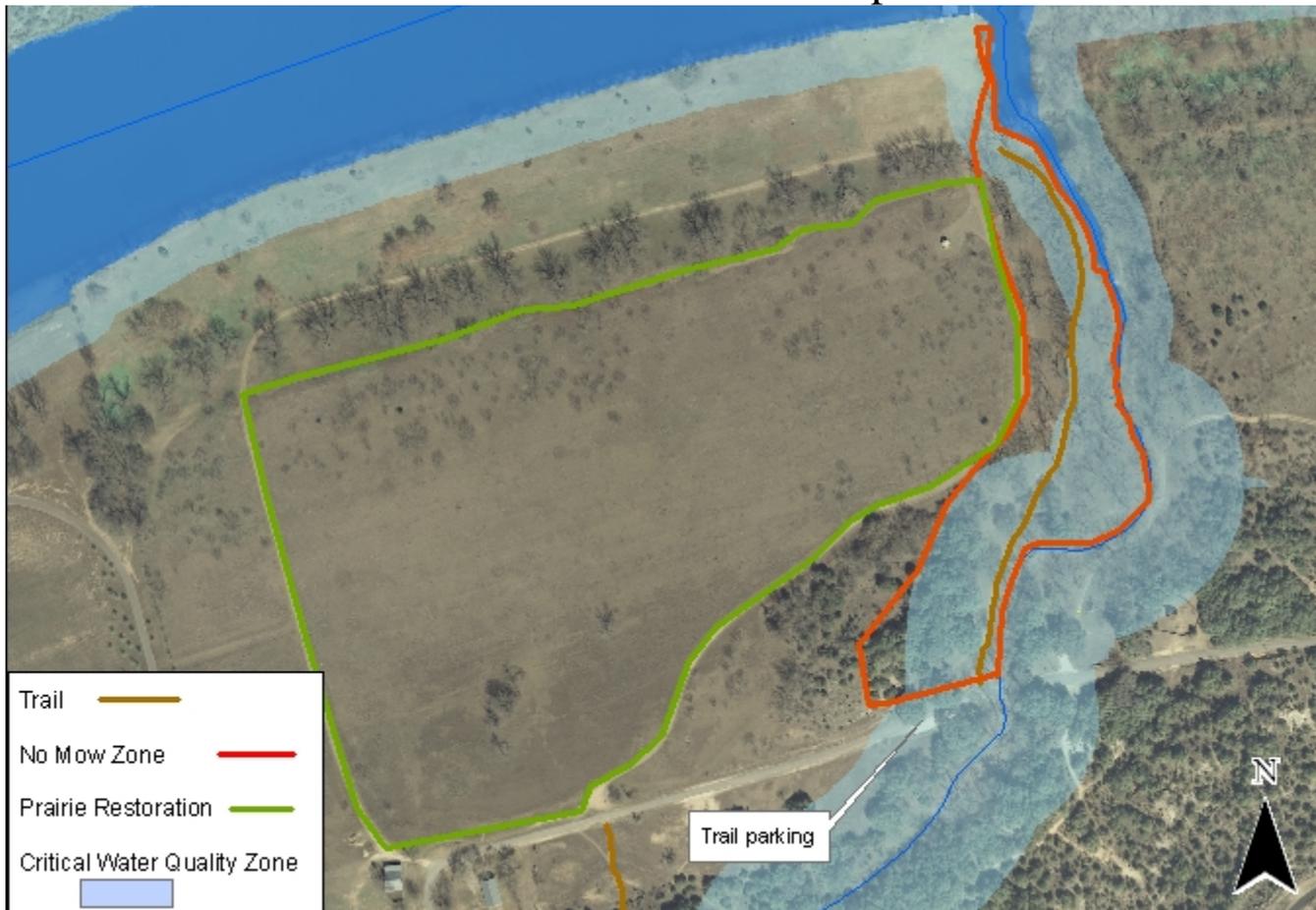


Creek Buffer Restoration: Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park



Introduction: Commons Ford Creek is a small tributary to Lake Austin that runs through Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park. While most of the riparian (streamside) vegetation has been left to develop naturally, the west bank of the creek has been routinely mowed from the water’s edge up hill beyond the trail, as indicated on the above map. Through a joint effort between Parks and Recreation (PARD) and Watershed Protection (WPD), Commons Ford Creek 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

City of Austin Riparian Restoration



Example of mowed riparian zone



Improved riparian condition (transitional)

Management Approach:

- Establish a “no mow” area along the stream channel with a goal of a 50 foot riparian buffer (25 ft on each side of the creek). This is a flexible buffer, depending on trails, park infrastructure, access areas and/or view corridors. The trail through this zone will be closed to all vehicles
- 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).

Enhancement Options:

- Repair areas of trail and creek bank erosion
- Establish a rain garden with wetland vegetation downslope of trail erosion repair
- Plant cypress trees along Lake Austin shoreline, upstream of boat house

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 5 ft on either side of the trail
- 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?

- 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.
- Volunteer monitoring is encouraged, particularly of changes in bird or plant communities, as well as any other ecological measures.

Questions: Please contact Mary Gilroy, WPD, 974-2717, mary.gilroy@austintexas.gov

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