



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).

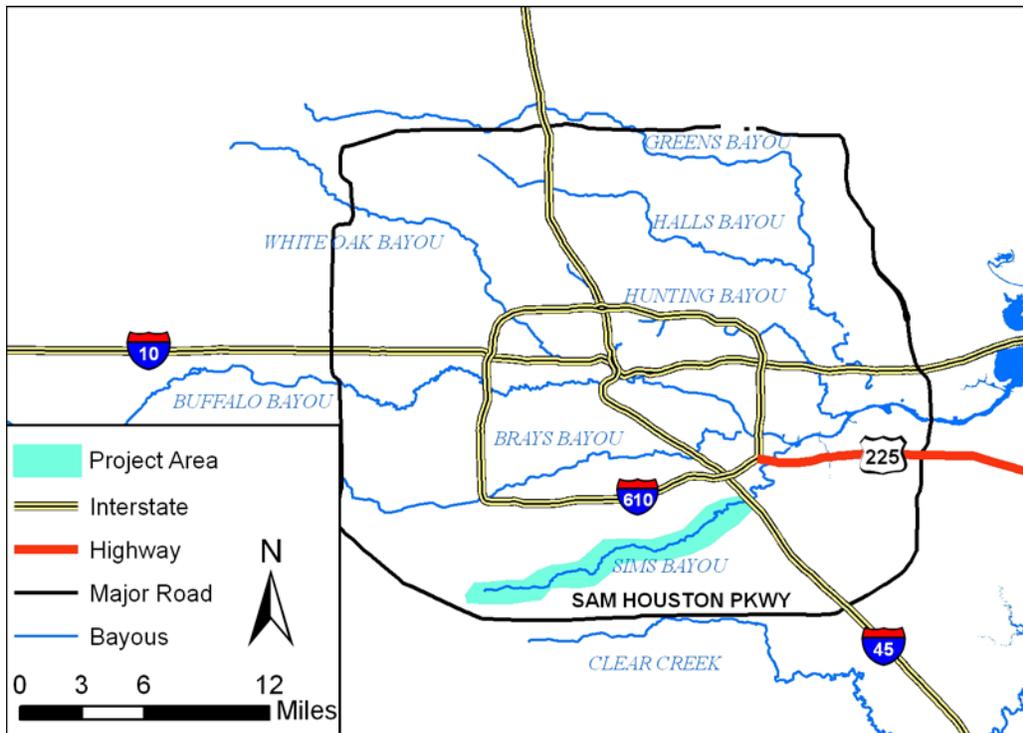


Figure 1. Map showing the project location.

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