

DRAFT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR
SIMS BAYOU RECREATION TRAIL,
HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, GALVESTON DISTRICT
GALVESTON, TEXAS
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**Draft Environmental Assessment
Sims Bayou Recreation Trail, Harris County, Texas**

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1.0 PROPOSED ACTION

1.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Sims Bayou, Houston, Texas project was authorized by Section 401(a) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1986, amended by Section 103 of the Energy and Water Resources Development Appropriations Act of 1990, and amended by Section 102(bb) of the Water Resources Development Act of 1992 to reduce flood damage in an extensively developed urban area of Harris County in the southern part of Houston (Figure 1). The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Sims Bayou Flood Damage Reduction project was included in the report: *Buffalo Bayou and Tributaries, Texas, Flood Damage Prevention, Interim Report on Sims Bayou, November 1982* (USACE 1982). Work described in the FEIS identified the authorized plan of improvement, including channel design and dimensions, disposal requirement, a recreation plan and other project details.

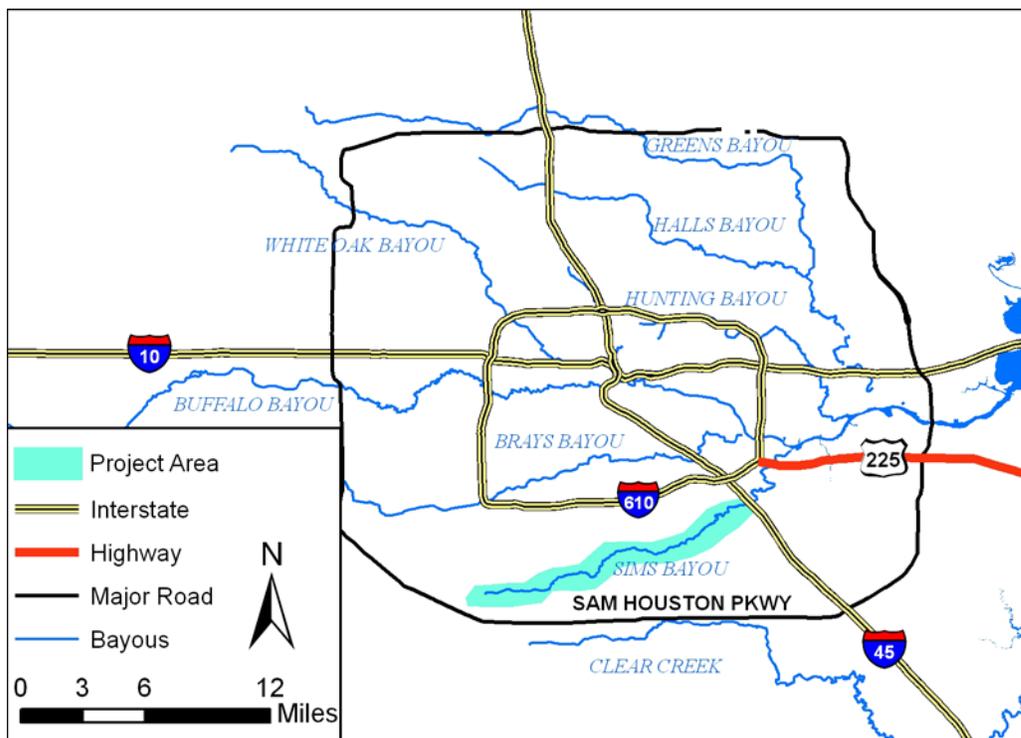


Figure 1. Overview map showing location of the project.

An Environmental Assessment, entitled *Sims Bayou, Houston, Texas Flood Damage Prevention, Channel Improvements, Modified Channel Plan* (USACE 1993), was finalized in September 1993 to document environmental impacts of modifications to the authorized plan. Instead of enlarging the channel in a trapezoidal configuration and lining it with concrete, the modified channel plan would be a compound trapezoid consisting of three separate cuts. The lower cut would form a pilot channel, with the middle cut forming berms on each side of the pilot channel and are referred to as maintenance berms. The top trapezoidal cut forms the upper flood bench berms on each side of the

channel where sufficient right-of-way (ROW) is available. The flood bench would be at an elevation not subject to frequent inundation and would be utilized as an urban greenbelt for recreational activities. Where erosion protection is needed, the lower channel and side slopes up to the in-channel maintenance berms would be lined with concrete cellular mats (CCM). The open-cell CCM allows for re-vegetation. The in-channel flood bench berms and upper side slopes would be planted with trees. The flood bench berms, remaining side slopes, and remaining ROW above the top-of-channel cut would be planted with grasses. The modifications provide a more environmentally sound, aesthetically pleasing and publicly acceptable project, as proposed by local interests through the local sponsor, the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD).

The authorized recreation plan includes construction of 22 miles of hike and bike trails on HCFCD ROW along Sims Bayou. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) policy requires the project have a non-Federal sponsor to cost-share in the construction of recreational features. The trail was the only project feature not constructed because it did not have a non-Federal sponsor to cost-share trail construction. The City of Houston (COH) has now come forward as a local sponsor for the trail.

1.2 PURPOSE AND NEED FOR PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to construct a hike and bike trail along the Sims Bayou ROW. The trail would provide recreation opportunities for joggers, walkers, and bicyclists and the trail would connect to existing park sites, schools and neighborhoods along the bayou. The COH has the opportunity to create a world class urban trail system by incorporating the bayous and other natural corridors.

The need for trail systems in Houston has been well demonstrated through studies conducted by Harris County (Harris County 2003) and the City of Houston (CHPRD 2008). The Harris County report identified bicycle, jogging, and exercise trails as the top desired amenity in Houston. Additionally, trails (natural and hard surface) were identified by Harris County Precinct 1 (where Sims Bayou is located) as the second most needed recreational facility in the precinct (Harris County 2003).

1.3 PROPOSED PROJECT

The USACE proposes to allow the City of Houston to construct a trail within the ROW for the Sims Bayou Federal Flood Control Project. The trail would connect to residential areas and would act as a conduit between several parks. Additionally, the trail system would include several amenities for the existing parks in anticipation of increased use. The proposed project would also involve landscaping to enhance the aesthetic view along the trail.

2.0 ALTERNATIVES

2.1 ALTERNATIVE 1 – NO ACTION

Under the No Action Alternative, no trail system would be built within the Sims Bayou ROW. The Sims Bayou ROW would remain as it currently is, unused, except for general

maintenance activities. The parks would remain disconnected. Finally, the various parks would not receive additional amenities.

2.2 *ALTERNATIVE 2 – 22 MILE MULTIPURPOSE TRAIL (1982 PLAN)*

This plan was originally coordinated in the 1982 Environmental Impact Statement (USACE 1982). Under Alternative 2, approximately 22 miles of multipurpose trails would be created. The trail would begin at Milby Park and extend in a westerly direction along Sims Bayou to the Glenbrook Golf Course. The trail would then go around the Glenbrook Golf Course, through Charlton Park, and continue on to I-45. The trail would then run along both the north and south sides of Sims Bayou, past Telephone Road and on to Scott Street. Between Telephone Road and Scott Street, the trail would connect to Reveille Park, Law Park, and Stewart Park. The trail would run along the north side of Sims Bayou from Scott Street to Almeda Road. At Almeda Road, the trail would continue west on both the north and south sides of Sims Bayou, connecting to Scottcrest Park, and ending at Townwood Park. At Townwood Park, the trail would join with two Harris County Precinct 1 trail segments from Townwood Park to White Heather Street and Post Oak Road to Croquet Street.

As a part of this project, these parks would receive the following amenities: 1) Milby Park: picnic tables, restroom facilities, and additional parking; 2) Charlton Park: picnic tables; 3) Reveille Park: picnic tables; 4) Sims Bayou Park: picnic tables, playground area, and additional parking; 5) Law Park: picnic tables, playground area, and additional parking; 6) Stewart Park: picnic tables, playground area, and additional parking; 7) Scottcrest Park: picnic tables, restroom facilities, and additional parking; and 8) Townwood Park: picnic tables.

2.3 *ALTERNATIVE 3 – 17 MILE MULTIPURPOSE TRAIL (1993 PLAN)*

This plan was originally coordinated in the 1993 Environmental Assessment (USACE 1993). Under Alternative 3, approximately 17 miles of multipurpose trail would be created. The trail would begin at I-45 and extend westerly to Reveille Park along the north side of Sims Bayou. The trail would then continue along the north side of Sims Bayou from Reveille Park connecting to Stewart Park and to Law Park. From Law Park, the trail would continue on both the north and south sides of Sims Bayou. The north trail would connect to Sims Bayou Park and Scottcrest Park, finally ending at Townwood Park. Pedestrian bridges would be added at Sims Bayou Park, Scottcrest Park, and Townwood Park to connect the south trail with each park. The plan includes three pedestrian bridges that would connect the north and south trails at three of the parks.

As a part of the project, these parks would receive the following amenities: 1) Reveille Park: picnic tables; 2) Stewart Park: picnic tables and additional parking; 3) Law Park: picnic tables, exercise stations, and additional parking; 4) Scottcrest Park: picnic tables and additional parking; and 5) Townwood Park: picnic tables. Additionally, approximately 14 trees per acre would be planted for landscaping.

2.4 ALTERNATIVE 4 – 12.3 MILE MULTIPURPOSE TRAIL (PREFERRED PLAN)

Under Alternative 4, approximately 12.3 miles of multipurpose trail would be created (Figure 2). The trail would begin at a new trailhead located within the Sims Bayou ROW on the east side of I-45, on the north bank just upstream of Glenbrook Golf Course. The trail would connect to the COH's on-road bikeway network which continues downstream of I-45. From the trailhead, the trail would extend westerly along the north shore of Sims Bayou connecting to Reveille Park, Stewart Park, and Law Park. At Law Park, the trail would cross a pedestrian bridge to the south side of Sims Bayou. The trail would then connect to the sidewalk on Airport Blvd and then follow an existing bike route along Airport Blvd. The trail would reconnect with Sims Bayou just downstream of the Martin Luther King Bridge. At Martin Luther King Blvd, a portion of the trail would connect with Sims Bayou Park. The trail would continue along the south side of Sims Bayou, past Scott Street and connect to Scottcrest Park via a proposed pedestrian bridge. The trail would continue on the south side of Sims Bayou where it would eventually connect with the COH biking facility, "The Hill at Sims Greenway", located just downstream of State Highway 288. Continuing on, the trail would cross under SH-288 and continue until reaching Alameda Road, where it would cross to the north side of the bayou. The trail would continue on until it reached Townwood Park where it would tie into the existing park trail. From Townwood Park, the trail would continue on the north side of the bayou where it would tie into two separate segments of Harris County Precinct 1 trails already existing along the bayou.

As a part of this project, these locations would receive the following amenities: 1) The I-45 trailhead: parking spaces, signs with recreation descriptions and trail route maps, picnic areas, trash receptacles, benches, exercise stations and a water fountain; 2) Stewart Park: parking spaces, benches, trash receptacles, picnic areas and a water fountain; 3) Law Park: benches, exercise stations, picnic areas, a trash receptacle, and a water fountain; 4) Reveille Park: exercise stations, picnic areas, benches, trash receptacles, and a water fountain; 5) Sims Bayou Park: picnic tables, benches, a water fountain and a trash receptacle; 6) The trail intersection connecting "The Hill at Sims Greenway": signage, benches, and picnic areas; 7) Townwood Park: exercise stations, picnic areas, benches, and a water fountain.

2.5 COMPARISON AND EVALUATION OF ALTERNATIVES

The purpose of this project is to construct a hike and bike trail along the Sims Bayou right of way to provide recreation opportunities for joggers, walkers, and bicyclists and the trail will connect to existing park sites, schools and neighborhoods along the bayou.

Four alternative plans were evaluated as a part of this project. The features associated with each plan are summarized in Table 2-1.

Alternative 1, the No Action Plan, does not address the purpose or the need of the project. Accordingly, Alternative 1 was not considered acceptable and was not considered further.

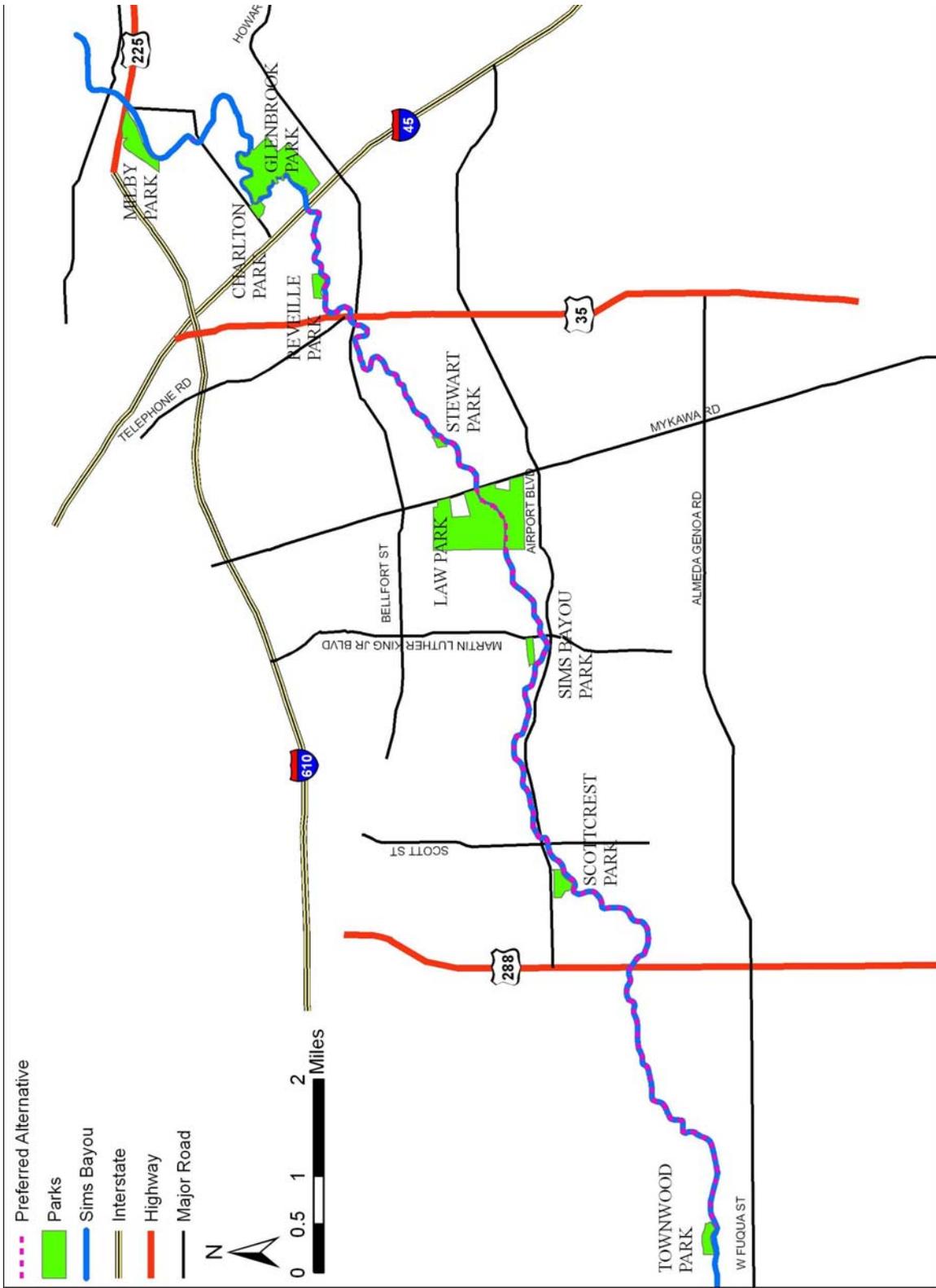


Figure 2. Major roads and parks along the proposed trail alternatives.

Table 2-1. Comparison of Sims Bayou Recreation Trail Plans

Trail Features	Alt. 1	Alt. 2	Alt. 3	Alt. 4
Trail (miles)	0	22	17	12.3
Picnic Tables	0	134	83	63
Picnic Shelters	0	0	43	39
Trash Receptacles	0	0	13	14
Exercise Stations	0	0	22	29
Restrooms	0	1	0	0
Playgrounds	0	3	0	0
Benches	0	50	60	57
Parking Spaces	0	204	88	66
Trees/acre	0	0	14	14

Alternative 2 creates 22 miles of trail along Sims Bayou that provides a connection between eight parks and the surrounding community. In addition, the plan provides additional parking, playgrounds, and picnic facilities at several of the parks.

Alternative 3 creates 17 miles of trail along Sims Bayou that provides a connection between six parks and the surrounding community. In addition, the plan provides additional parking, picnic facilities, and exercise stations at several of the parks.

Alternative 4 creates 12.3 miles of trail along Sims Bayou that provides a connection between six parks and the surrounding community. In addition, the plan provides additional parking, picnic facilities, and exercise stations at several of the parks.

The primary difference between the alternatives is that with Alternatives 2 and 3, the trail is on both the north and south side of Sims Bayou, while the trail for Alternative 4 is only on one side of the Bayou (either north or south). At this time, the level of use for the trail is not expected to warrant trails on both the north and south side of Sims Bayou.

Alternative 2 starts at Milby Park, while Alternatives 3 and 4 start just east of I-45. The City of Houston has already developed an on-road bikeway network which runs eastward from I-45 so the proposed new trailhead in Alternative 4 could serve as a trailhead for the bike trail as well. The City of Houston has selected Alternative 4 as the preferred plan.

3.0 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

3.1 PROJECT AREA

The Sims Bayou Recreation Trail study area consists of a one-mile buffer surrounding the proposed trail location in the southern part of Houston, Harris County, Texas. Sims Bayou is part of the Buffalo Bayou watershed which drains much of the urbanized area of Houston and the surrounding suburban communities. Sims Bayou originates in northeastern Fort Bend County and flows in a general east-northeast direction through Harris County for approximately 22 miles to its junction with the Houston Ship Channel. As part of the Texas coastal plain, the study area is relatively flat and devoid of topographic features.

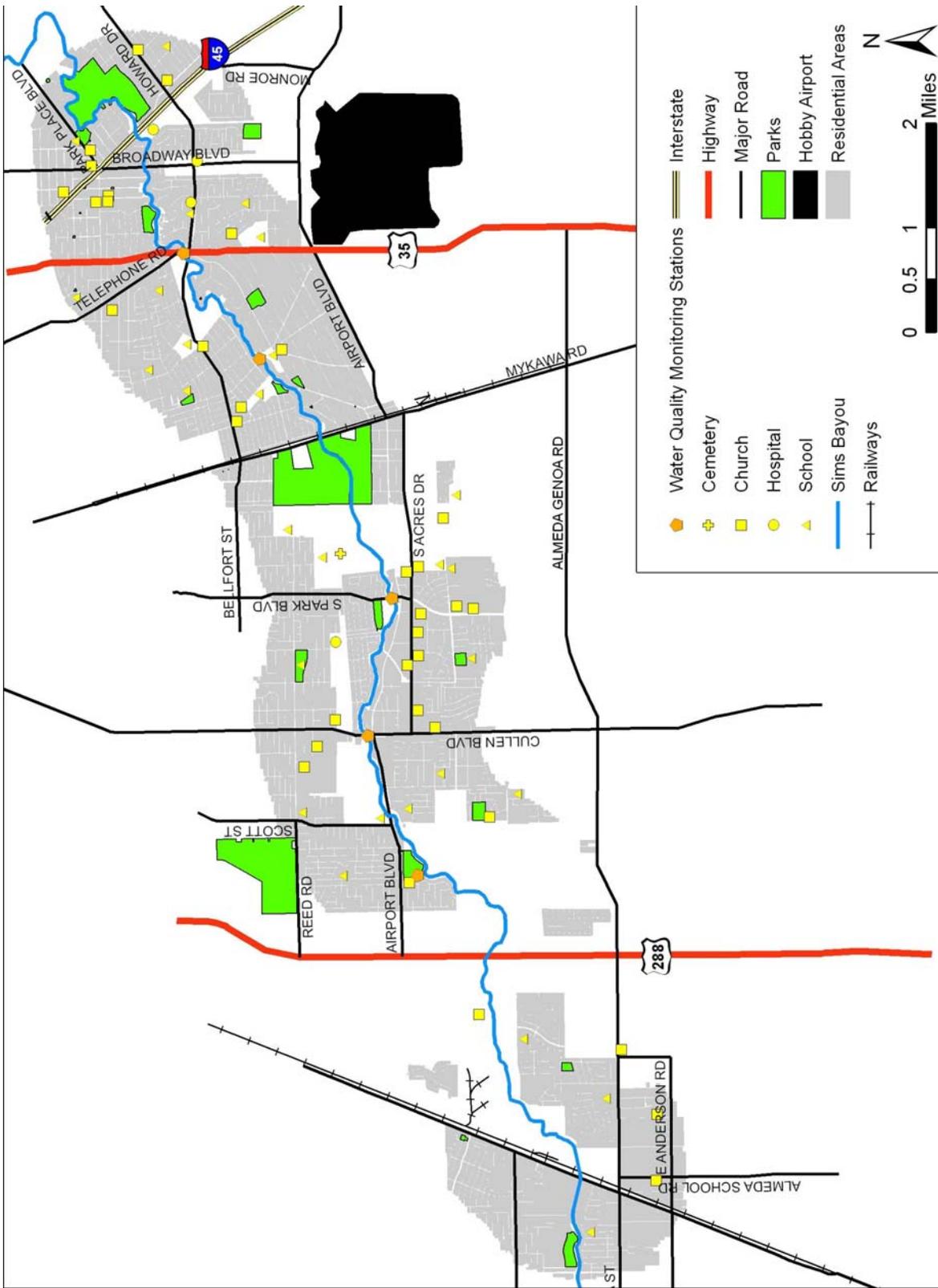


Figure 3. Study area for the affected environment.

Nearly the entire bayou has been channelized by the HCFCD in an effort to control the flooding which frequently results from severe thunderstorms. In 1993, a channel enlargement project designed to reduce flooding in the watershed was modified. The modification changed the concrete lined trapezoidal channel to an earthen and concrete cellular mat lined compound trapezoidal channel. The modified channel plan extends from I-45 to Croquet Street, and was designed to reduce the use of concrete in the channel section and enable extensive use of trees and vegetation and recreation activities within the project ROW. Currently, most of the channel improvements have been completed; the remaining improvements that need to be constructed are scheduled to be finished by December 2010.

3.2 WATER QUALITY

Sims Bayou is the only surface water located within the study area. This portion of Sims Bayou has been divided into two segments by Texas Council on Environmental Quality (TCEQ); Segment 1007 is identified as part of the Houston Ship Channel/Buffalo Bayou (HSC/BB) and Segment 1007O is identified as Sims Bayou above tidal (SBAT). The HSC/BB segment is currently classified for navigational uses and for industrial water supply. The SBAT segment is currently unclassified for uses (TCEQ 1997). In order to determine if a water body can be used for its intended uses, the TCEQ has established safe levels for seven indicators of water quality; however only four of the criteria are monitored for Sims Bayou (see Table 3-1).

There are five water quality monitoring stations within the study area: Stations 11123, 15878, 15877, 11133, and 16655. All of these stations are operated by the City of Houston Health and Human Services. The stations are displayed on Figure 3 (HGAC 2009). A summary of the monitoring information was gathered from the TCEQ website and is presented in Table 3-1 (TCEQ 2009a).

Table 3-1. Sims Bayou water quality monitoring

Water Quality Indicators	Unit of Measure	Safe Level	Samples Exceed Safe Levels				
			Station				
			11132	15878	15877	11133	16655
Cl ⁻¹ (chloride)	mg/L	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
So ₄ ⁻² (sulfate)	mg/L	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
TDS ⁴ (total dissolved solids)	mg/L	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Dissolved Oxygen	mg/L	1.0	No	No	No	No	No
pH Range	SU	6.5-9.0	No	No	No	No	No
Indicator Bacteria (<i>E. coli</i>)	#/100ml	168	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Temperature	F	95	No	No	No	No	No

The HSC/BB is also monitored for chronic numerical toxic criteria and chronic total toxicity requirements. The HSC/BB segment does not meet state standards for fish and crab consumption due to the presence of dioxin, PCBs, Chlordane, Dieldrin and Heptachlor Epoxide in edible tissue. Bacteria impairments prohibit contact recreation in the SBAT segment. Both segments are considered impaired by TCEQ for these reasons.

3.3 AIR QUALITY

The study area is located in an area designated as the Houston-Galveston-Brazoria Intrastate Air Quality Control Region (HGB) by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Ambient air quality is directly related to emissions from man-made sources such as stationary sources (stacks, vents, etc.); emissions from mobile sources such as vehicles, ships, trains, etc.; chemical reactions in the atmosphere such as the formation of ozone; and natural sources such as trees, fires, and wind-blown dust. Since all of these sources must be considered in an assessment of air quality, the EPA has established the Air Quality Control Regions and the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) as a key method for assessing air quality. A summary of the monitoring information was gathered from the TCEQ website and is presented in Table 3-2 (TCEQ 2009b).

Table 3-2. NAAQS attainment for HGB Air Quality Control Region

Pollutant	Averaging Period	Standard	NAAQS	Attainment
Ozone	8-hr	The average of the annual fourth highest daily eight-hour maximum over a three-year period is not to be at or above this level.	76 ppb	Severe Nonattainment
Carbon Monoxide	1-hr	Not to be at or above this level more than once per calendar year.	35.5 ppm	Attainment
	8-hr	Not to be at or above this level more than once per calendar year.	9.5 ppm	Attainment
Sulfur Dioxide	3-hr	Not to be at or above this level more than once per calendar year.	550 ppb (secondary)	Attainment
	24-hr	Not to be at or above this level more than once per calendar year.	145 ppb	Attainment
	Annual	Not to be at or above this level.	35 ppb	Attainment
Nitrogen Dioxide	Annual	Not to be at or above this level.	54 ppb	Attainment
	Annual	The three-year average of annual arithmetic mean concentrations at each monitor within an area is not to be at or above this level.	51 µg/m ³	Attainment
Respirable Particulate Matter (10 microns or less) (PM10)	24-hr	Not to be at or above this level on more than three days over three years with daily sampling.	155 µg/m ³	Attainment
	Annual	The three-year average of annual arithmetic mean concentrations at each monitor within an area is not to be at or above this level.	51 µg/m ³	Attainment
Respirable Particulate Matter (2.5 microns or less) (PM2.5)	24-hr	The three-year average of the annual 98th percentile for each population-oriented monitor within an area is not to be at or above this level.	66 µg/m ³	Attainment
	Annual	The three-year average of annual arithmetic mean concentrations from single or multiple community-oriented monitors is not to be at or above this level.	15.1 µg/m ³	Attainment
Lead	Quarter	Not to be at or above this level.	1.55 µg/m ³	Attainment

The HGB is in attainment with the NAAQS for all criteria pollutants except ozone. The HGB is classified as having “severe” nonattainment with the 8-hour NAAQS for ozone,

with an attainment deadline of 2019. Thus by 2019, the area is expected to achieve and maintain attainment with the NAAQS for ozone.

3.4 NOISE

The study area generally consists of residential neighborhoods, commercial retail shops, and business offices (see Figure 3). The noise in these areas tends to range from faint to loud. Additionally, there are noise sources in the study area that generate substantially greater levels of noise. These noise sources are I-45, the other main roads, Hobby Airport, and the Missouri Pacific and SF&AT railways. Standard decibel ranges for the existing noise levels in the study area can be found in Table 3-3 (HUD 1985).

Table 3-3. Existing noise levels in the study area

Ambient Neighborhood Noise	Decibel Range	Subjective Evaluation
Residential Neighborhoods	30-70	Faint to Loud
Retail Shops	40-70	Moderate to Loud
Business Offices	50-70	Moderate to Loud
Residential Streets	65-80	Loud to Very Loud
Busy Urban Streets	70-105	Loud to Very Loud
Interstate 45	80-105	Very Loud
Railway	90-110	Very Loud to Deafening
Hobby Airport	90-120	Very Loud to Deafening

Noise Sensitive Receptors (NSRs) are those locations where loud noises are not generally acceptable, such as hospitals, schools, churches, cemeteries, or residential neighborhoods (see Table 3-4 and Figure 3). Other NSRs include recreational areas (see Table 3-13).

Table 3-4. NSRs in the study area and their distance from the proposed trail area

Type of NSR	Within ¼ mile	Between ¼ and ½ miles	Between ½ and ¾ miles	Between ¾ and 1 mile
Residential Neighborhood	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Schools	4	5	12	6
Hospital	1	3	0	0
Churches	6	13	11	3
Cemeteries	1	0	0	0

3.5 HAZARDOUS, TOXIC, AND RADIOACTIVE WASTE (HTRW)

An HTRW assessment addressing channel modifications was conducted in November 1990, in accordance with methodology prescribed in Engineering Regulation (ER) 1165-2-132 HTRW Guidance For Civil Works Projects. This HTRW audit was discussed in the May 1993 Supplement to General Design Memorandum, as referenced in the Sims Bayou Recreation Plan. This audit was periodically reviewed and site surveys conducted for segments of the bayou when plans and specifications were provided for the next channel construction reach. The HTRW assessment identified two sites that had a potential for encountering waste, although the potential risk was low. One site was an auto salvage operation near stream mile 12. The HCFCD contracted with an environmental company to test soil samples and remove any impacted soils. The second potential site was an

industrial park near stream mile 15. In 2004, plans and specifications were being drafted for Reach 7 of the project, which included the industrial park near stream mile 15. Online regulatory databases were utilized to update the industries compliance records and a pedestrian survey was conducted on 26 March 2004. A site visit was conducted February 26, 2008 and online regulatory databases were again used to update local industry and business compliance records. No violations or noncompliance were found in the vicinity of Sims Bayou. As such, there are no HTRW concerns in the project area and no other HTRW investigations are recommended at this time.

3.6 WETLANDS

The National Wetland Inventory (NWI) for the study area was reviewed and no wetlands were present (USFWS 2009a). The lack of wetlands along Sims Bayou is most likely due to the built urban environment in the study area. When the Sims Bayou Federal Flood Control Project was built, Sims Bayou was channelized; this likely resulted in the removal of any and all remaining wetlands.

Table 3-5. Wildlife observed along Buffalo and Lower White Oak Bayous in 2006 and 2007

Birds			
American Goldfinch (<i>Carduelis tristis</i>)	Carolina Wren (<i>Thryothorus lubovicianus</i>)	Red-bellied Woodpecker (<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>)	Orange-crowned Warbler (<i>Vermivora celata</i>)
American Robin (<i>Turdus migratorius</i>)	Cedar Waxwing (<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>)	House Wren (<i>Troglodytes aedon</i>)	Pileated Woodpecker (<i>Dryocopus ppoleatus</i>)
Belted Kingfisher (<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>)	Downy Woodpecker (<i>Picoides pubescens</i>)	Mourning Dove (<i>Zenaida macroura</i>)	Hermit Thrush (<i>Catharus guttatus</i>)
Blue Jay (<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>)	Eastern Phoebe (<i>Sayornis phoebe</i>)	Northern Cardinal (<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>)	Red-shouldered Hawk (<i>Buteo lineatus</i>)
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (<i>Poliophtila caerulea</i>)	Great Blue Heron (<i>Ardea herodias</i>)	Northern Mockingbird (<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>)	
Reptiles and Amphibians	Butterflies	Fish	Mammals
Broad-banded Watersnake (<i>Nerodia fasciata confluens</i>)	Common Buckeye (<i>Junonia coenia</i>)	Mosquitofish (<i>Gambusia</i> sp.)	Eastern Cottontail (<i>Sylvilagus floridanus</i>)
Five-lines skink (<i>Eumeces fasciatus</i>)	Hackberry Emperor (<i>Asterocampa celtis</i>)	Alligator Gar (<i>Atractosteus spatula</i>)	Eastern Fox Squirrel (<i>Sciurus niger</i>)
Ground Skink (<i>Scincella lateralis</i>)	Question Mark (<i>Polygonia interrogarionis</i>)	Sunfish (<i>Lepomis</i> sp.)	Mexican Free-tailed bat (<i>Radarida brasiliensis</i>)
Red-eared Slider (<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>)	Red Admiral (<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>)		Mollusks
Western Ribbon Snake (<i>Thamnophis proximus proximus</i>)	Texas Crescent (<i>Anthanassa texana</i>)		Bankclimber (<i>Plectomerus dombeyanus</i>)
Southern Leopard Frog (<i>Lithobates sphenoccephalus</i>)			Rock Pocketbook (<i>Arcidens confragosus</i>)
Western Cottonmouth (<i>Agkistrodon piscivorus leucostoma</i>)			

3.7 WILDLIFE

Wildlife habitat is limited within the watershed due to the urbanized nature of the surrounding area. However, the riparian area along Sims Bayou does provide a corridor for numerous wildlife species. The species listed in Table 3-5 were identified during surveys of Buffalo Bayou and Lower White Oak Bayou (HCFCD 2008). Both Buffalo and Lower White Oak Bayous have similar habitats to Sims Bayou, so it is reasonable to expect the same variety and types of species to be present.

3.8 THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) lists two endangered species as potentially occurring in Harris County (USFWS 2009b). A Draft Biological Assessment (BA) was prepared to determine the effects of this project on these species (Appendix C). The BA concluded the two species are highly unlikely to occur in the study area and therefore the project would have no effect on either of the species.

Table 3-6. Effects of the project on Federally-listed Threatened and Endangered Species

Taxon	Common Name	Scientific Name	Federal Status	Occurrence in Study Area	Effect of Project
Birds	Whooping Crane	<i>Grus americana</i>	Endangered	Highly Unlikely	No Effect
Plants	Texas prairie dawn	<i>Hymenoxys texana</i>	Endangered	No potential	No Effect

The State-listed rare, threatened, or endangered species for Harris County are presented in Table 3-7 (not including species identified in Table 3-6). These species are not likely to occur in the project area and will not be affected by the project; additionally, these species have no Federal standing and will not be considered further.

Table 3-7. State listed Rare, Threatened, or Endangered Species

Taxon	Common Name	Scientific Name	Federal Status	State Status
Amphibians	Houston toad	<i>Bufo houstonensis</i>	LE	E
Birds	White-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo albicaudatus</i>		T
Birds	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	DL	T
Birds	American Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus anatum</i>	DL	E
Birds	Whooping Crane	<i>Grus americana</i>	LE	E
Birds	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	DL	T
Birds	Wood Stork	<i>Mycteria americana</i>		T
Birds	Brown Pelican	<i>Pelecanus occidentalis</i>	LE-PDL	E
Birds	Red-cockaded Woodpecker	<i>Picoides borealis</i>	LE	E
Birds	White-faced Ibis	<i>Plegadis chihi</i>		T
Fishes	Creek chubsucker	<i>Erimyzon oblongus</i>		T
Fishes	Smalltooth sawfish	<i>Pristis pectinata</i>	LE	E
Mammals	Red wolf	<i>Canis rufus</i>	LE	E
Mammals	Rafinesque's big-eared bat	<i>Corynorhinus rafinesquii</i>		T
Mammals	Louisiana black bear	<i>Ursus americanus luteolus</i>	LT	T
Plants	Texas prairie dawn	<i>Hymenoxys texana</i>	LE	E
Reptiles	Loggerhead sea turtle	<i>Caretta caretta</i>	LT	T
Reptiles	Green sea turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>	LT	T

Reptiles	Timber/Canebrake rattlesnake	Crotalus horridus		T
Reptiles	Leatherback sea turtle	Dermochelys coriacea	LE	E
Reptiles	Kemp's Ridley sea turtle	Lepidochelys kempii	LE	E
Reptiles	Smooth green snake	Liochlorophis vernalis		T
Reptiles	Alligator snapping turtle	Macrochelys temminckii		T
Reptiles	Texas horned lizard	Phrynosoma cornutum		T

3.9 PRIME AND UNIQUE FARMLANDS

Prime farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, and is also available for these uses. Unique farmland is land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high value food and fiber crops. There is no prime or unique farmland within the study area. The project area is a maintained right-of-way for a flood control project and consists of soil from the Vamont-Urban land complex (NRCS 2009). This soil series is not considered prime farmland (NRCS 2009).

3.10 SOCIOECONOMICS

As of the 2000 census, there were 54,213 people and 17,051 households in the study area. The population density of the study area is 4,465 people per square mile. The following information was collected from the Environmental Protection Agency Website and is based on the 2000 census (EPA 2009).

Overall, the study area has higher percentage of minorities than either Harris County or the state. This is due to a higher percentage of African-Americans, Hispanics, and people who identified themselves as “Other Race” (Table 3-9). The age distribution in the study area is very similar to Harris County and the state (Table 3-10). The population in the study area has a higher percentage of people with a 12th grade education or less than either Harris County or the state (Table 3-11).

Approximately four percent of the households in the study area are on public assistance. In contrast, approximately two percent of the households in Harris County and three percent of the households in Texas are on public assistance (Table 3-12). People in the study area also tend to have a lower income than people in Harris County or the state (Table 3-13).

Table 3-8. Comparison of Demographics

Category	Study Area	Harris County, TX	Texas
Total Persons	54,213	3,400,578	20,851,820
Population Density	4465/sq mi	1967/sq mi	80/sq mi
Percent Minority ¹	87.8%	58%	48%
Persons Below Poverty Level ²	22.1%	15%	15%
Households in Area ³	17,051	1,205,516	7,393,354
Households on Public Assistance	793	30,506	234,081

¹ see Table 3-8

² see Table 3-11

³ see Table 3-12

Table 3-9. Comparison of the Racial Breakdown

Race	Study Area	Harris County, TX	Texas
White	29.9%	58.6%	71.0%
African-American	34.7%	18.4%	11.4%
Hispanic Origin	47.9%	33.0%	32.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4.8%	5.1%	2.7%
American Indian	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%
Other Race	27.6%	14.4%	11.8%
Multiracial	2.5%	3.0%	2.5%

Table 3-10. Comparison of the Age Breakdown

	Study Area	Harris County, TX	Texas
Child 5 Years or Less	11.2%	9.8%	9.3%
Minors 6 to 17 Years	20.7%	19.1 %	18.9%
Adults 18 to 64 Years	59.0%	63.7%	71.8%
Seniors 65 Years and Older	9.1%	7.4%	9.9%

Table 3-11. Comparison of the Educational Attainment

	Study Area	Harris County, TX	Texas
Less than 9 th Grade	21.3%	12.7%	12.1%
9 th – 12 th Grade	21.2%	13.9%	13.6%
High School Diploma	27.6%	22.7%	26.2%
Some College/2yr.	19.2%	22.4%	23.6%
B.S./B.A. or more	10.7%	28.3%	24.5%

Table 3-12. Comparison of Income Levels

	Study Area	Harris County, TX	Texas
Less than \$15,000	22.1%	15.0%	16.8%
\$15,000 - \$25,000	18.7%	12.6%	13.5%
\$25,000 – \$50,000	32.2%	29.4%	30.0%
\$50,000 - \$75,000	14.4%	18.4%	18.5%
Greater than \$75,000	11.8%	24.8%	21.3%

Table 3-13. Comparison of Households (Rent vs. Owner Occupied)

	Study Area	Harris County, TX	Texas
Owner Occupied	57%	55.3%	63.6%
Renter Occupied	43%	44.7%	36.4%

3.11 RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

There are 32 parks within the study area. All of these parks and their distance from the proposed trail area was gathered from the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department and is provided in Table 3-14. Neighborhood parks tend to range from 1 to 15 acres and have a service area of ½ mile; they typically provide playgrounds, open space, and walking trails. Community parks range in size from 16 to 150 acres and have a service area of up to five miles; these parks typically provide the services found in neighborhood parks plus picnic areas, game courts, and parking areas. Regional parks tend to be larger than 150 acres and serve a large region; these parks tend to provide a large range of services to a variety of interests (CHPRD 2008).

Table 3-14. Recreational resources in the study area.

Park Name	Type of Park	Distance from Recreation Trail	Park Name	Type of Park	Distance from Recreation Trail
Carter	Neighborhood	within ¼ mile	Lynn-River Dr.	Pocket	¼ to ½ mile
Garden Villas	Community	within ¼ mile	Andover	Neighborhood	½ to ¾ mile
Glenbrook	Regional	within ¼ mile	Bradford Circle	Pocket	½ to ¾ mile
Haywood – North Haywood	Pocket	within ¼ mile	Cloverland	Community	½ to ¾ mile
Law	Metro	within ¼ mile	Crestmont	Community	½ to ¾ mile
Reveille	Community	within ¼ mile	Dover Kingsley	Pocket	½ to ¾ mile
South Crest	Community	within ¼ mile	Grimes	Neighborhood	½ to ¾ mile
Sims Bayou	Neighborhood	within ¼ mile	Almeda Plaza	Neighborhood	½ to ¾ mile
Stewart	Neighborhood	within ¼ mile	Townwood	Community	½ to ¾ mile
Telephone Reveille	Pocket	within ¼ mile	Dow	Community	¾ to 1 mile
W. and E. Alpine	Pocket	within ¼ mile	Joplin-Popular Circle	Pocket	¾ to 1 mile
Bellfort-Westover	Pocket	¼ to ½ mile	Joplin Street	Neighborhood	¾ to 1 mile
Canterbury Village	Neighborhood	¼ to ½ mile	Lynnhurst Circle	Pocket	¾ to 1 mile
Charlton	Community	¼ to ½ mile	Park Place	Neighborhood	¾ to 1 mile
Dillon-Santa Fe	Pocket	¼ to ½ mile	Ridgeway Circle	Pocket	¾ to 1 mile
Dover	Pocket	¼ to ½ mile	Sunny Side	Regional	¾ to 1 mile

3.12 TRAVELWAYS AND TRAFFIC

There are numerous roads throughout the study area. The majority of the roads are residential. However, there are several major roads, including: Interstate 45 and State Highways 288 and 35. These major roads are shown on Figures 2 and 3.

There are also two railroad lines in the study area, one operated by Missouri Pacific RR Company and the other operated by AT&SF RR Company. Both railroads lines bisect the study area along a north/south axis.

Additionally, the William P. Hobby Airport is located immediately south of the study area. The airport covers 1,304 acres and has four runways. Hobby serves Houston as a secondary airport handling domestic service and is a regional center for corporate and private aviation.

3.13 CULTURAL RESOURCES

The Sims Bayou project area was surveyed for cultural resources in 1979 by Texas A&M University (Fletcher 1980). The survey results found no cultural resources by either field survey or archival research. The subsequent development and channelization of Sims Bayou has likely destroyed any prehistoric archeological sites that may have been present

but undetected by the survey. The study area does not contain any cultural resources currently listed on, or known to be eligible for inclusion in, the National Register of Historic Places.

4.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES OF PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE

4.1 IMPACTS TO THE PROJECT AREA

The construction of the proposed trail is of such limited nature and extent that it does not have the potential to affect the overall climate, topography, soils, or urban nature of the study area. Any impacts in the study area would be minor, temporary, and would quickly dissipate upon completion of the work. Impacts to the resources are presented in the following subsections.

4.2 IMPACTS TO WATER QUALITY

In the short term, during the period when the trail is being conducted, earth moving activities may result in a minor increase in erosion. After construction of the trail is completed, any increase in erosion would stabilize rapidly. The proposed construction of the trail would not affect any of the water quality indicators.

4.3 IMPACTS TO AIR QUALITY

An air analysis conducted for the 1993 EA and coordinated with the TCEQ determined that some temporary adverse effects to air quality would occur during construction of the project, which included the recreation trail. There will be increases in exhaust and dust levels from machinery and equipment. However, a minimal amount of equipment will be needed to construct the trail. Emissions and dust levels caused by the construction equipment would be temporary and occur during daytime work hours. Although the local State Implementation Plan (SIP) has changed since the project was authorized, air conformity rules do not require reanalysis of air quality for an authorized project due to changes in the local SIP or changes in air quality regulations. 40 C.F.R. 51.857(b) provides the applicable citation: “Ongoing Federal activities at a given site showing continuous progress are not new actions and do not require periodic redeterminations so long as such activities are within the scope of the final conformity determination reported under §51.855.”

4.4 NOISE IMPACTS

Noise associated with the construction equipment presents a short-term impact during the construction phase. The standard decibel ranges for common construction equipment likely to be used during the repairs was gathered from the EPA and is presented in Table 4-1 (EPA 1972).

Table 4-1. Decibel ranges for standard construction equipment

Equipment	Decibel range	Equipment	Decibel range
Compactors (rollers)	70-75	Scrapers, graders	80-95
Front Loaders	70-85	Concrete mixers	75-85
Backhoes	70-95	Trucks	85-95

The standard decibel ranges for the construction equipment is substantially lower than the decibel ranges along I-45 (refer to Table 3-3). The repairs may periodically and temporarily disturb wildlife as described in Section 4.7. Construction activities would be limited to operating between 8 AM and 5 PM. No long-term impacts would occur as a result of noise.

4.5 IMPACTS TO HAZARDOUS, TOXIC, AND RADIOACTIVE WASTE (HTRW)

An HTRW survey was conducted for the modified channel plan to evaluate the risk of encountering solid or hazardous wastes during construction. The project area is periodically surveyed to insure an HTRW incident has not occurred that would impact construction of the project. Construction of the trail is not expected to encounter any HTRW as there are no known sites in the trail footprint.

4.6 IMPACTS TO WETLANDS

There are no wetlands within the study area. Therefore, the project will not impact wetlands.

4.7 IMPACTS TO WILDLIFE

The project would result in temporary, minor disturbances to wildlife in and near the damaged area while the repairs are being conducted. The proposed repair work would occur within the footprint of the existing Sims Bayou Federal Flood Control Project which has been previously disturbed and undergoes routine inspection and maintenance activities. The trail construction is expected to result in disturbances of less magnitude than those from the previous project. Species that do not tolerate disturbances resulting from the trail construction could avoid the area during this time. Temporarily displaced wildlife would have suitable habitat immediately available to them both upstream and downstream on Sims Bayou.

Almost half of the proposed trail occurs within a 5-mile radius of William P. Hobby Airport. Wildlife species deemed hazardous to aircraft were identified by the Federal Aviation Administration and are listed in Appendix D. Some of these species exist within the study area. However, the proposed project, building a trail along the Sims Bayou ROW, would not make the area more attractive to these species resulting in an increase in the number of individuals present in the study area.

4.8 IMPACTS TO THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

Construction of the trail is not expected to have any adverse effects on any of the Federally-listed species known to occur in Harris County. Because of past flood control

activities and urban and commercial development, there is no suitable undisturbed habitat remaining in the project area. The USFWS concurred with the opinion in the supplemental Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act (SFWCA) report, dated April 22, 1993. To date, area conditions remain essentially the same.

4.9 IMPACTS TO PRIME AND UNIQUE FARMLANDS

There will be no impacts to prime and unique farmland as there are no prime and unique farmlands in the Sims Bayou project area.

4.10 IMPACTS TO SOCIOECONOMICS

The proposed project is of such limited nature and extent, that it does not have the potential to alter the demographics or the economy at a local or regional scale. While the project area does contain a higher percentage of minority (87%) and low-income (22.1%) families than Harris County (58% minority and 15% low-income), the impacts associated with the proposed project are minimal and enhance recreational opportunities. Therefore, there are no Environmental Justice concerns.

4.11 IMPACTS TO RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Construction of the trail would result in increased access to six parks along Sims Bayou: Reveille, Stewart, Law, Scottcrest, Sims Bayou, and Townwood. All six parks would receive additional amenities. The combination of increased access and increased amenities would result in an increase in use. In addition, the existing ROW along Sims Bayou would become available as open space for recreation. The neighborhoods and parks would be linked to a bike trail that runs east from I-45 and to the “Hill at Sims Greenway.”

4.12 IMPACTS TO TRAVELWAYS AND TRAFFIC

The project area can be most directly accessed from main roads in the study area. These are all heavily travelled roads and any increase in traffic would be minor and temporary. Impacts to traffic from the proposed project would be limited to construction equipment accessing and departing from the impacted area.

The proposed project would not impact either the Missouri Pacific Railroad or the AT & SF Railroad. The proposed project would not impact the William P. Hobby Airport (refer to section 4.7 Impacts to Wildlife).

4.13 IMPACTS TO CULTURAL RESOURCES

A pedestrian survey and archival/historical search of the project area were conducted and no cultural resource sites were identified. The results of the survey were coordinated with the SHPO by letter dated May 25, 1982. The trail will be constructed within the project footprint on areas excavated or otherwise disturbed for the flood damage prevention project. The project was reviewed by a Staff Archeologist and it was determined the area

has been so extensively modified there was no potential for the project to affect a historic property.

5.0 MITIGATION

The proposed project will not impact any sensitive resources so as to require compensatory mitigation. No mitigation is proposed.

6.0 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

An assessment of cumulative impacts takes into consideration the consequences that past, present and reasonably foreseeable future projects had, have, or will have on an ecosystem. Residences, commercial businesses, and industrial businesses dominate the study area. This community has influenced the study area's land use history.

Past major projects in the study area consist of the Sims Bayou Federal Flood Control Project, building Interstate 10, the Missouri Pacific Railroad line, the AT&SF Railroad line, and Hobby Airport, and the overall urbanization of the area. Combined, these projects have impacted the ecosystem of the area.

Current and reasonably foreseeable projects would most likely concentrate maintenance and improvement of the existing infrastructure (e.g. roads, utilities, railways, and Hobby Airport), maintenance of the Sims Bayou Channel, and maintenance and improvement of the residential, commercial, and industrial buildings in the area.

As discussed in Section 4.0, the impacts associated with the proposed trail are both minor and temporary. Therefore, the impacts from the proposed trail are not substantial even when considered cumulatively with impacts from past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects.

7.0 COMPLIANCE WITH ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This EA has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of all applicable laws and regulations. The document has been prepared using the USACE regulation, ER 200-2-2, Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ): Procedures for Implementing NEPA (30 CFR 230) and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), NEPA regulations (40 CFR Part 1500).

National Environmental Policy Act: This document has been prepared in accordance with CEQ regulations to aid in complying with NEPA. The environmental, economic, and social consequences of the preferred features were analyzed in accordance with the act and presented in the report.

Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958, as Amended: The Recommended Plan is located within the footprint of the 1993 plan which was coordinated with the USFWS, TPWD and other appropriate resource agencies. The recreational features, including the hike and bike trail, were previously coordinated and approved in 1993 (see Appendix A) when modifications were made to the channel plan.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended: Compliance with Section 106 of this act has been accomplished through surveys, archival/historic research, and coordination with the Texas SHPO. The area of the recreation trail was previously coordinated with SHPO prior to the current channel modification project.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act: No significant impacts to living marine resources or essential fish habitat would occur as a result of the project. The draft EA is being coordinated with NMFS and comments from NMFS regarding fisheries and EFH will be included in Appendix A.

Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972: The proposed work consists of constructing a recreation trail and adding features to existing parks. All work will occur within the existing right-of-way for the Sims Bayou Federal Flood Control Project and will not result in impacts to any coastal natural resource areas (e.g. tidal waters or submerged lands). The EA is being coordinated with the Coastal Coordination Council for compliance with the Texas Coastal Management Program.

Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA): This Federal law governs the management and disposal of hazardous and non-hazardous wastes. RCRA may impose substantial requirements on Federal projects that manage even small amounts of hazardous waste. A survey was conducted in the project area for RCRA material and none was located within the area of the recreation trail.

Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA): As amended by Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act of 1986, CERCLA provides for liability, compensation, cleanup, and emergency response of hazardous substances released into the environment and cleanup of inactive hazardous substances disposal sites. 42 U.S.C. 9620 provides that Federal facilities and agencies must comply with the requirements of CERCLA, including the sale or transfer of real property must include a declaration of the type, quantity and time for which any hazardous substance that was stored, released or disposed on the property. A survey was conducted for CERCLA material and none is located in or around the footprint of the recreation trail.

Endangered Species Act, as amended: Since it has been 16 years when the last ESA was conducted (see Appendix A), the purpose of this EA is to document the coordination that is being conducted to update the authorized project. The USFWS and the TPWD were contacted regarding threatened, endangered or proposed species and potential critical habitats in the project area. Available information, investigations, and informal consultation with USFWS and TPWD have determined that the proposed construction will not result in impacts to any federally-listed threatened or endangered species and there is no critical habitat in the project area that would be impacted.

Clean Air Act of 1972, as amended: The Preferred Plan is expected to be consistent with the Clean Air Act, EPA's General Conformity Rule. The recreation trail is a feature of an authorized project, approved by the TCEQ in 1993.

Clean Water Act of 1977, as amended: Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) regulates the discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States. A Section 401 State Water Quality Certification was obtained for the authorized flood control project and is still valid. The proposed trail construction will utilize storm water erosion control measures as required by Section 402(p) of the CWA, where they are applicable.

Executive Order 11990 – Protection of Wetlands: This EO directs Federal agencies to avoid undertaking or assisting in new construction located in wetlands, unless no practical alternative is available. The trail will be constructed along the upper half of the modified channel and will not impact wetlands.

Executive Order 12898 – Environmental Justice: This EO directs Federal agencies to achieve EJ by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies and activities on minority and low income populations. Constructing the hike and bike trail will provide positive impacts to the local population by providing recreational opportunities.

Noise Control Act: This Act establishes a national policy to promote an environment for all Americans free from noise that jeopardizes their health and welfare. Each Federal agency is required to limit noise emissions to within compliance levels. Construction of the recreation trail and channel extension will increase noise levels during construction due to heavy equipment, work crew activities and passing trucks and vehicles. Construction is confined to daytime hours and will not create a disturbance during nighttime hours. Therefore, the project will be compliant with this Act.

CEQ Memorandum Dated August 11, 1980 – Prime or Unique Farmlands: The proposed project will not impact any lands considered prime or unique.

Executive Order 11988: Floodplain Management: This Executive Order directs Federal agencies to evaluate the potential effects of proposed actions on floodplains. Such actions should not be undertaken that directly or indirectly induce growth in the floodplain unless there is no practical alternative. Most of the land surrounding Sims Bayou has been developed. Construction of the recreation trail along the channel flood bench is not expected to increase the density of that development.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA): This EO directs Federal agencies to increase their efforts under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Acts, the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, the ESA of 1973, NEPA of 1969 and other pertinent statutes as they pertain to migratory birds to avoid measurably negative take of migratory bird populations. Construction of the recreation trail would not impact migratory bird populations.

Memorandum of Agreement between the Federal Aviation Administration, the U.S. Air Force, the U.S. Army, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Department of Agricultural to Address Aircraft-Wildlife Strikes: This Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was developed with the intention to

minimize wildlife risks to aviation and human safety, while protecting the Nation's valuable environmental resources. Pursuant to this MOA, Agencies should not construct projects within a specified distance of airports that may become an attractant to wildlife deemed hazardous to aircraft (see Appendix D). The recreation trail would not become an attractant to wildlife or migratory bird populations.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

As presented in Section 4.0 – Environmental Consequences of Preferred Alternative, the proposed project would result in temporary and minor impacts to the environment. The following conclusions summarize the findings of the EA:

- The proposed project would have minor and temporary impacts in the project area that would quickly dissipate when construction of the trail was completed.
- Water quality would not be impacted by the proposed project.
- Air quality would be temporarily impacted during the construction of the trail. However, the impacts would only occur during construction and would dissipate immediately upon completion.
- The construction of the trail would result in a temporary increase of noise. However the increase would be limited to the time construction equipment was operating between 8AM and 5PM.
- There would be no impacts to hazardous, toxic, or radioactive wastes from this project.
- There are no wetlands in the study area.
- Wildlife may be temporarily affected by minor impacts during construction of the trail. However, there would be similar habitat available to the species both upstream and downstream along Sims Bayou.
- Threatened and Endangered Species are highly unlikely to occur in the project area.
- There are no prime or unique farmlands in the project area.
- The proposed project would not affect socioeconomic resources either locally or regionally.
- There are no Environmental Justice issues.
- Travelways and traffic are unlikely to be affected by the proposed project. Some minor increase in the level of traffic may occur during the construction of the trail; however, this would be temporary and would dissipate immediately upon completion of the trail.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers finds that the proposed action is in compliance with the Texas Coastal Management Program.
- The proposed project has no potential to affect Historic Properties.

9.0 LITERATURE CITED

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Appendix A - Agency Coordination

Appendix B - Notice of Availability and Coordination



**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
GALVESTON DISTRICT, CORPS OF ENGINEERS
P. O. BOX 1229
GALVESTON, TEXAS 77553-1229**

July 16, 2009

NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY

**U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, GALVESTON DISTRICT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR CONSTRUCTION OF A RECREATION TRAIL
SIMS BAYOU FEDERAL FLOOD CONTROL PROJECT,
HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS**

PURPOSE

This notice is being distributed to interested State, Federal, and local agencies, private organizations, news media, and individuals in order to assist in collecting facts and recommendations concerning proposed construction of a recreation trail along the Sims Bayou Federal Flood Control Project in Harris County, Texas. The purpose of this project is to construct a hike and bike trail along the Sims Bayou right-of-way. The trail would provide recreation opportunities for joggers, walkers, and bicyclists and the trail would connect to existing park sites, schools and neighborhoods along the bayou. The City of Houston (COH) has the opportunity to create a world class urban trail system by incorporating the bayous and other natural corridors.

NEED FOR WORK

The need for trail systems in Houston has been well demonstrated through studies conducted by Harris County and the City of Houston. A Harris County report identified bicycle, jogging, and exercise trails as the top desired amenity in Houston. Additionally, trails (natural and hard surface) were identified by Harris County Precinct 1 (where Sims Bayou is located) as the second most needed recreational facility in the precinct.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) proposes to allow the City of Houston to construct a trail within the ROW for the Sims Bayou Federal Flood Control Project. The trail would connect to residential

areas and would act as a conduit between several parks. Additionally, the trail system would include several amenities for the existing parks in anticipation of increased use. The proposed project would also involve landscaping to enhance the aesthetic view along the trail.

The proposed project is located within the right-of-way along Sims Bayou, between I-45 and Townwood Park (see Figure 1).

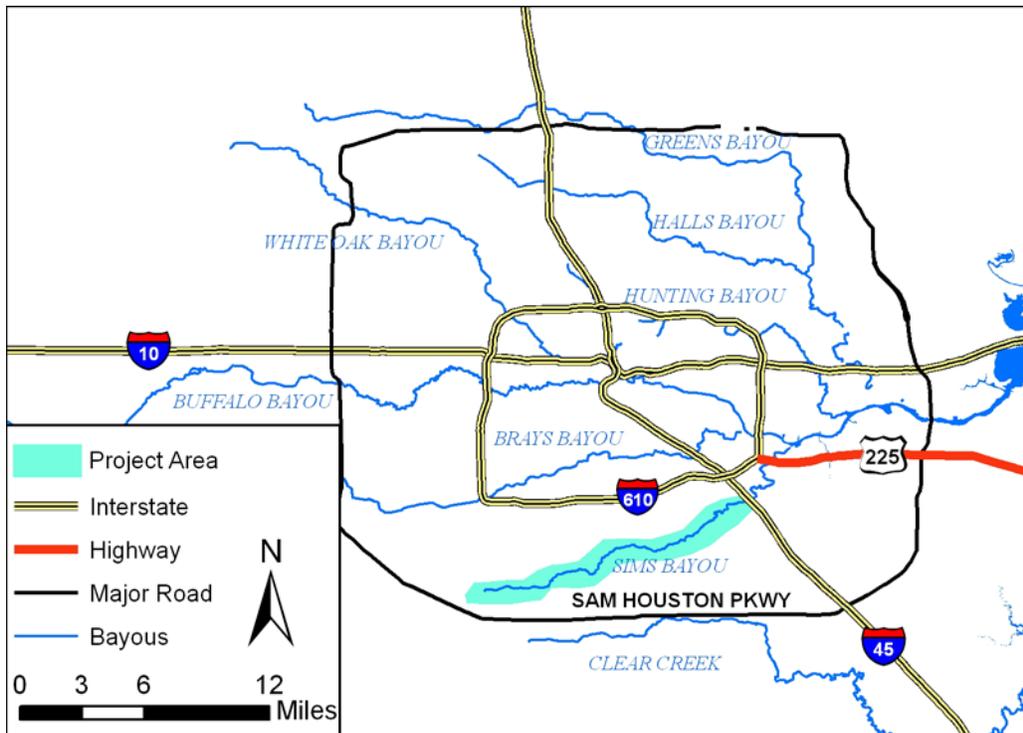


Figure 1. Map showing the project location.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED RECREATION TRAIL

Approximately 12.3 miles of multipurpose trail would be constructed. The trail would begin at a new trailhead located within the Sims Bayou right-of-way (ROW) on the east side of I-45, on the north bank just upstream of Glenbrook Golf Course. The trail would connect to the City of Houston's (COH) on-road bikeway network which continues downstream of I-45. From the trailhead, the trail would extend westerly along the north shore of Sims Bayou connecting to Reveille Park, Stewart Park, and Law Park. At Law Park, the trail would cross a pedestrian bridge to the south side of Sims Bayou. The trail would then connect to the sidewalk on Airport Blvd and then follow an existing bike route along Airport Blvd. The trail would reconnect with Sims Bayou just downstream of the Martin Luther King Bridge. At Martin Luther King Blvd, a portion of the trail would connect with Sims Bayou Park. The trail would continue along the south side of Sims Bayou, past Scott Street and connect to Scottcrest Park via a proposed pedestrian bridge. The trail would continue on the south side of Sims Bayou where it would eventually

connect with the COH biking facility, “The Hill at Sims Greenway”, located just downstream of State Highway 288. Continuing on, the trail would cross under SH-288 and continue until reaching Alameda Road, where it would cross to the north side of the bayou. The trail would continue on until it reached Townwood Park where it would tie into the existing park trail. From Townwood Park, the trail would continue on the north side of the bayou where it would tie into two separate segments of Harris County Precinct 1 trails already existing along the bayou.

As a part of this project, these locations would receive the following amenities: 1) The I-45 trailhead: parking spaces, signs with recreation descriptions and trail route maps, picnic areas, trash receptacles, benches, exercise stations and a water fountain; 2) Stewart Park: parking spaces, benches, trash receptacles, picnic areas and a water fountain; 3) Law Park: benches, exercise stations, picnic areas, a trash receptacle, and a water fountain; 4) Reveille Park: exercise stations, picnic areas, benches, trash receptacles, and a water fountain; 5) Sims Bayou Park: picnic tables, benches, a water fountain and a trash receptacle; 6) The trail intersection connecting “The Hill at Sims Greenway”: signage, benches, and picnic areas; 7) Townwood Park: exercise stations, picnic areas, benches, and a water fountain.

COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS AND REGULATIONS

A Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) is being coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and other Federal, state, and local agencies. Consultation has been initiated with the USFWS in compliance with the Endangered Species Act. The proposed trail was previously coordinated and approved in 1993 when modifications were made to the channel plan. The Biological Assessment (Appendix C of the Draft EA) concludes that the project is not likely to adversely affect threatened or endangered species in the project area.

A Section 401 State Water Quality Certification was obtained for the authorized flood control project and is still valid. The proposed trail construction will utilize storm water erosion control measures as required by Section 402(p) of the CWA, where they are applicable.

It is also our preliminary determination that the proposed actions are consistent with the Texas Coastal Management Program (TCMP) to the maximum extent practicable.

The proposed trail is expected to be consistent with the Clean Air Act, EPA’s General Conformity Rule. The recreation trail is a feature of an authorized project, approved by TCEQ in 1993.

The proposed activities will be coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). Our initial determination is that the proposed actions do not have the potential to effect historic properties.

The following is a partial list of Federal, State, and local agencies with which this activity is being coordinated:

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 6
U.S. Department of Commerce
U.S. Department of the Interior
Texas Historical Commission
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
Texas General Land Office
Coastal Coordination Council
Texas Department of Transportation
Texas Water Development Board

EVALUATION FACTORS

The decision whether to proceed with the construction of this recreation trail will be based on an evaluation of the probable impact of the proposed activities on the public interest. The decision will reflect the national concern for protection and utilization of important resources as well as public and environmental safety and economic concerns. The benefit, which reasonably may be expected to accrue from the proposal, must be balanced against its reasonably foreseeable detriments. All factors, which may be relevant to the proposal, will be considered. The proposed construction of the recreation trail will proceed unless found contrary to the overall public interest.

ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTATION

It is anticipated that Environmental Assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact will fulfill the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. Single copies of these documents will be available by written request to the address below. The draft EA is also available online for review in the “Hot Topics” section at: <http://www.swg.usace.army.mil/>.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Persons desiring to express their views or provide information to be considered in evaluating the impact of this project are requested to mail their comments within 15 days of the date of this notice to:

District Engineer
U.S. Army Engineer District, Galveston
ATTN: CESWG-PE-PR, Mr. Jerry Androy
P.O. Box 1229
Galveston, Texas 77553-1229

or email at: jerry.l.androy@usace.army.mil; or phone 409-766-3821

Any person who has an interest which may be affected by this action may request a public hearing. The request must be submitted in writing within 10 days of the date of this notice and must clearly set forth the interest which may be affected and the manner in which the interest may be affected by this activity. Any questions concerning the proposed action may be directed to Mr. Jerry Androy at (409) 766-3821, or the email address above.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. C. Weston", written in a cursive style.

David C. Weston

Colonel, Corps of Engineers

District Engineer

Appendix C – Biological Assessment

**DRAFT BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT FOR FEDERALLY-LISTED
THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES
SIMS BAYOU RECREATION TRAIL,
HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS**

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

This Biological Assessment (BA) is being prepared for the purpose of fulfilling the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) requirements as outlined under Section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) of 1973, as amended. The purpose of this project is to construct a hike and bike trail along the Sims Bayou ROW. The trail would provide recreation opportunities for joggers, walkers, and bicyclists and the trail would connect to existing park sites, schools and neighborhoods along the bayou. This BA is being prepared to assist the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) personnel in fulfilling their obligations under the ESA.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed trail would begin at a new trailhead located within the Sims Bayou ROW on the east side of I-45, on the north bank just upstream of Glenbrook Golf Course. The trail would connect to the City of Houston's (COH) on-road bikeway network which continues downstream of I-45. From the trailhead, the trail would extend westerly along the north shore of Sims Bayou connecting to Reveille Park, Stewart Park, and Law Park. At Law Park, the trail would cross a pedestrian bridge to the south side of Sims Bayou. The trail would then connect to the sidewalk on Airport Blvd and then follow an existing bike route along Airport Blvd. The trail would reconnect with Sims Bayou just downstream of the Martin Luther King Bridge. At Martin Luther King Blvd, a portion of the trail would connect with Sims Bayou Park. The trail would continue along the south side of Sims Bayou, past Scott Street and connecting to Scottcrest Park via a proposed pedestrian bridge. The trail would continue on the south side of Sims Bayou where it would eventually connect with the proposed COH biking facility, "The Hill at Sims Greenway", located just downstream of State Highway 288. Continuing on, the trail would cross under SH-288 and continue until reaching Alameda Road, where it would cross to the north side of the bayou. The trail would continue on until it reached Townwood Park where it would tie into the existing park trail. From Townwood Park, the trail would continue on the north side of the bayou where it would tie into two separate segments of Harris County Precinct 1 trails already existing along the bayou.

As a part of this project, these locations would receive the following amenities: The new I-45 trailhead: parking spaces, signs with recreation descriptions and trail route maps, picnic areas, trash receptacles, benches, exercise stations and a water fountain; Stewart Park: parking spaces, benches, trash receptacles, picnic areas and a water fountain; Law Park: benches, exercise stations, picnic areas, a trash receptacle, and a water fountain;

Reveille Park: exercise stations, picnic areas, benches, trash receptacles, and a water fountain; Sims Bayou Park: picnic tables, benches, a water fountain and a trash receptacle; The trail intersection connecting “The Hill at Sims Greenway”: signage, benches, and picnic areas; Townwood Park: exercise stations, picnic areas, benches, and a water fountain.

2.0 FEDERALLY-LISTED THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES

The project area is located in Harris County, Texas. The USFWS considers the threatened or endangered species identified in Table 1 as possibly occurring in the county. No other species and no designated or proposed critical habitat under their jurisdiction were identified as occurring in the project vicinity.

Table 1. Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Species – Harris County, Texas

Taxon	Common Name	Scientific Name	Federal Status
Birds	Whooping Crane	Grus americana	Listed Endangered
Plants	Texas prairie dawn	Hymenoxys texana	Listed Endangered

¹ USFWS, 2009. www.fws.gov/southwest/es/EndangeredSpecies/lists/ListSpecies.cfm

2.1 WHOOPING CRANE

The whooping crane is a potential migrant via plains throughout most of state to the coast. Whooping cranes are known to winter in the coastal marshes of Aransas, Calhoun, and Refugio counties (TPWD 2009). The study area is an unlikely stopover site for the whooping crane. It is highly unlikely the whooping crane would occur in the project area.

2.2 TEXAS PRAIRIE DAWN

The Texas prairie dawn is found in poorly drained, sparsely vegetated areas (slick spots) at the base of mima mounds in open grassland or almost barren areas on slightly saline soils that are sticky when wet and powdery when dry. They flower in late February through early April (TPWD 2009). There is no potential for the Texas prairie dawn to occur within the project area.

3.0 EFFECTS OF THE PROPOSED ACTION ON LISTED SPECIES

The Texas prairie dawn and the whooping crane are highly unlikely to occur in the project area. Accordingly, the project will have no effect on these species.

Table 2. Effects of project on Federally-listed Threatened and Endangered Species.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Effects
Whooping Crane	Grus americana	No Effect
Texas prairie dawn	Hymenoxys texana	No Effect

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

The overall conclusion is that the proposed project would have no effect on any federally-listed threatened or endangered species or critical habitat. Although threatened or endangered species may occur in the project vicinity, no regularly used habitat is known to exist in the immediate project site.

References Cited

TPWD 2009. Wildlife fact sheets. <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/> Accessed 27 April, 2009.

USFWS 2009b. <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/EndangeredSpecies/lists/>. Accessed April 28, 2009.

Appendix D – Wildlife Deemed Hazardous to Aircraft

Birds

1. Gulls (all spp.)
2. Geese (primarily, Canada geese)
3. Hawks (primarily Red-tailed hawks)
4. Ducks (primarily Mallards)
5. Vultures (primarily, Turkey Vultures)
6. Rock doves
7. Doves (primarily mourning doves)
8. Blackbirds
9. European starlings
10. Sparrows
11. Egrets
12. Shore birds (primarily, Killdeer and Sandpipers)
13. Crows
14. Owls
15. Sandhill cranes
16. American kestrels
17. Great blue herons
18. Pelicans
19. Swallows
20. Eagles (Bald and Golden)
21. Ospreys
22. Ring-necked pheasants
23. Herons
24. Barn-owls
25. American robins
26. Meadowlarks
27. Buntings (snow)
28. Cormorants
29. Brants
30. Terns (all spp.)
31. Great horned owls

32. Horned larks
33. Turkeys
34. Swans
35. Mocking birds
36. Quails
37. Homing pigeons
38. Snowy owls
39. Anhingas
40. Ravens
41. Kites
42. Falcons
43. Peregrine falcons
44. Merlins
45. Grouse
46. Hungarian partridges
47. Spotted doves
48. Thrushes
49. Mynas
50. Finches

Mammals

1. Deer
2. Coyotes
3. Dogs
4. Elk
5. Cattle
6. Bats
7. Horses
8. Pronghorn antelopes
9. Foxes
10. Raccoons
11. Rabbits
12. Moose