

Boardwalk Trail at Lady Bird Lake

Frequently Asked Questions - Environmental

1. Isn't this project in the floodplain? Are you allowed to build in the floodplain?

Yes, this project is located in the 100-year floodplain. While most development is prohibited and/or restricted in these areas, City of Austin regulations allow for Parkland improvements (such as hike and bike trails) within floodplains of the Lady Bird Lake watershed.

2. Will the Boardwalk bridges cause more flooding at the creek outlets (East Bouldin, Blunn, Harper's and the unnamed drainage west of 1818 Lakeshore)?

No, the Boardwalk Trail is being designed so that there will be minimal impact to the floodplain footprint and elevations. The elevation of the boardwalk over these tributaries may be slightly higher to ensure that storm water flow will not be restricted from entering Lady Bird Lake.

3. Won't the Boardwalk piers and handrail catch debris and impact flooding?

The Boardwalk Trail, including the piers and railing, is being designed to withstand significant flood events. The piers for the elevated portions of the trail have been designed to deflect flood debris and are typically spaced 20' apart to minimize the opportunity for flood debris to become trapped. The handrails will be made of galvanized steel arranged horizontally and designed to survive water forces from the larger flood events required to reach this elevation. Handrail sections are designed to be easily replaced if damaged.

4. Is an Environmental study required for this project?

Yes, multiple environmental studies have been completed for the Boardwalk Trail project. These include a hydrogeologic setting review, a threatened and endangered species and general wildlife habitat survey, cultural and historical reviews, vegetation assessments, various tree surveys, a Critical Environmental Features survey, an Ordinary High Water Mark survey and wetlands delineations. These studies are required as part of the various permitting processes.

5. Numerous fish and wildlife live along the edge of the lake; won't the Boardwalk Trail affect this sensitive river bank environment?

The preliminary alignment of the Boardwalk Trail has been adjusted to minimize the impacts along the river bank (riparian) zone. The shoreline that will be impacted is limited to the land-to-water transition points. An environmental protection and restoration plan is part of the permit.

6. Will this project disturb the waterfowl in the lake?

Disturbance to waterfowl should be temporary and limited to the construction phase of the Boardwalk Trail. Surveys for nests will be conducted prior to construction to avoid interference with waterfowl nesting cycles. In the open water, boardwalk construction will be moderately paced and birds will have ample opportunity to seek refuge or alternative feeding locations.

7. Will you be removing trees or plants that migrating birds use for nesting?

We don't think so, but surveys for nests will be conducted prior to construction to avoid interference with waterfowl (and other birds) reproductive cycles. If nesting sites must be removed or disturbed, construction schedules will be restricted accordingly. The project will include a tree and ground vegetation restoration plan generated as a collaborative effort among the various review agencies.

8. Are there any threatened or endangered species affected by the proposed trail?

No; extensive field surveys have been conducted as a part of the design effort. To our knowledge there are no threatened or endangered species nor their suitable preferred habitat, within the project limits.

9. The Blunn Creek outlet includes wetlands; are these areas protected?

Yes, wetlands adjacent to water bodies are Waters of the United States (WOTUS) and protected by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act through the jurisdictional authority of the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Outside of the Central Business District (CBD) the City of Austin considers wetlands to be Critical Environmental Features (CEF) and has additional municipal regulation in place to protect these features from development.

10. How can you build in wetlands without causing permanent damage?

Generally, construction activities that change the function of a wetland or alter water flow regimes within and around wetlands are prohibited. The Boardwalk Trail will be elevated well above the water and the wetland areas with handrails to discourage foot traffic in these sensitive areas. Extensive protection and special construction efforts will be made so that the general functions of the wetland areas near the Boardwalk Trail will be retained and enhanced. Restorative efforts for wetlands will commence immediately following the boardwalk construction in these areas.

11. Are you cutting down any trees?

Yes, however, the trail is being designed to avoid tree removal as much as practicable in coordination with City Arborist and Urban Forestry staff; no Heritage trees are being removed. Size, species, condition and other criteria were evaluated in the alignment selection process giving preference to those larger, older and more valuable trees. Trees will be replaced according to specifications set by the City's Tree Ordinance, the Parks Department's Urban Forestry Program Manager and the USACE vegetation restoration plan comments.

12. How are the trees in the Woodland Trail segment (below Edgecliff Terrace) going to be protected?

The City of Austin has standard tree-protection procedures and specifications to guard trees and their root systems during construction. In addition, the design and construction specifications have been enhanced for construction in this sensitive area. The trail may change from decomposed granite (DG) surface to an elevated surface at key tree locations to further protect these root zone areas. During construction large wooden mats will be placed as a temporary road surface to distribute the vehicle loads and minimize compaction of the root zone areas.

13. Will there be any landscaping improvements?

Yes, modest planting is planned at bridgeheads and in the Lakeshore Park entry area. Restorative planting are a required part of the Boardwalk Trail plans. Riparian rehabilitation will include vegetative replacement and enhancement to repair and improve the habitat in and along the shoreline of Lady Bird Lake within the project limits. In all cases native or adapted plants, mostly from Austin's Grow Green Plant Guide, will be used.

14. Won't dredging and construction pollute Lady Bird Lake?

No, the current boardwalk design does not call for dredging of Lady Bird Lake. Boardwalk construction over the water will take place from a barge and will be limited to the drilling of shafts and filling forms with concrete to create support piers. Spoils from shaft drilling will be captured and properly disposed or reused in accordance with existing State regulations which also call for

strict pollution control methods such as silt curtains. The remainder of construction activities over the water will be constructed upon the support piers.

15. What permits are required for this project?

The project will be coordinated with the United States Army Corps of Engineers who is the key permitting authority. Additional coordination efforts include the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Historical Commission, Texas Department of Transportation, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, State of Texas General Land Office, and the City of Austin Watershed Protection and Development Review Departments for permits and related clearances.

16. Are there public hearings for the Federal permits?

In all cases the project will require a review (permit) from the United States Army Corps of Engineers. The construction funding is not federally sponsored and a Nationwide Permit will be used that does not require public hearings.

17. Will you need to build water quality and stormwater management facilities?

No, typically these regulated stormwater requirements are triggered by a change in impervious cover that increases run-off within a watershed. Park trails are not considered impervious cover so no significant water quality or detention facilities are required.

18. Are sustainable materials planned for the Boardwalk?

Yes, the recommended materials were chosen based upon their sustainability, construction cost and long term maintainability. Materials that are locally sourced (concrete, local limestone, DG) or have a recycled content (steel, possibly fly ash) make up the bulk of the design. The final selections will reflect considerations of aesthetics, environment and safety.

19. Will there be lights on the Trail? Will they be energy efficient?

Yes, but trail lighting will be limited to areas where it is needed for safety and/or security. Typically the elevated portions of the trail will have low levels of illumination on the trail surface; there will not be "street" lights on poles. Energy efficient LED lights will be used instead incandescent bulbs.

20. What is being done to help with water conservation?

The vegetation used on the project will be native species which have minimal watering requirements. The first two years after project completion will require temporary irrigation along the trail. We are planning on use of temporary water from Lady Bird Lake in lieu of potable water for these efforts.