

Open Space Working Group
Report and Possible Action on Items
for the
Bond Election Advisory Task Force

Members: Estrella De Leon, Tom Nuchols, Jeff Smith and Rob Walker, chair

February 8, 2018

- I. Purpose - 2018 election bond funding for
 - A. Watershed protection land acquisition (\$72 million), and
 - B. The Parks and Recreation Department (\$45 million)

- II. **Watershed Protection land acquisition (\$72,000,000 request)**
 - A. Our water quality is at risk, and the available and affordable land is diminishing. See the Edwards Aquifer recharge contributing zone slides, attached.
 - 1. There has been significant development growth in the watershed since 1998
 - 2. See the 1998, 2006 and 2017 slides of maps showing the increase in developed tracts of land in the watershed area over those years. Time is running out and land prices are rising.

 - B. Objective: Limit development to 10% impervious cover in the Edwards Aquifer recharge and contributing (source-water protection) zones. This requires permanently protecting 100,000 acres of land to mitigate flooding and to protect water quality in the creeks and the aquifer.
 - 1. Presently only 28,000 acres are permanently protected.
 - 2. We recommend \$72 million to acquire an estimated 4,300 acres – about 6% of the 72,000 shortfall (\$36 million for acquiring fee simple tracts and \$36 million for acquiring conservation easement acreage).
 - 3. Popular proposition with the voters - 62% average voter approval in 4 bond elections from 1998 through 2012
 - 4. Good investment of bond funding.
 - a. Of the bonds approved from 2006 through 2013, Drainage and Open Space funding has the highest percentage of funds expended to date of any of the bond propositions - 96%.
 - b. The majority of funding is spent within the first 2-3 years of a bond program.
 - 5. Currently, bonds are the only funding source for significant Watershed Open Space land purchases

III. Parks and Recreation Department (PARD) bond funding (\$45,000,000 request)

A. The issues:

1. Austin is becoming increasingly deficient in parkland. The standard is 24 acres per 1,000 population. We're now below 20 acres, a deficiency of about 5,000 acres (please see the attached graph).
2. Our Council has no funds to act quickly to secure beautiful tracts and open spaces that become available; The Grove problem.

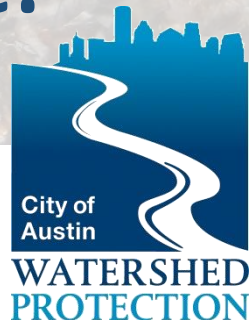
B. We recommend \$45 million for parkland acquisition, allocated as follows:

1. **\$10 million for 200 acres in Oak Hill** out Highway 71 for a metropolitan destination park.
2. **\$5 million for 5-10 infill parks** in park-deficient areas of our City.
3. **\$5 million for 10 miles of greenbelt** including completing the northern Walnut Creek park and trail system
4. **\$25 million for a parkland reserve fund** to help preserve or acquire strategic tracts as they become available.
 - a. This seed money will give our Council leverage to act fast on tracts that come on the market. We don't want a repeat of The Grove.
 - b. It will help attract grant money and private donor partnering to acquire and preserve beautiful open spaces for our Citizens, including:
 - **Lions Municipal Golf Course.** Lease expires in 2019. This reserve fund will demonstrate to the University, the State Legislature and private donors that Austin is committed to preserving Muni for parkland, watershed protection, clean air, and recreation. Preserving Muni will give Austin added leverage in preserving the Brackenridge lake front tract, one of the first areas of affordable housing in our city
 - **State and AISD properties, e.g., Austin State Hospital, Austin State Supported Living Center, and Palm School.**
 - **Other parkland acquisition opportunities for destination parks, greenbelt and infill parks**
 - c. The reserve fund may yield an excellent return on investment through judicious sale of portions of acquired properties not used for parks, affordable housing and watershed protection. (Austin could have made millions on The Grove by planning it in a more appropriate manner had we been able to buy it for TXDOT's \$27 million asking price.)
 - d. It will give PARD the flexibility and speed needed when strategic tracts come on the market



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Water Quality Protection Lands Program





Recharge Zone

Swallets showing groundwater directly entering the aquifer

1. Whirlpool swallet showing groundwater directly entering the aquifer.

This recharge swale was injected with Eosine dye on 8-6-02 at Cripple Crawfish Cave by Onion Creek. The dye showed up at Barton Springs 17 miles away in less than 3 days. Photo by David Johns.

2. Another swallet. If the swallets get paved over, where will our aquifer water come from? Or, if the contributing water is polluted, then what?

Land Impacts: Developed vs. Undeveloped

Developed land:

- Pollution in runoff
- Increases flooding
- Reduces recharge
- Decreases creek base flow
- Impacts are irreversible



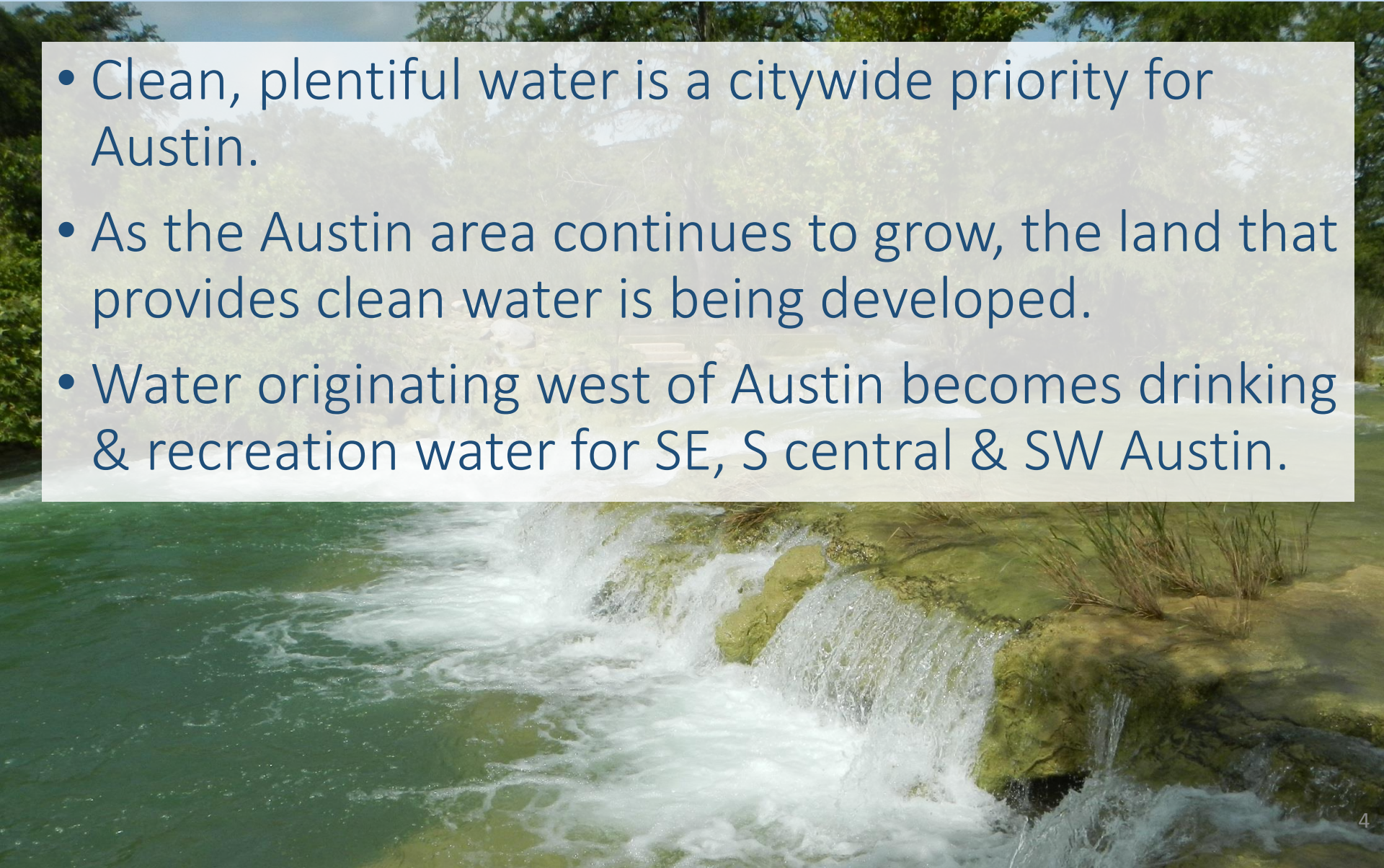
Undeveloped land protects water resources:

- Cleaner runoff
- Mitigates flooding
- Maintains recharge

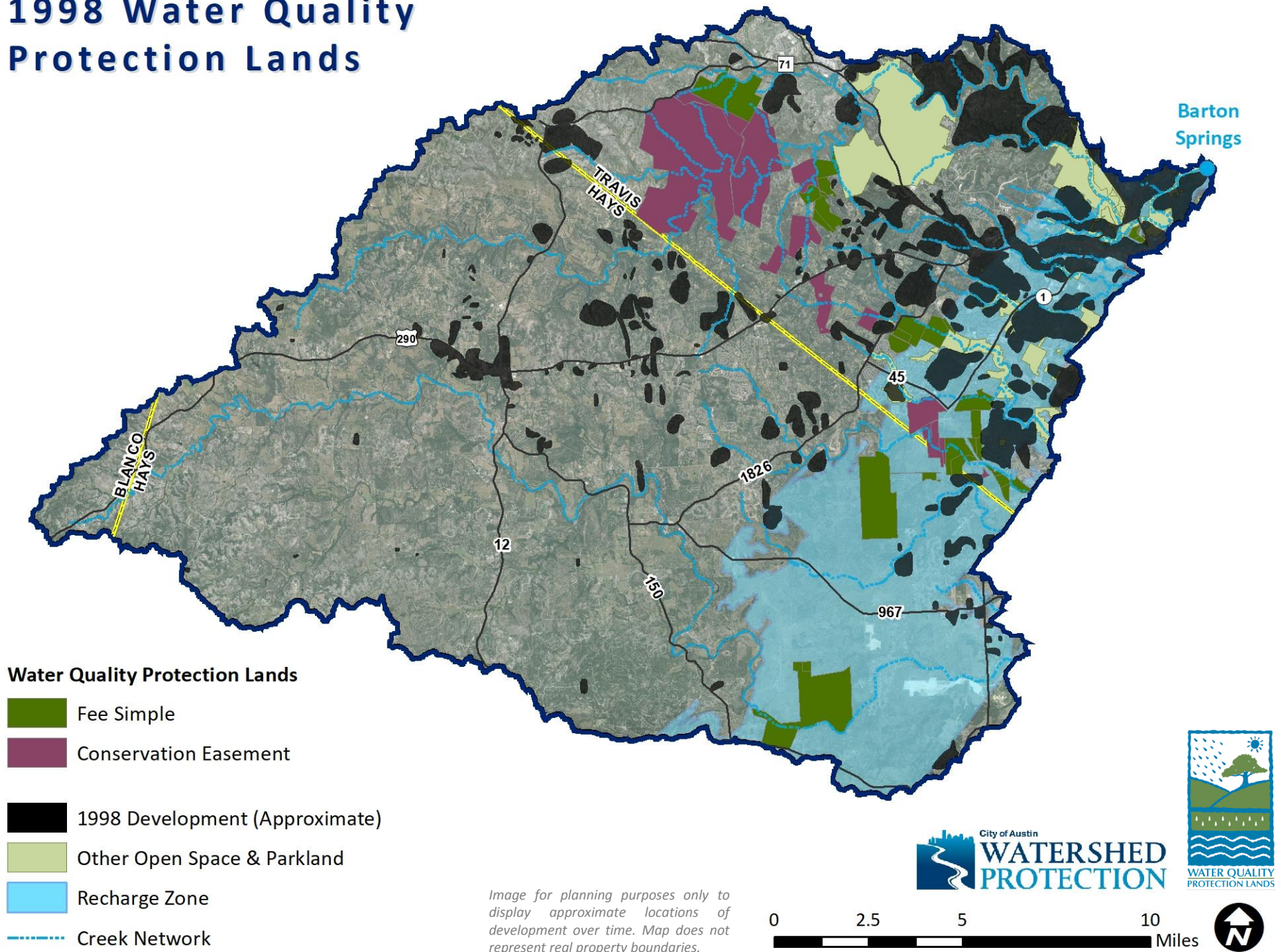


Edwards Aquifer recharge & contributing zones

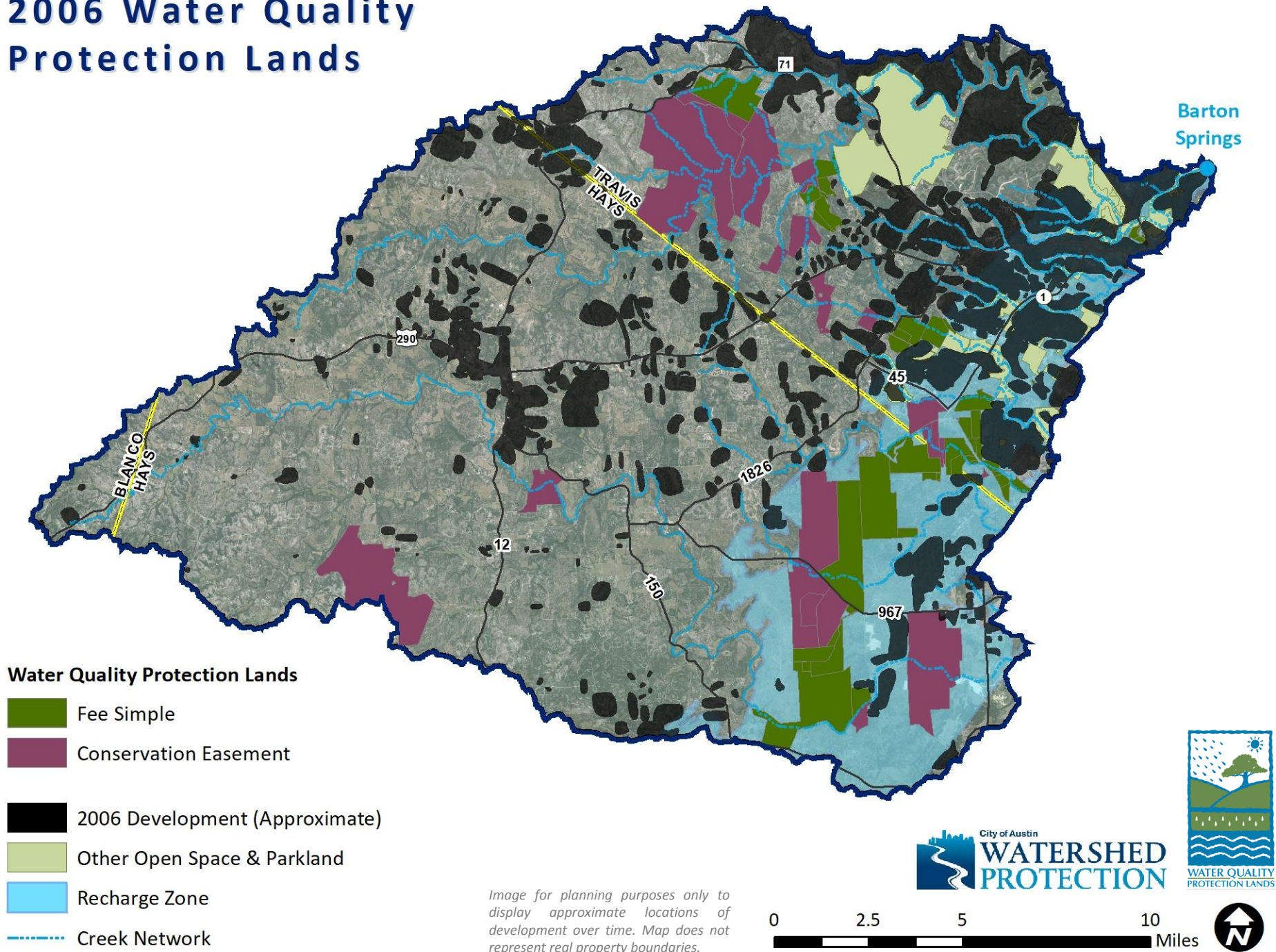
- Clean, plentiful water is a citywide priority for Austin.
- As the Austin area continues to grow, the land that provides clean water is being developed.
- Water originating west of Austin becomes drinking & recreation water for SE, S central & SW Austin.



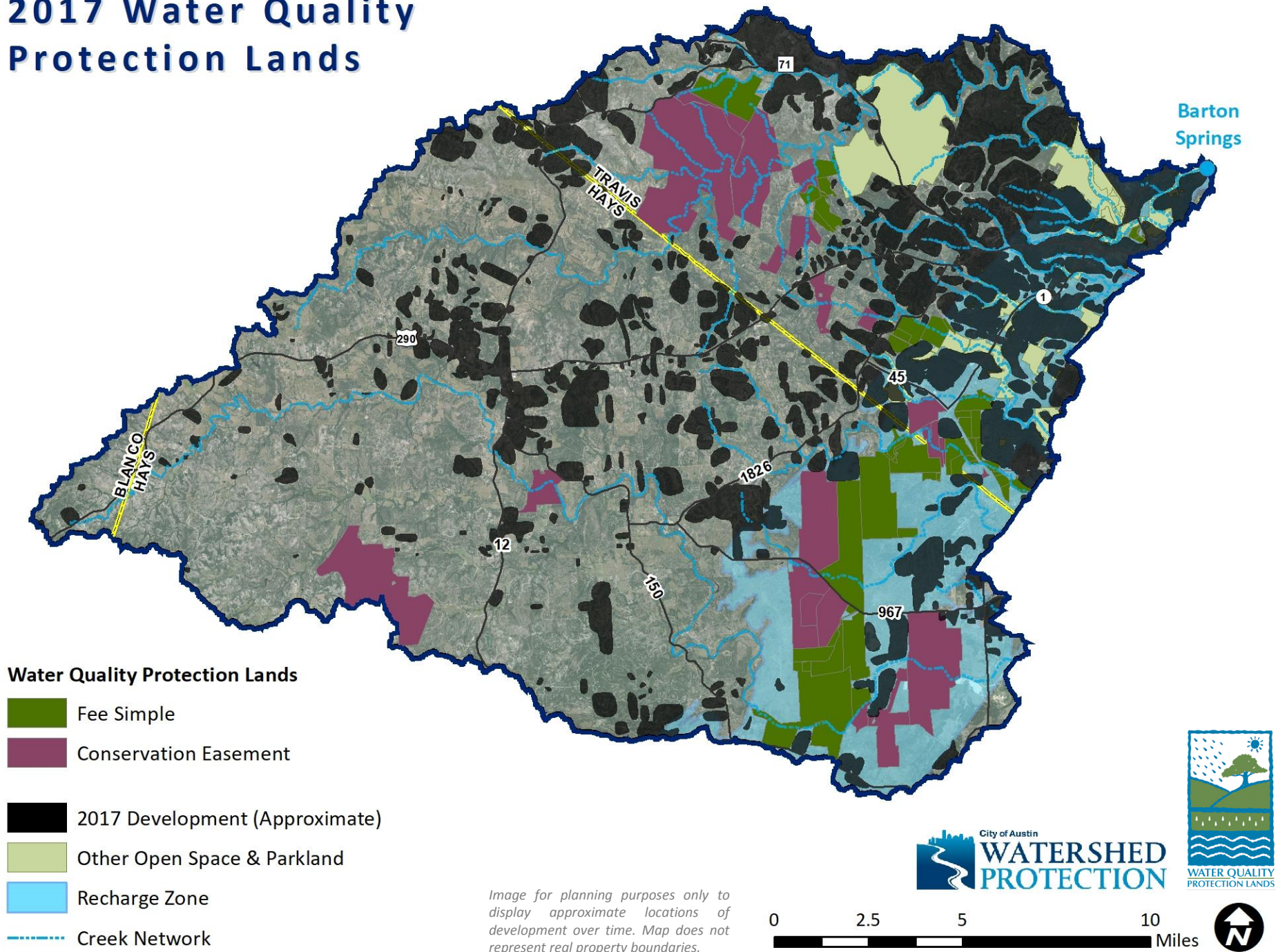
1998 Water Quality Protection Lands



2006 Water Quality Protection Lands



2017 Water Quality Protection Lands



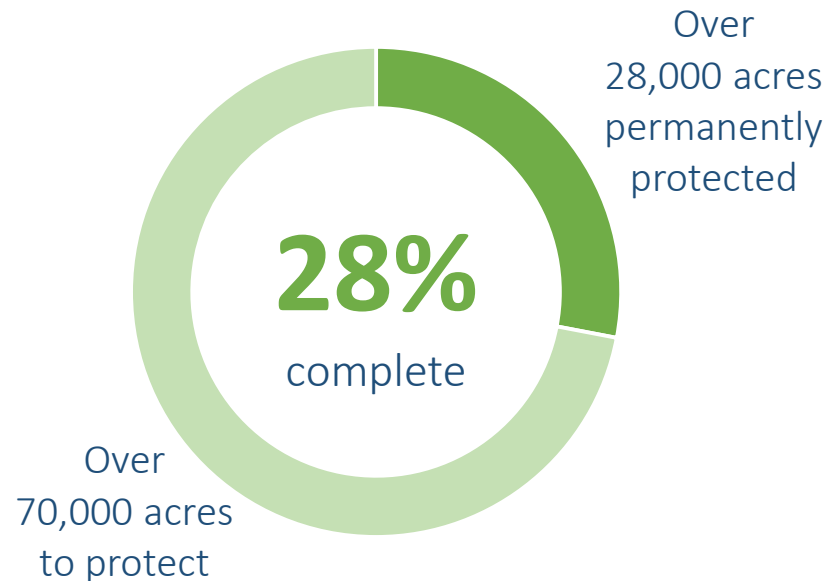
Watershed Protection Open Space Goal

Protection of critical areas in Source Water Protection Area to preserve or mitigate water quality and quantity through the strategic acquisition of land along main channels, tributaries, and significantly large upland tracts.

Long-Term Protection Goal:

Maintain overall impervious cover percentage **at under 10%***

- Permanently protect up to 100,000 acres of land in the Source Water Protection Area

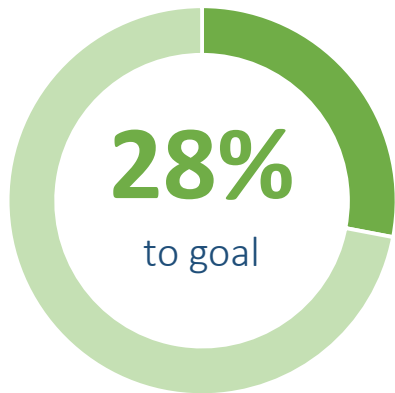


**Irreversible water quality impacts observed when total impervious cover exceeds 10%*

2018 Bond Needs Assessment: Funding Scenarios

More funding = more leveraging opportunities and
more permanent land protection

Current Status

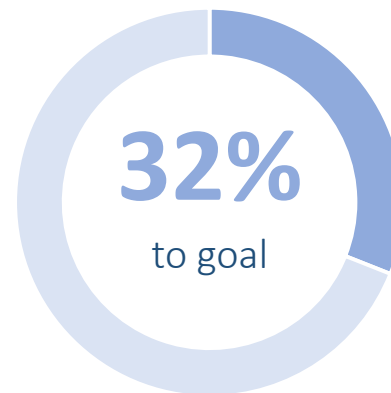


\$20M Scenario



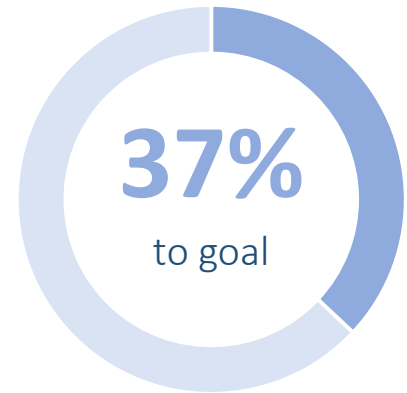
+800 acres

\$72M Scenario



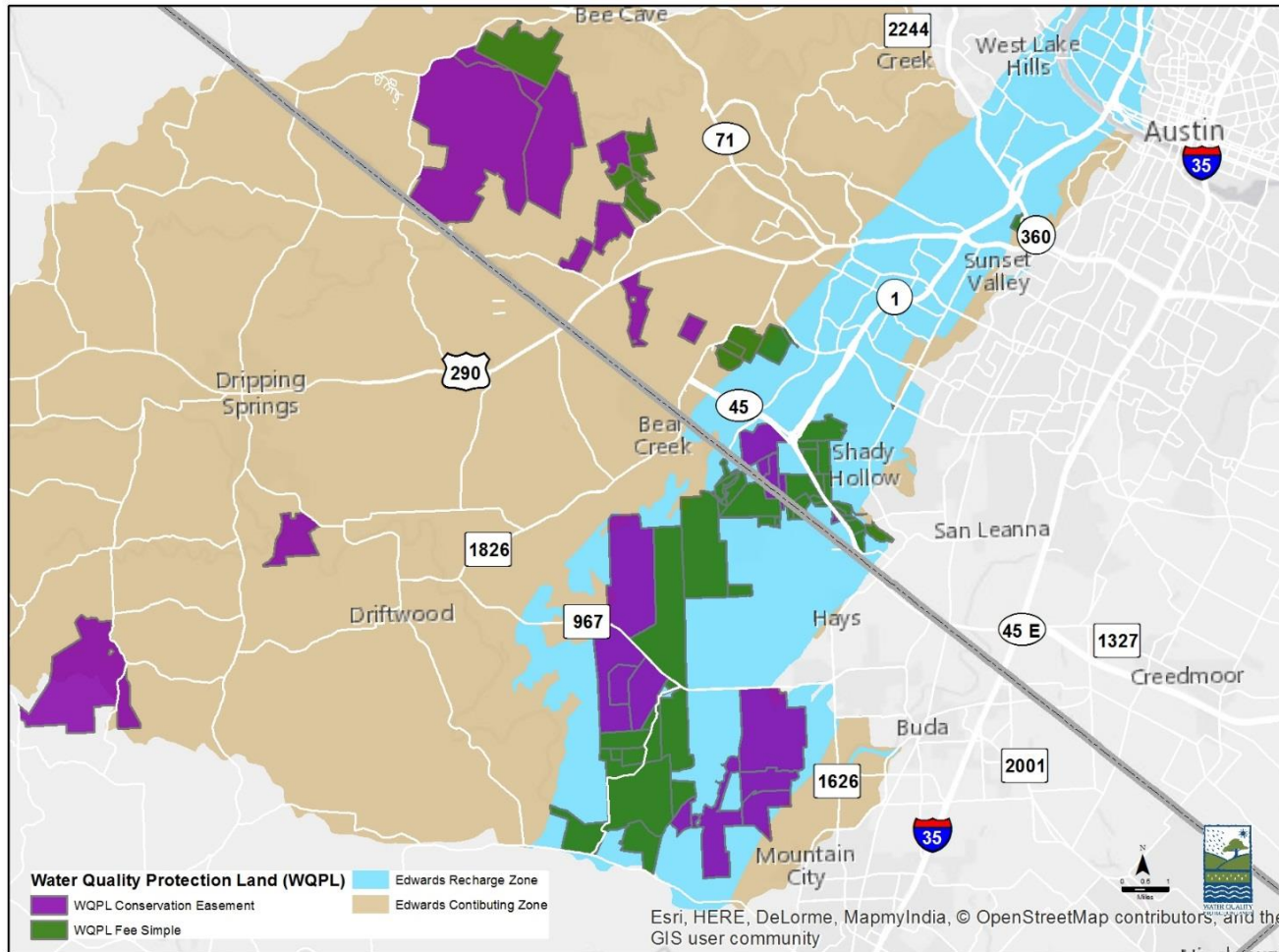
+4,300 acres

\$150M Scenario



+9,000 acres

Water Quality Protection Lands Program



Contributing Zone

- **7% protected**
- **2/3** Barton Springs Zone outside Austin's jurisdiction
- Development regulations in other jurisdictions are less protective of water quality

Recharge Zone

- **25% protected**

Irreversible water quality impacts observed when total impervious cover exceeds 10%

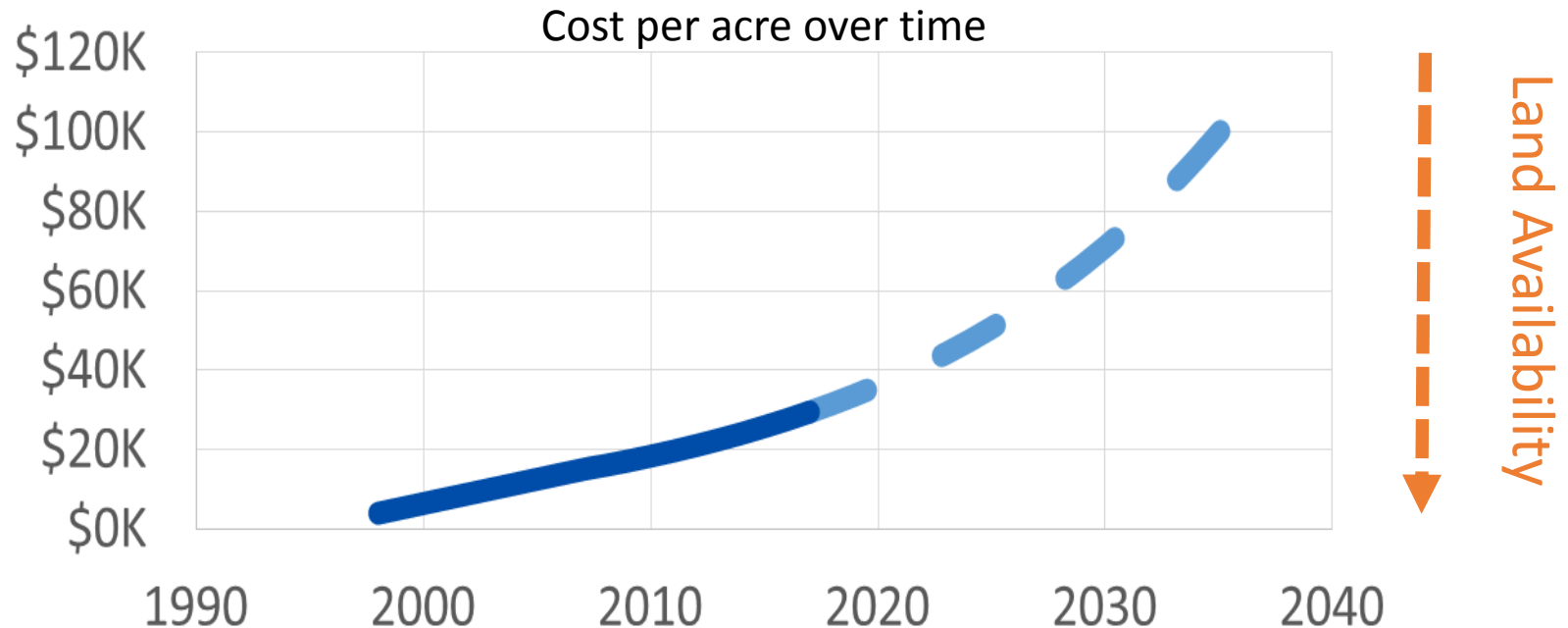
High Voter Appeal/Rising Land Costs

All Four Water Quality Protection bonds voter-approved:

May 1998 - Nov 2012 *62% average approval vote*

4 elections total: \$157.6M for 28,354 acres plus partnership contributions of \$24M = \$181.6M (\$6,405/acre average)

Need for Watershed acquisition now



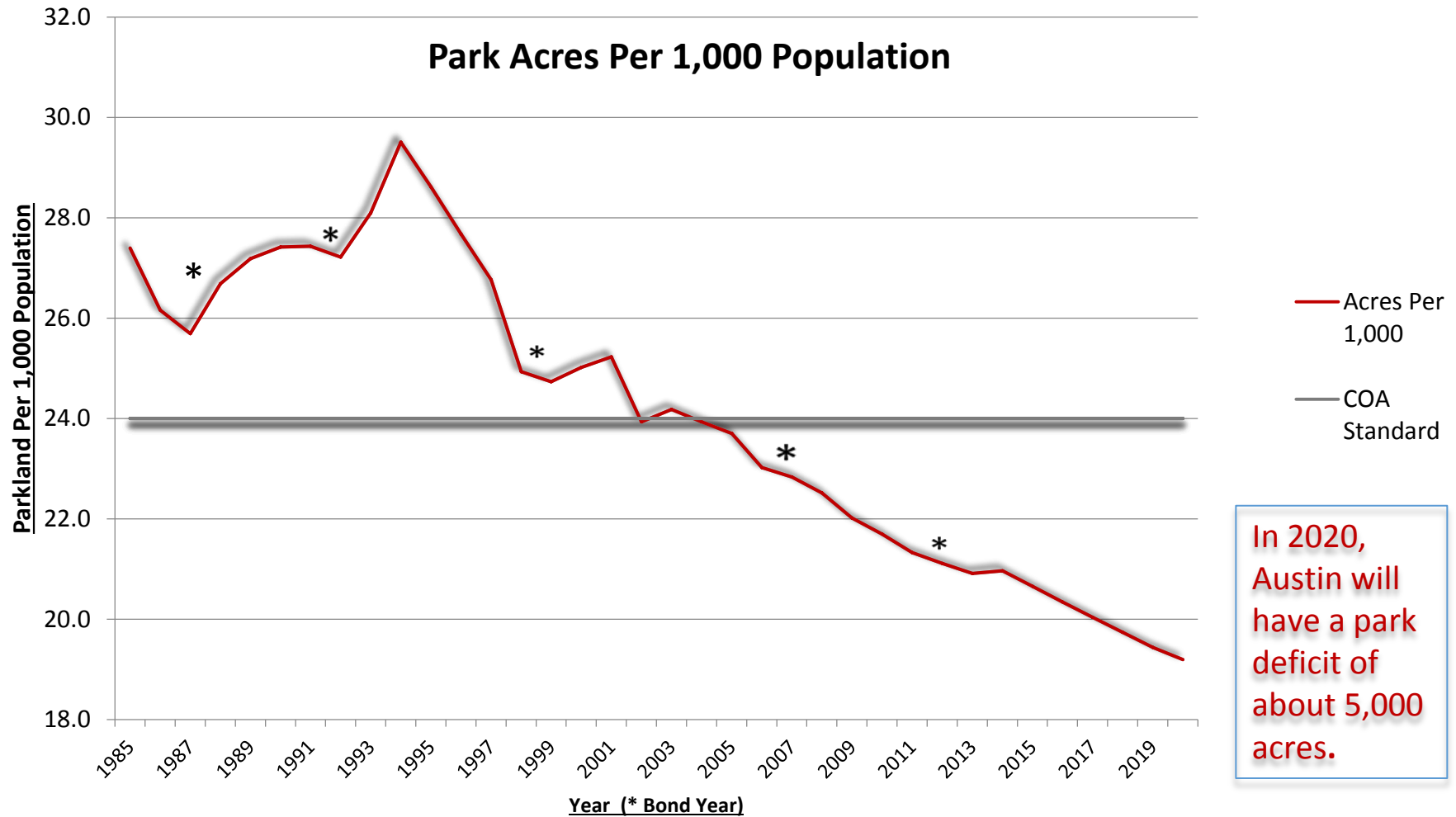


St. Edwards Park

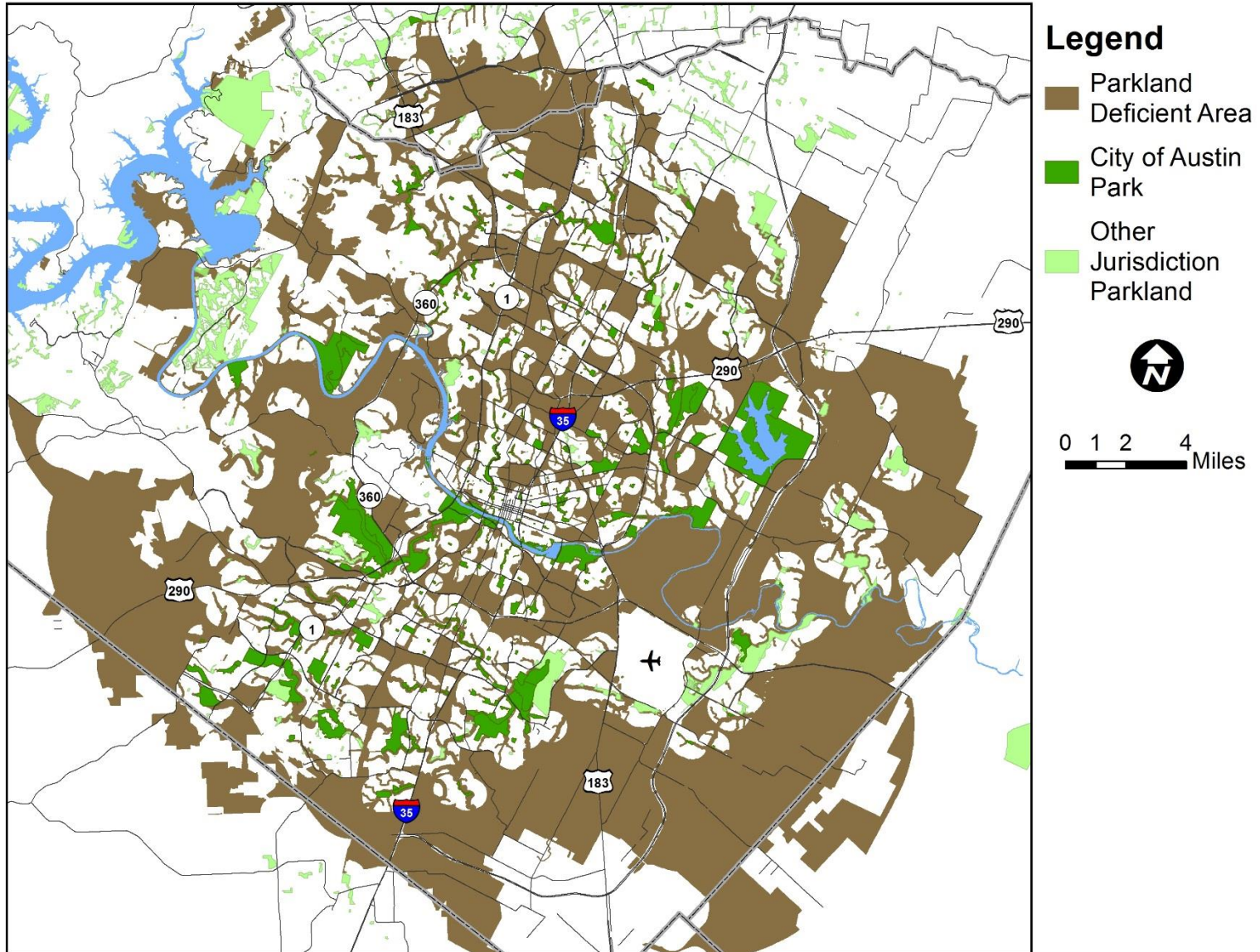
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Parkland Acquisition Fund Overview

How park-deficient are we?



Where Austin is park-deficient



Infill parks to serve existing residents

Located in park-deficient areas.

The Imagine Austin goal for access to parks is:

- ¼ mile walk in urban core
- ½ mile walk outside the urban core

Pocket parks: up to 2 acres; Neighborhood parks: 2–30 acres

*Tom Lasseter-South Lamar
Neighborhood Park*



Parkland bonds and purchasing power have diminished over time; our proposal

Bond Year	Funds	Acres	Parks Acquired, Expanded or Proposed		
			Destination Parks, Sports Complexes & Centers	Neighborhood & Pocket Parks	Greenbelt miles
1998	\$40,000,000	2,045	7	3	8
2006	\$20,000,000	264	5	4	3
2012	\$ 4,000,000	99	0	3	3
2018	\$20,000,000	300	1	5-10	10
2018	\$25,000,000	Reserve fund to help preserve and acquire beautiful, strategic tracts for our Citizens like Muny & the State Assisted Living Center			

Greenbelts to mitigate the impacts of urbanization on Austin residents

- Minimize flood potential
- Increase access to nature
- Connect neighborhoods to parks by trails



Country Club Creek Greenbelt

How bond funding plays a crucial role

- **Bond Funding is critical to:**
 - ❑ Acquiring metropolitan parkland, critical gaps in greenbelts, neighborhood parks and pocket parks
 - ❑ Giving our City a reserve fund as seed money to acquire and preserve major tracts and open spaces. It will help attract grant money and private donor partnering for those major acquisitions
- **Opportunities to acquire and preserve beautiful parcels for our Citizens are quickly disappearing, like The Grove and MUNY.**

Reserve Fund for Acquiring Strategic Tracts

- **A \$25 million parkland reserve fund is critical for giving:**
 - ❑ PARD & Council flexibility, speed & leverage in negotiating for beautiful strategic tracts like MUNY and the State Hospital

