



**Westside Creeks Restoration
Oversight Committee Meeting
San Antonio River Authority
100 E. Guenther
February 19, 2019
6:00 pm**

Committee Members Present

- Robert Ramirez, Co-Chair
- Skye Curd, West San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
- Gabriel Velasquez, Avenida Guadalupe
- Matthew Purdy, Beacon Hill Area Neighborhood Association
- Cary Guffey, Our Lady of the Lake University
- Stella Tenorio-De La Garza, San Antonio Conservation Society
- Kamala Platt, TexasTejano.com
- Erwin DeLuna, United San Antonio Pow Wow Inc.
- Veronica Lopez, West San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
- Charles Oisten, Woodlawn Lake Neighborhood Association

Staff and Public Present

- Lourdes Galvan, SARA Board BC D2
- Kerry Averyt, San Antonio River Authority
- Richard De La Cruz, San Antonio River Authority
- Reuben Bazan, San Antonio River Authority
- Carrie Brown, San Antonio River Authority
- Hillary Lilly, San Antonio River Authority
- Gloria Hernandez, Las Palmas Neighborhood Association
- Roy Martinez, Woodeez Stone & Laser Imaging
- Gen. Juan Ayala, City of San Antonio, Office of Military Affairs
- Brian Wilmunen, Flight Safety Airman at Kelly Airfield
- Sam McAnally, 433RD Airfield Wing, C5 Wing Chief of Safety
- Michael Pacheco, US Department of Agriculture
- Matt Rainey, TX Parks and Wildlife
- John Anderson, JBSA Community Initiatives Office
- Mitchel Kane, 502nd Air Base Wing
- Edward Brown, City of San Antonio, Office of Military Affairs
- Daniel Leal, City of San Antonio
- Steven Imburgia
- Gloria Almaraz
- Siboney Diaz Sanchez, Overland Partners
- Mauricio Pena
- Michael Pacheco
- Jose Lizcano
- Cecilia Garcia-Hours
- Alaina Parker
- Mark V. Padilla
- Laura Calderon, Ximenes & Associates

I. Welcome

Mr. Ramirez welcomed everyone and asked them to introduce themselves and their organization.

II. Calendar Items

Mr. Ramirez reviewed upcoming calendar items for the remainder of February through May. Items included:

- San Antonio River Authority Board - February 20, 2019
- San Pedro Creek Culture Park "Get Fit" Event - February 23, 2019
- San Pedro Creek Sub-Committee Meeting - March 14, 2019
- San Pedro Creek Sub-Committee Meeting - April 11, 2019
- San Pedro Creek Sub-Committee Meeting - May 9, 2019
- Westside Creeks Restoration Oversight Committee Meeting - May 21, 2019

III. Approval of Meeting Minutes - November 20, 2018

Mr. Ramirez stated that a quorum was not present and tabled approval of the minutes.

IV. Citizens to be Heard

Mr. Ramirez called for Citizens to be Heard. He stated that this item had been moved to the beginning of the agenda so citizens did not have to stay until the end of the meeting. No citizens were signed up to speak.

V. Briefing on Elmendorf Lake Park Bird Mitigation - General Juan Ayala, CoSA Office of Military and Veteran Affairs

Mr. Ramirez welcomed General Juan Ayala. General Ayala's team introduced themselves:

- Brian Wilmunen, Flight Safety Airman at Kelly Airfield;
- Sam McAnally, 433RD Airfield Wing, C5 Wing Chief of Safety;
- Michael Pacheco, US Department of Agriculture, specializing in wildlife hazard management on and off airports;
- Matt Rainey, Texas Parks and Wildlife, wildlife biologist;
- John Anderson, Joint Base San Antonio, Community Initiatives Office;
- Mitchel Kane, 502nd Air Base Wing; and
- Edward Brown, CoSA Office of Military and Veteran Affairs.

General Ayala defined BASH as a bird strike or a collision between a bird or a bat and an aircraft. During the past century, wildlife aircraft strikes have resulted in hundreds of lost lives and billions of dollars in aircraft damage. BASH events between 2011 and 2018 consisted of 87 Navy mishaps, 418 Air Force mishaps, and four deaths in 2014.

He said that the goal is to humanely change the behavior of the cattle egrets at Elmendorf Lake and move them out of the flight path. While every bird strike does not result in the loss of life for the airmen, every bird strike results in the loss of life for the bird, so the goal is to get them out of danger. General Ayala added that the plan to mitigate the hazard is in accordance with law. He said that 28 strikes with cattle egrets have occurred at Kelly and there have been over 50 bird strikes per year since 2010.

General Ayala said that waste and diseases spread when the bird populations are large. He stated that wildlife experts attribute most of the waste at Elmendorf Lake to the cattle egret's

overpopulation, and that the bird population is not sustainable at the man-made lake. Risks include avian diseases, salmonella, and fecal waste in high concentrations. He mentioned that Councilwoman Gonzalez had also raised the issue of the stench coming from the lake.

In terms of dispersing the birds, noise will be used. General Ayala showed a list of the involved agencies and said this is a joint military, civilian, and community effort to enhance the safety of the air crews and the public. General Ayala said suggestions that the military should leave are not feasible as they are the largest employer in the region, and have a long history in San Antonio. He concluded his presentation.

Mr. Ramirez opened the discussion by commenting on the presentation.

- Mr. Ramirez stated that none of the 50 bird strikes per year mentioned in the presentation came from Bird Island.
- Mr. Ramirez clarified that the lake may have been man-made, but it is now a natural eco-system.
- Mr. Ramirez said that the Elmendorf AFB crash was caused by Canadian geese and that the birds at Elmendorf Lake are not the same.
- Mr. Ramirez commented that General Ayala used the word “collaborative” but “collaborative” means “working together” and what General Ayala described “is a done deal.”
- Mr. Ramirez said the law is the lowest common denominator; people have to follow the law, but they can also choose to do better.
- Mr. Ramirez said they do not want to have the birds in the flight line. He said they would like to see a Merlin bird detection/deterrent system to keep the birds away from the airstrip. He said the committee could agree with this.
- Mr. Ramirez said that he would like to see a recommendation for flight scheduling that is sensitive to the egrets; incorporation of the Merlin system; and as a minimal first step, the military should work with the neighborhood to monitor the bird situation.
- Mr. Ramirez said that the city and county spent \$12 million in 2016 to restore the lake, which included aerators and bio swales. It is his assumption that the lake is in better condition today than before the restoration.
- Mr. Ramirez said that they have been monitoring the birds and noticed that one was sitting on a nest and had not moved all day. General Ayala said they checked last week and did not see any eggs. Mr. Ramirez said that he has been monitoring the birds and changes in their plumage suggest they are about to lay eggs. He added that this is the worst possible time to disperse them. He recommended waiting until after their eggs and hatch and the chicks fly away.
- Regarding plane landings and takeoffs, Mr. McAnally said they do mitigate their take-off and landing times when birds are in high concentrations. Mr. Ramirez asked if a Merlin device could help them. Mr. McAnally said it could, but their approaches are quite long and originate from a southerly direction, so it is difficult to mitigate in this manner. Mr. McAnally also mentioned they practice many touch-and-go’s. Mr. Ramirez said there is nothing that says they have to fly during the time that the birds are flying. Mr. McAnally said that they are the only training facility for C5s, so they must run multiple groupings per day. Mr. Ramirez asked if moving the time by 30 minutes would impact their mission. Mr. McAnally said it would be impactful. He said it has happened before and they have lost an entire training day.

- The discussion then focused on the eight cattle egret strikes and why it was necessary to mitigate for these when there are 50 strikes due to other types of birds. The team responded that one strike is one too many. Their job is to collect data, observe hazards and offer it to leadership so they can make decisions. He said they would like to have radar to help with that but it would cost about \$500,000, and take about two years to program the funds. He further said they can observe about a thousand birds regularly flying across the flight path and that it's a hazard they are obligated to address. Mr. Ramirez said that it seems like the predictability would make it easier to mitigate against flying while the birds are present in large concentrations. Mr. Ramirez added that a human life is worth more than \$500,000.
- Matt Rainey said that when a bird is nesting, they will not spend all of their time on the nest. Mr. Ramirez said that his research showed that the male and female shared incubating duties, so if you do not see the birds during their shift change, it would be hard to know if there is an egg. Mr. Rainey said there is ample research on this, that it is an accepted practice to move the bird to check for an egg, and that this will not disturb the nesting process.
- Lourdes Galvan, San Antonio River Authority Board Member, said she worked at Kelly AFB for years and never heard of a bird strike. The representative stated that prior to the Ajax bird strike, reporting these incidents was not required. Pilots must now report all bird strikes.
- Ms. Galvan said the birds were important to the community. She is concerned about human life, but she's never heard about anyone dying locally due to a bird strike. She also said she had never been contacted about this effort.
- Mr. Charles Oisten asked if there was a minimum concentration of birds that would be acceptable. The representative said the goal is to reduce the risk. Another representative said that at Randolph, they reduced the window of time impacted by bird flights and not necessarily the bird concentration. Mr. Oisten asked again what an acceptable bird population would be. He said they are describing bird populations in the 1,000s on the runway, but if the number can be reduced to a flock of 50 or so, that would be manageable.
- Kamala Platt said that she has seen egrets at Apache Creek and wondered about the distance the birds actually travel. The representative responded that they do not want the birds staying close by, but rather far away from the runway.
- Ms. Platt asked why the base was focusing on the egrets from Elmendorf Lake. She said the Air Force claims that 800-1200 cattle egrets are crossing the airstrip, but she has never seen more than 300 cattle egrets at Elmendorf Lake.
- Ms. Platt said that the egrets are at the lake between sunset and sunrise. She stated that their presentation was missing information about the egrets feeding at the landfill or fields on the other side. They responded that the main destination they found is the Covell Gardens Landfill. Ms. Platt said the egrets may not be coming from Elmendorf Lake. If there is a food source, they might be coming from multiple locations. She said if there are 250 cattle egrets on Bird Island overnight, then 800 or 1200 cattle egrets cannot be coming from Bird Island. She asked again why the base was focusing on Elmendorf Lake. She said it seems like the base wants to displace the egrets, similar to projects displacing people. Ms. Platt referenced the Climate Action and Adaptation Plan and said this effort needs to be considered in light of the CAAP as well.

- Ms. Platt referred to the statement that Randolph had reduced the bird flight to 1.5 hours. She said that in her experience, the birds complete their morning flight out of Bird Island in less than 10 minutes. If 1.5 hours is considered a success, then the cattle egrets at Bird Island should be considered very successful. He responded that the situation at Randolph is unique to the types of birds there and the types of aircraft flying out of that airstrip.
- Ms. Platt said the cattle egrets are culturally important to the people in the community. She said there are stories tied to the heron, and that this is about maintaining the culture, as well as the bird species.
- Gabriel Velasquez said the community has expressed concerns and distrust about why this is happening. He said this is a community that has had to be vigilant about what governments will do when no one is looking. It is important that the military know that the Westside Creeks Committee represents the neighborhoods, and that the neighborhoods hold the committee members accountable. He said the community does not want the birds moved. Regarding pollution, this is not the first time the issue has been raised. Mr. Velasquez said moving the birds to a more natural space could be positive if it is humane and properly timed.
- Erwin De Luna asked if they have identified other areas where the birds are originating. The representative said they communicate by text message with the USDA airport hazard biologist at Covell Gardens. By text, he tells the biologist the number of birds that have left the island, then a second person along the flight path identifies them. They have done this for three years and did not identify other originating locations.
- Mr. De Luna said he is still trying to reconcile the numbers since he does not believe there are more than 300 birds on the island, but the base keeps reporting bird numbers over 800.
- Mr. De Luna asked how many birds can be sustained on the island. The representative said that the concern was not the number, but the egrets entering the flight path. Mr. De Luna asked by what percent would they like to reduce the population. He said the committee would like to know what a safe number would be, when it would start, and when the greatest impact could be seen.
- Ms. Brown asked how the neighborhood would be informed of the process. General Ayala said that organizations were contacted and informed, and that social media and flyers were shared. She asked about the number of presentations made. General Ayala said that, in addition to the current presentation, two community meetings were held. The City of San Antonio is leading this effort. The media has also covered the public meetings. The Joint Base San Antonio Public Affairs representative said they are using a wide range of communication channels to inform the community.
- Matthew Purdy said that part of the creek restoration project is to create a more robust ecosystem and that it seems counterproductive to chase the birds from Bird Island when they should be deterred from the landfill.
- Gloria Pacheco Hernandez, President of Las Palmas Neighborhood Association, said she was advocating for a sensible plan to save the egrets and that much of our culture is tied to them. She added that everyone is concerned about safety, but when they worked on Elmendorf Lake, the community was told that the birds would not be disturbed.
- Mr. Velasquez said that this has always been a difficult subject that did not get addressed because someone wanted to deal with the Westside creeks. The dialogue on the ecosystem began when the “godfather” of the Westside Creeks idea threatened to

sue the Corps of Engineers. Mr. Velasquez said that the community has been led to believe that the water quality is bad and that the committee needs data on this.

Mr. Ramirez closed discussion on the item. He asked that they study the issue further and consider the timeline for dispersing the birds at Bird Island. He suggested that they try to purchase the Merlin system. He said that 11 years ago the committee developed its logo with a symbol for each creek, and that Elmendorf's symbol is an egret for a reason. He thanked the representatives for attending and sharing information at the meeting.

VI. Briefing on Apache Creek Neighborhood Connection, Daniel Leal, CoSA & Mark Padilla Studio

Daniel Leal presented the connection by saying that while it is small, it will set an important precedent. He said that the city has identified a need for neighborhood connections to the trails. He said that these connections were created by combining savings from the Westside Creek Trails, citing the pocket park at Apache Creek at Brazos Street and Chihuahua. Cecilia Hours and Alaina Parker, MPC Studios, provided the project details. See the related presentation, Apache Creek Neighborhood Connection, for further information.

Ms. Galvan asked if the signage would be bilingual and the team responded affirmatively. Ms. Galvan asked if the concrete walls would be sprayed to prevent graffiti. The team responded that it would be treated so graffiti could be easily removed.

Mr. Velasquez said that there is a need for parking. Mr. Leal responded that this connection will serve people who live in the neighborhood, and it is not meant for people driving to the area.

VII. Status Report on Westside Creeks Improvements Projects - Richard De La Cruz, San Antonio River Authority

Skye Curd introduced Richard De La Cruz, project manager for Westside Creeks. He reviewed the status of the different creeks and projects and some of the ongoing SAWS construction. See the related presentation, Elmendorf Pool and Linear Creekway Trails, for details.

VIII. Status Report on Elmendorf Lake Park Pool - Reuben Bazan, San Antonio River Authority

Reuben Bazan said that the joint bid with SAWS was not progressing well because the contractor's performance had delayed the project. He said Councilwoman Gonzalez and SAWS were aware. Mr. Bazan addressed the status of the pool. He said there was a groundbreaking on October 27, 2018. He said the pool was delayed but the goal is to make up that time. See the related presentation, Elmendorf Pool and Linear Creekway Trails, for details.

Mr. Bazan said they are having other issues with SAWS. He said they are going to have to open a trench near this area. He said there is a temporary roadway for access to the pool, but the primary access will be restored before the pool opens. He said the contractor is at 45% and that the goal is to open it by May 2019, in time for summer use.

Mr. De La Cruz then continued with the Westside Creeks and reviewed the status and details for Zarzamora Creek, Alazan Creek, and the Martinez Creek projects.

Mr. Velasquez stated that if Alazan Creek abuts the San Antonio Housing Authority near Guadalupe Street, there could be an opportunity to involve the community in the design. Mr.

Leal said that this could be done in an informational meeting, but at this point, they cannot change the design without impacting their budget.

IX. Status Report on San Pedro Creek Culture Park - Kerry Averyt, San Antonio River Authority

Kerry Averyt reviewed the project's status and funding. He said they have started construction for Phase 1.2, and design for Phase 1.3 and Phase 2. See the related presentation, San Pedro Culture Park, for details.

Mr. Velasquez asked Mr. Averyt about the guaranteed maximum price. Mr. Averyt said the contractor had more information, but that it primarily reflects market trends and design changes.

Mr. Averyt reviewed the on-going partner coordination. He mentioned coordination efforts for the new SAISD Administration building; working to complete the Travis-to-Houston block in time for the new Frost Bank Tower opening; and working with the Alameda Theater and Texas Public Radio. He said they have also worked with the UTSA downtown campus and the federal courthouse to coordinate with their plans. Mr. Velasquez congratulated Mr. Averyt for his hard work and for the work being done on San Pedro Creek. A member asked about the timeline for the pedestrian crossing at Santa Rosa. Mr. Averyt said it would be ready in March and that it should only take about two weeks.

X. Update on Public Art for San Pedro Creek Culture Park - Carrie Brown, San Antonio River Authority

Carrie Brown provided an update on the programming for Phases 1.1 and 1.2. Ms. Brown reviewed the various events held between December and January. In addition to reporting on upcoming activities, she said SARA would be issuing a call for artists to become pre-qualified for upcoming art installations.

Ms. Curd asked if similar programming could be provided at Elmendorf Park. Ms. Brown said her charge is to activate San Pedro Creek but the City Parks & Recreation Department are aware of the need to increase programming at Elmendorf.

I. Miscellaneous Items

- **Update Committee Membership Roster** – Mr. Ramirez said that some organizations had not attended meetings in some time, so they may have to determine their interest in serving. This item was tabled until the next meeting.
- **Westside Creeks Website Updates** – Mr. Ramirez asked Hillary to address the website. She said that various updates had been made and more would be forthcoming as information becomes available. Mr. Ramirez thanked Hillary for updating the website at www.westsidecreeks.com.
- Ms. Platt encouraged everyone to see the metal screen mural at Zarzamora and Culebra. She said it is called "Water is Life" and reflects the committee's work.

II. Adjourn at 9:00 PM