

Conservation efforts begin on Lake Creek Greenway Project

Volunteers plan to construct hiking trails, canoe route, nature center

By [Wendy Cawthon](#) August 5, 2015





A group of Montgomery County officials and volunteers are moving forward with plans to preserve and transform nearly 600 acres of land in Precinct 2 from I-45 to FM 149 as part of the Lake Creek Greenway Project.

Since the project was initiated in 2011, acreage has been obtained from various county entities to protect the forest and flood plain areas from rapid development, said Glenn Buckley, board secretary for the nonprofit organization Keep Montgomery County Beautiful, or KMCB. The mission of the volunteer-run organization is to promote environmental education and improvement efforts in Montgomery County.

The project will include the installation of new hiking trails, a 20-mile canoe route and a possible future nature center. In January 2011, the Montgomery County Commissioners Court issued a resolution in support of the newly organized Lake Creek Greenway Project.

“The impetus [for the greenway project] was all the growth around here and the impact on the water quality,” Buckley said. “Our intent was to take that [area] and put nature trails on it and try to get people to go down there and show them that there’s potential for recreation.”

Creating a greenway

Over the past four years, KMCB members have also begun collaborating with the Bayou Land Conservancy, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and the Houston-Galveston Area Council to move forward with conservation efforts.

In 2013, KMCB members and residents from nearby neighborhoods began volunteering and donating funds to develop recreation areas within the greenway. One project includes the construction of two new hiking trails on 64 acres of the project along Sendera Ranch Drive to help turn the area into a recreational and educational destination, Buckley said.

“Ecotourism is a big part of [the Lake Creek Greenway Project], and [KMCB is] promoting lower-impact development because of the impact we’re seeing on the water quality and the flooding,” Buckley said. “We believe [the greenway] has the potential to improve on the commercial aspects in terms of attracting people to the area.”

The site is open to the public as construction continues, and plans are being developed to create a 20-mile canoe route along the public stream south of the preserve, Buckley said. There are also plans for a nature center, which could act as a rest stop or a site for school field trips.

Land acquisition

“A lot of people around Magnolia and Montgomery County don’t know that [this land] is even there, and that’s a shame. Lake Creek is [part of our history], and I think it’s something that has to be preserved.”

—Montgomery County Precinct 2 Commissioner Charlie Riley

The 64-acre tract was donated to Montgomery County in 2009 after master-planned community Woodforest Development Ltd. acquired the acreage during mitigation for the construction of Fish Creek Thoroughfare, Buckley said. The county then granted the land as a conservation easement area to the conservancy.

Buckley, who lives near the Woodforest master-planned community in Montgomery County, said he moved to the area in 1998 after potential residents were promised a 1,000-acre nature preserve. Just over a decade later, Johnson Development Corp. agreed in 2009 to provide the bulk of the future Lake Creek Greenway Project—500 acres of land—for use as a nature preserve.

With continued volunteering and donated funding from residents, Buckley said he estimates the trails and canoe route will be completed in the coming months. In addition, Buckley said he hopes to identify a cost estimate for a potential future nature center and develop a building design plan within the next year.

“As we get further into this, [we’re] really trying to make people aware of what we’re trying to do ... and how much funding we’ll need,” Buckley said. “We’re not quite there at this point. At some point, the citizens have to start demanding this; otherwise, it’s not going to happen.”

Conservation efforts

One of the main reasons the Lake Creek Greenway is important for conservation is because of its location on a flood plain, which tends to retain water during periods of heavy rainfall, said Becky Zitterich, a former biologist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service and KMCB board member.

“With all of those trees, if you came in and [cut them down] before the floods, the water would destroy bridges downstream,” Zitterich said. “I don’t want to talk scare tactics, but it is conceivable. All those trees hold the soil, and if you cut them down, that causes 10 times the erosion problems.”



Water quality improvement

Along with the Lake Creek Greenway Project, KMCB is working with H-GAC to develop a watershed protection plan to identify threats to water quality and take steps to reduce water contamination.

One of the biggest water issues in the area is bacteria impairment, in addition to sedimentation and oxygen level issues that often come as a result of development, said Todd Running, H-GAC water resources program manager.

“Bacteria comes from a lot of different sources, and it occurs naturally in the environment [from domestic and wild animals],” Running said. “Another [source] is the sewer system. All the things that we dispose of that we probably shouldn’t flush down the commode or the sink ends up creating a big plug in the system, which backs up into public ditches and moves bacteria into the streams.”

H-GAC plans to work with local residents to develop the watershed protection plan over the next few years. Running said he hopes providing education about proper waste management and encouraging more involvement will help keep the area clean.

Work on the 1.5-mile hiking trail in Lake Creek Preserve began in 2013. With the help of local residents and Boy Scout troops, many of the trails have been established and boardwalks have been built to help hikers over difficult terrain.



Future outlook

To date, KMCB has raised nearly \$2,000 in donations, with additional funds raised by Boy Scout troops who are helping clear a portion of the land. KMCB also plans to work with the county to find a grant writer and apply for additional conservation project funds.

In July, KMCB began working with Montgomery County Precinct 2 Commissioner Charlie Riley to take immediate steps to make the nature trails more accessible, such as establishing a parking area and a gravel road near the preserve entrance.

“A lot of people around Magnolia and Montgomery County don’t know that [this land] is even there, and that’s a shame,” Riley said. “Lake Creek is [part of our history], and I think it’s something that has to be preserved.”

