10 million gallons of water each year. The children's playground includes several artist-designed features shaped like turtles, inspired by the booming turtle population found in the nearby river and supporting the park's mission to educate visitors about the local environment.

The park also contains expansive sport and recreation spaces and picnic areas. East Austin residents are thrilled to have a large park with numerous amenities for enjoyment. If you would like more information on visiting or supporting the park, please visit the Austin Parks Foundation's website, www.austinparks.org.



A jogger enjoys the new park trails



Help Austin Become a Wildfire-Adapted Community



Currently, most of East Austin is fortunate to be experiencing a low risk of wildfire; however, the potential threat is higher in nearby areas. Central Texas communities, including those just 25 miles east of Austin in the Bastrop Pines, experienced a devastating wildfire season just two years ago. Regional agencies are taking steps to prevent such tragic losses in the future.

Following the 2011 fires, the City of Austin, Travis County, and other agencies partnered to form the Joint Wildfire Task Force. The task force aims to make Central Texas a fire-adapted community through public education, selective vegetation management and effective emergency response. A fire-adapted community means that residents, firefighters, land managers and civic leaders act collectively to prepare for the next wildfire and help prevent future catastrophes. Although the risk of wildfires can't be eliminated, homeowners can greatly reduce the probability of harm through sound decision-making and responsible actions. Preparing for a wildfire allows residents to take personal responsibility for protecting themselves, their families, and their property. Do your part to prevent wildfires! Visit www.austintexas.gov/WildfireEnviroBMPs to learn Environmental Best Management Practices for Wildfire Risk Reduction and to see a Wildfire Risk Summary Report created by the Texas A&M Forest Service.

Austin is in Drought Response Stage 2



Your watering day may have changed. Please see the Drought Response Stage 2 watering restrictions below for information on your watering day.

RESIDENTIAL		COMMERCIAL		PUBLIC SCHOOLS	
Hose-End Sprinklers BEFORE 10 AM OR AFTER 7 PM	Automatic Irrigation BEFORE 5 AM OR AFTER 7 PM	Hose-End Sprinklers BEFORE 10 AM OR AFTER 7 PM	Automatic Irrigation BEFORE 5 AM OR AFTER 7 PM	Hose-End Sprinklers BEFORE 10 AM OR AFTER 7 PM	Automatic Irrigation BEFORE 5 AM OR AFTER 7 PM
Even Address Sunday	Even Address Thursday	Even Address Tuesday	Even Address Friday	Monday	
Odd Address Saturday	Odd Address Wednesday				

STAGE 2 WATER RESTRICTIONS

Visit WaterWiseAustin.org or give us a call at (512) 974-2199

How Dry I Am...How Austin Copes with the Drought

The ongoing drought may soon become the worst on record for Central Texas, replacing the historic drought of the 1950s. Our region is facing a serious situation because of this drought, and no relief is in sight. As of July 10, lakes Travis and Buchanan were only 36 percent full. Without significant rainfall, lake levels will continue dropping. The rains that fell earlier in the year did little to fill the lakes, since much of it soaked into the parched ground. To refill the lakes, approximately 20 inches or more of rain is needed.

Lake Travis is the main source of water for Austin. To conserve this important resource, Austin Water asks everyone to make an extra effort to use water wisely. Follow Austin Water's mandatory Stage 2 restrictions and look for additional ways to reduce water use at home and at work. During Stage 2, landscape watering is allowed only once a week. Be sure to check the current watering day and times for your address, since they might be different from what you followed in the past. Last fall, Austin Water revised the Water Conservation Code, which sets the watering schedule and other water restrictions. These changes allow Austin to better respond to long-term drought, while also preserving the tree canopy and other vegetation.

To learn more about the Stage 2 water restrictions, stay informed about drought conditions, find water-saving tips, or get information on available water conservation rebate programs, visit www.WaterWiseAustin.org, or call (512) 974-2199. If the drought continues to worsen, additional water use restrictions may be needed. Keep an eye on the website to stay up-to-date on the latest restriction level.

Rain Gardens Sprout Up in East Austin

Mr. Robert Martinez, a retired engineer and founder and former president of MWM Design, is a well-known community organizer who has been actively involved in helping Austin's schools. In 2012, Mr. Martinez partnered with the City's Watershed Protection Department, local businesses, and students, parents, and staff from Barbara Jordan Elementary and Gus Garcia Middle School to construct a rain garden on each school's campus.

A rain garden is a low-lying area that absorbs the water that washes from roofs, sidewalks, and driveways. As the Austin landscape becomes increasingly covered in hard surfaces, rainwater has less opportunity to soak into the ground. Water washes over hard surfaces rapidly, picking up pollutants (such as motor oil and litter) and washing the pollution into our creeks. This fast-moving water also causes flooding and erosion. Rain gardens slow water down and help keep it on the land. Rain gardens hold water and allow it to slowly soak into the soil. These gardens can be created in a variety of shapes and sizes and are typically planted with colorful native plants and grasses. They are an attractive addition to any outdoor space and greatly benefit the community through water quality protection and flood prevention.

Mr. Martinez first learned about rain gardens at a seminar sponsored by the Watershed Protection Department. His leadership in building volunteer-created rain gardens has helped protect the environment and provided enjoyable opportunities for community members to interact with schools and for students and parents to spend time together.

Learn how to make your own rain garden and about resources provided to schools at www.austintexas.gov/raingardens.



Volunteers at Gus Garcia Middle School with former mayor, Gus Garcia (top row, 6th from left)

Contributed by Kevin O'Brien, a junior at Texas Tech University and Summer Intern with the City of Austin's Watershed Protection Department

EASTSIDE ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS



Where to Call for Pollution Information & Assistance

CITY OF AUSTIN NUMBERS

General Non-Emergency
311

Health & Human Services Department
512-972-5600

Austin Enviro Mechanics Program
512-974-2550

East Austin Environmental Initiative
512-974-1893

Pollution Hotline (24 Hr.)
512-974-2550

Household Hazardous Waste program
512-974-4343

Public Information Office
512-974-2220

Solid Waste Services Customer Service
512-494-9400

Stormwater Drainage/Erosion Complaints
512-974-3355

Austin Water Utility
(Sewage complaints 24 Hr.)
512-972-1000

Zoning and Building Use Complaints
512-974-2875

Austin Brownfield Revitalization Office
512-974-1954

OTHER NUMBERS

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
512-339-2929

Lower Colorado River Authority
512-473-3307

CITY OF AUSTIN ELECTED OFFICIALS

Mayor Lee Leffingwell 512-974-2250
Mayor Pro Tem Sheryl Cole 512-974-2266

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Chris Riley 512-974-2260
Laura Morrison 512-974-2258
Kathie Tovo 512-974-2255
Bill Spellman 512-974-2256
Mike Martinez 512-974-2264



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Volunteers Pitch In to Improve Montopolis Bridge Area

From the Montopolis Bridge, the Colorado River begins an amazing, 200-mile, unobstructed journey to the Gulf of Mexico. The green space and riverbank near the bridge are popular recreational spaces, and the natural area had degraded from heavy use over time. This year, Austin Youth River Watch (AYRW), a local non-profit organization, spearheaded two volunteer events to educate the community about the site's ecological importance and to help restore the area's natural beauty and function.

In January, AYRW partnered with Keep Austin Beautiful and the City's Watershed Protection Department to host a Day of Service in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Nearly 70 volunteers picked up litter under the bridge and in the Colorado River Wildlife Sanctuary. AYRW high school participants taught volunteers how to test water quality by using testing kits and by identifying a variety of aquatic insects.

In June, AYRW held a service day in conjunction with local writer and historian Fred McGhee and volunteers from the sustainability consulting group Environmental Resources Management (ERM). Volunteers had a great experience planting native grasses to restore denuded areas along the shoreline and learning about the history of the area and water quality testing.

AYRW will be planning more volunteer events in the Montopolis Bridge area. If you'd like to learn about the organization or get involved in future events, please visit www.ayrw.org.



Community Corner

The Watershed Protection Department's Pollution Prevention staff asked East Austin residents to identify their top environmental concerns. Here are a few:



Katelyn Jones- East Austin resident

The City could provide ongoing information about the composting bins distributed by Austin Resource Recovery. Many bins are going unused.



Karim Manashya- business owner

Homeless people are removing trash from dumpsters - the trash ends up in the street and washes into storm drains.



John Davidson- metal worker

Austin Resource Recovery's bulk trash collection timeframe is too long. People pick through curbside items, and trash ends up in the street.

Based on citizens' reported concerns, the Pollution Prevention team targets areas for increased educational outreach; investigates individual properties to determine if enforcement actions are needed; and coordinates, as needed, with other City departments and programs. At any time (24 hours/7 days), citizens can report suspected environmental contamination by calling 512-974-2550 or report illegal dump sites by calling 3-1-1. For more information on the Pollution Prevention program, visit www.austintexas.gov/pollutionprevention.

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