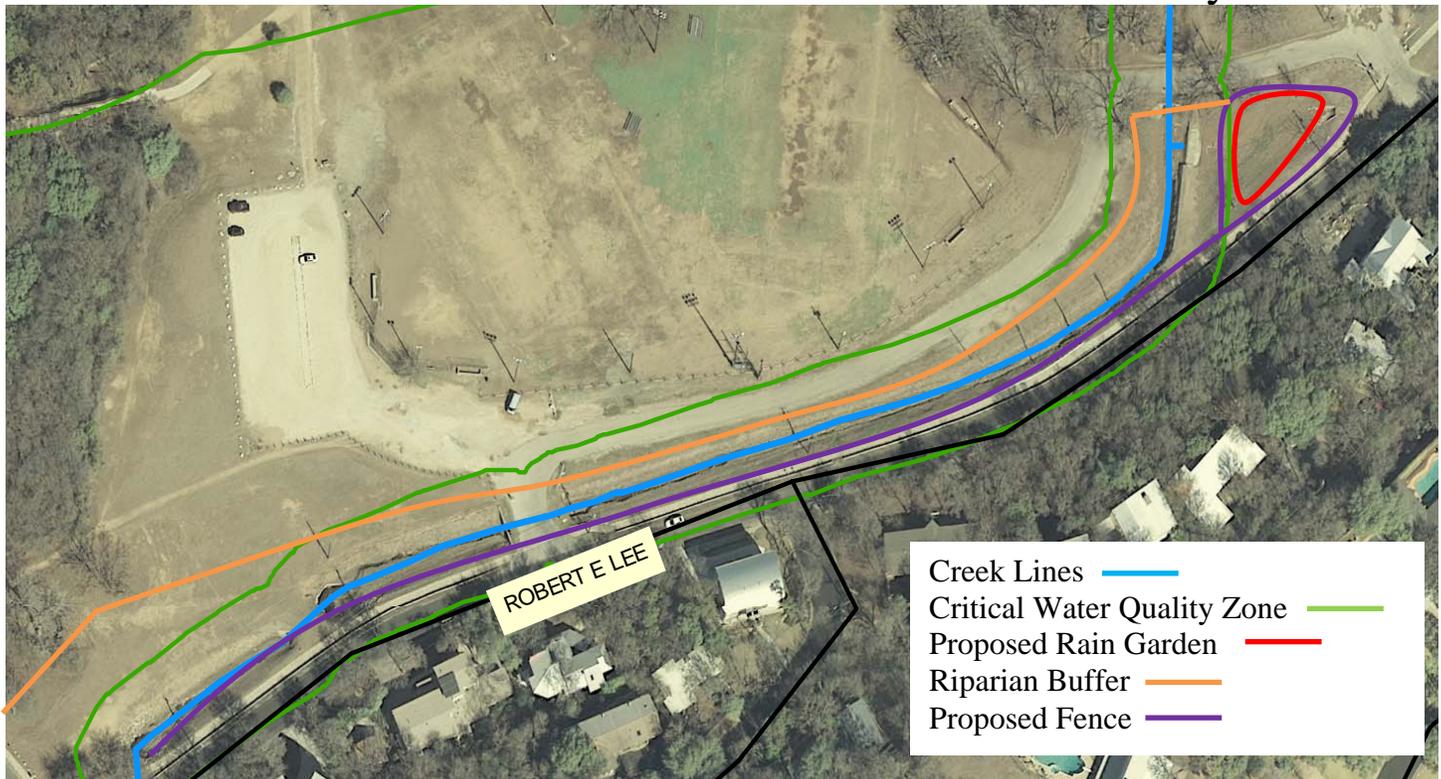


Creek Buffer Restoration: Robert E. Lee Tributary



Introduction: Robert E. Lee tributary flows through the eastern portion of Zilker Park before emptying into Barton creek at Lady Bird Lake. This small tributary has been routinely mowed and maintained with minimal vegetation. Through a joint effort between Parks and Recreation (PARD) and Watershed Protection (WPD), Robert E. Lee tributary has been selected as one of several creeks for a new “No Mow” initiative. While appropriate in some areas for public access and recreation, repeated mowing along the stream bank is not conducive to a healthy riparian zone and creek.

What is the long-term goal?

To establish a healthy riparian buffer on each side of the creek, with a woody canopy, understory, and diverse and dense ground cover while providing frequent open view corridors between 3 and 7 ft.

Why is a streamside buffer important?

Establishing this buffer, with its mix of grasses, forbs/wildflowers, shrubs and trees, will allow for a variety of benefits to the park’s ecosystem, including:

- Filtering pollutants out of storm runoff before it reaches the creek
- Limiting erosion, protecting creek banks and keeping sediment out of the creek
- Providing a “sponge” that will slow run-off and enhance baseflow
- Providing shade and maintaining moderate water temperatures
- Providing habitat and food for a diverse group of animals, both on land and in the water

Management Approach:

- Establish a “no mow” area along the stream channel with a goal of a 10-30 foot riparian buffer along the north side of the tributary. This is a flexible buffer, depending on trails, park infrastructure, access areas and/or view corridors.

City of Austin Riparian Restoration

- Allow for passive plant growth in entire buffer area, with additional active plantings where necessary, (native grass, wildflowers, and woody species) following site assessments. Planting activities will be coordinated by WPD, but will rely on stakeholder interest and involvement.
- Periodic trash clean-up, triggered by an agreed upon trash threshold, measured using the WPD Trash index score sheet and implemented by WPD (Field Operations-Easter Seals).
- Periodic “weed/invasive management” to address nuisance problems that may arise, based on stakeholder input and WPD site assessment, implemented by WPD (American Youth Works).
- Educational and demarcation signage where appropriate and/or requested (Collaboration between WPD, PARD and stakeholders).



Current mowed status



Improved condition (transitional)

Enhancement Options:

- Establish a designated rain garden with wetland vegetation (both active/ passive vegetation growth).
- Extend fence along Robert E. Lee rd. and around newly established rain garden

What should park users expect?

- As the plant community recovers from the mowing disturbance, some areas may have taller, much less manicured vegetation. It can take between 5 and 10 years to develop a diverse vegetation community, so patience is important!
- Continued maintenance/mowing along trails, around infrastructure and access areas.
- Signs will be posted explaining the effort.

When will this start?

- We would like to initiate this process at the beginning of the 2012 growing season.

Who will track progress and/or Success?

- WPD will evaluate changes over the next 3-5 years, as the vegetation transitions into more mature communities and implement a range of adaptive riparian restoration practices as needed.
- Volunteers monitoring is encouraged, particularly changes in bird or plant communities, and any other ecological measures of interest.

Questions: Please contact Alex Duncan, WPD, 974-2215, alexander.duncan@austintexas.gov

Website: <http://www.cityofaustin.org/watershed/creekside.htm>