

RIO BOSQUE NEWS

A newsletter reporting on events at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park

Center for Environmental Resource Management
The University of Texas at El Paso



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USACE's DRAFT PLAN FOR RIO BOSQUE NOW OUT FOR REVIEW

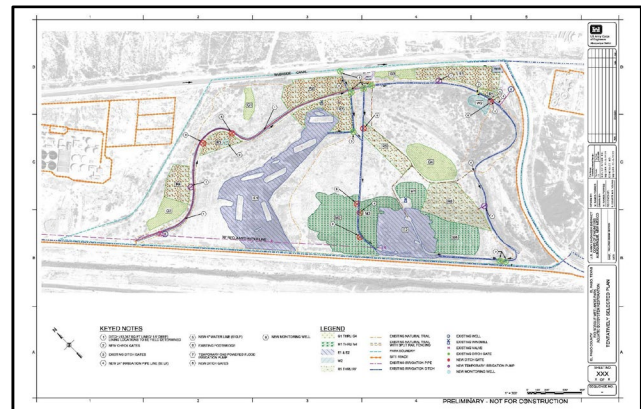
On Nov 23, The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) released a [Draft Detailed Project Report with Integrated Environmental Assessment \(DPR/EA\)](#) for a proposed aquatic-ecosystem restoration project at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park. The project would bring about the next big change in the park's evolving landscape. What would it include?

Existing Wetland Cells. The biggest change would take place in the park's 2 existing wetland cells. They are currently shallow wet-marsh areas designed to be flooded 6-18 inches deep. Except for a perimeter of shallow edge habitat, they would be deepened to depths of 3 to 6 feet and either lined with geosynthetic clay liners or bentonite clay or treated with soil amendments to reduce permeability. Approximately 55.1 acres would be affected.

Since 2015, when the pipeline from the Bustamante Plant was completed, water has been available to flood portions of the 2 wetland cells in spring and summer. In consistently flooded areas, dense stands of emergent vegetation – including natives like southern cattail and pale smartweed and exotic species like Johnsongrass – quickly took over, occupying areas that were previously open water. To provide favorable habitat for waterfowl, we would like to have an approximately even mix of open water and emergent vegetation in the park's wetlands. Deepening the cells will help us achieve that mix and introduce a new deep-water habitat element at the park.

New Wet Marsh. The loss of wet marsh in the existing wetland cells would be offset by creation of 34.3 acres of new wet marsh in 4 areas surrounding the park's existing Wetland Cell 2. The areas would be modified to enable flooding up to 2 feet deep.

New Wetland. A 1.4-acre wetland with shallow margins and a 5-foot-deep open-water area would be



The USACE's Tentatively Selected Plan for an aquatic ecosystem restoration project at Rio Bosque.

created next to the old river channel near the park's visitor center – the Discovery Pond we envisioned during early stages of park planning years ago.

Riparian Habitat. The plan identifies 7 areas totaling 45 acres where the focus would be on restoring riparian habitat. Some (R1, R3, R4) are open areas where early successional vegetation now predominates. Others (R2, R5, R6, R7) include large stands of tornillo, or screwbean mesquite. Historically, extensive tornillo stands were a common feature of the river valley in our region. One of the most rewarding changes that has taken place at the park over the past 20+ years is the development of such stands. How the riparian restoration work will affect them is not clear.

Grasslands. The plan identifies 4 areas totaling 15.3 acres where the focus would be on establishing flood-plain grassland habitat, currently underrepresented at the park. Three are relatively open areas, but one (G4) includes extensive tornillo stands.

Recreation. The purpose of the project is ecological restoration, but a limited part of the budget can be dedicated to compatible recreation. The USACE's analysis determined the economically justified level for the recreation budget to be \$80,000. A number of recreation-related improvements were considered

during the planning process. The USACE proposes to use most of the available recreation funds for 2 wildlife-viewing shelters, one at each existing wetland cell, and on trails providing access to them. In the Draft DPR/EA, the shelters are presented as open structures rather than blinds.

The USACE is working on this project, initiated through a request from El Paso Water, under Section 206 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996. Section 206 projects have 2 phases: 1) Feasibility and 2) Design and Construction.

The Draft DPR/EA is now out for public review and comment. Its finalization and approval will complete the Feasibility phase, but it won't complete planning

for the project. The plans developed during the Feasibility phase are largely conceptual. The detailed design analysis and the preparation of plans and specifications for construction will take place during the Design and Construction phase.

You can submit comments on the Draft DPR/EA (deadline: **30 Dec 2020**) to:

RioBosqueWetlands@usace.army.mil

or

USACE, Albuquerque District
Environmental Resources Section
Attn: CESP-PM-LE (Ms. Dana Price)
4101 Jefferson Plaza NE
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

RIO BOSQUE CALENDAR

Tours and workdays have resumed at Rio Bosque, but they remain subject to possible cancellation if COVID-19 conditions so dictate. Due to the pandemic, these events are limited to 9 participants plus the tour leader, and masks are required. Check www.riobosque.org for up-to date information on any schedule changes.

JANUARY			FEBRUARY			MARCH		
9 (Sat.)	Birding Tour	8 a.m.	7 (Sun.)	Birding Tour	8 a.m.	7 (Sun.)	Birding Tour	3 p.m.
16 (Sat.)	Workday	9 a.m.	13 (Sat.)	Introductory Tour	3 p.m.	13 (Sat.)	Introductory Tour	9 a.m.
17 (Sun.)	Introductory Tour	3 p.m.	20 (Sat.)	Workday	9 a.m.	20 (Sat.)	Workday	9 a.m.

Meeting place for all activities is a bridge crossing the Riverside Canal. From I-10, take Americas Ave. (Loop 375) to Pan American Dr., turn left onto Pan American and travel 1.5 miles to the bridge. Please be prompt.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.riobosque.org

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