

INTRODUCTION PART 2

BRACKENRIDGE PARK CLR OVERVIEW AND OUTCOMES

OVERVIEW

CURRENT MANAGEMENT

Brackenridge Park is owned by the city of San Antonio, and three entities contribute to its oversight, management, and stewardship: the San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department, the San Antonio River Authority (SARA), and the Brackenridge Park Conservancy (BPC). The San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department, previously under the direction of Xavier Urrutia (from January 2009 – July 2018), and currently headed by Homer Garcia on an interim basis, is responsible for maintaining the park, along with approximately 240 other parks that it maintains throughout the city.¹ SARA, created in 1937 and currently under the management of Suzanne Scott and governed by an elected board of directors, is responsible for “developing and conserving” the San Antonio River.² SARA, therefore, is instrumental in protecting the park’s ecological resources and improving the water quality of the San Antonio River, which runs through the park. The BPC, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization directed by Lynn Osborne Bobbitt and governed by a volunteer board of directors, acts as the park’s primary preservation steward and advocate. The BPC was formed in September 2008, and its founding board was elected in February 2009.³

Prior to the BPC’s formation, the San Antonio Conservation Society “played an active role in the park’s preservation,” serving as its steward since its founding in 1924. In the early 2000s, the conservation society formed a Brackenridge Park committee and engaged Elizabeth Barlow Rogers to prepare a white paper “about the creation of an organization

1 “About Our Parks,” San Antonio Parks and Recreation, City of San Antonio, accessed June 6, 2019, sanantonio.gov/ParksAndRec/About-Mission/About-Us.

2 “About San Antonio River Authority,” San Antonio River Authority, accessed June 6, 2019, sara-tx.org/about.

3 “Brackenridge Park Mission and History,” Brackenridge Park Conservancy, brackenridgepark.org/about/mission-history.

dedicated solely to the protection of Brackenridge Park.”⁴ Rogers, a San Antonio native, was instrumental in founding the Central Park Conservancy in the 1980s, and she served as the first Central Park administrator. The BPC originated following Rogers’s commissioned white paper.

Working closely with the San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department, the BPC “raises funds for projects that benefit the park, implements park-based programs and projects, advises City staff and City Council, supports the evolution and implementation of plans for the park, and acts as a forum for users to address common issues and build consensus.”⁵

The BPC is the primary client for this CLR. SARA is the primary client for the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center’s Ecological Site Assessment that informs components of this CLR and addresses the site’s ecology in greater depth. Both entities are working in close partnership, along with the San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department, to ensure the outcomes of the CLR process.

PROJECT/GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT AND SITE BOUNDARIES

San Antonio’s Brackenridge Park is in the geographic region referred to as South Texas. “The region is bordered by the Edwards Plateau to the north...the Gulf of Mexico coastline” to the southeast, “and the Lower Pecos region to the west.”⁶ The major metropolitan Houston area is east of Bexar County and San Antonio. San Antonio is at the base of the Balcones Escarpment” fault line “of the Edwards Plateau.”⁷ The plateau is the southernmost unit of the Great Plains. The site is a transitional zone. The convergence of these geographic regions results in a dividing line between the “humid subtropical East and Gulf Coast Texas and semiarid Central and West Texas.”⁸ This dividing line does not mean that San Antonio has a balanced, temperate climate. Rather, “In one year, San Antonio may experience desert-like conditions and in the next year receive a deluge of precipitation”⁹ (**figure 13**).

Major drainages associated with Brackenridge Park are the Olmos Creek Basin located north of the park, the headwaters of the San Antonio River, south of Olmos Creek Basin and north of the park on property owned by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, the San Antonio River, and several small springs in proximity to the river.¹⁰ The park is situated north of downtown San Antonio, and it is the starting point for a series of cultural and historic sites that dot the San Antonio River and associated spring systems (**figure-14**).

In its entirety, Brackenridge Park occupies 343 acres. This acreage includes the Witte Museum, San Antonio Zoo, Brackenridge Park Golf Course, and the area occupied by

4 “Brackenridge Park Mission and History,” Brackenridge Park Conservancy.

5 “Brackenridge Park Mission and History,” Brackenridge Park Conservancy.

6 Kristi M. Ulrich. “Archaeological Services Associated with Improvements to Miraflores at Brackenridge Park, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.” Archaeological Report, No. 387. Texas Antiquities Permit No. 4653. San Antonio, TX: Center for Archeological Research. The University of Texas at San Antonio. 2008. From Norwine 1995 138.

7 Ulrich, Kristi M. “Archaeological Services Associated with Improvements to Miraflores at Brackenridge Park, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.” 2008. 1.

8 Porter, Charles R. Jr. *Spanish Water, Anglo Water: Early Development in San Antonio*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2009. 3.

9 Porter, Charles R. Jr. *Spanish Water, Anglo Water: Early Development in San Antonio*. Quoting Miller 21.

10 Ulrich, Kristi M. “Archaeological Services Associated with Improvements to Miraflores at Brackenridge Park, San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas.” 2008. 1.

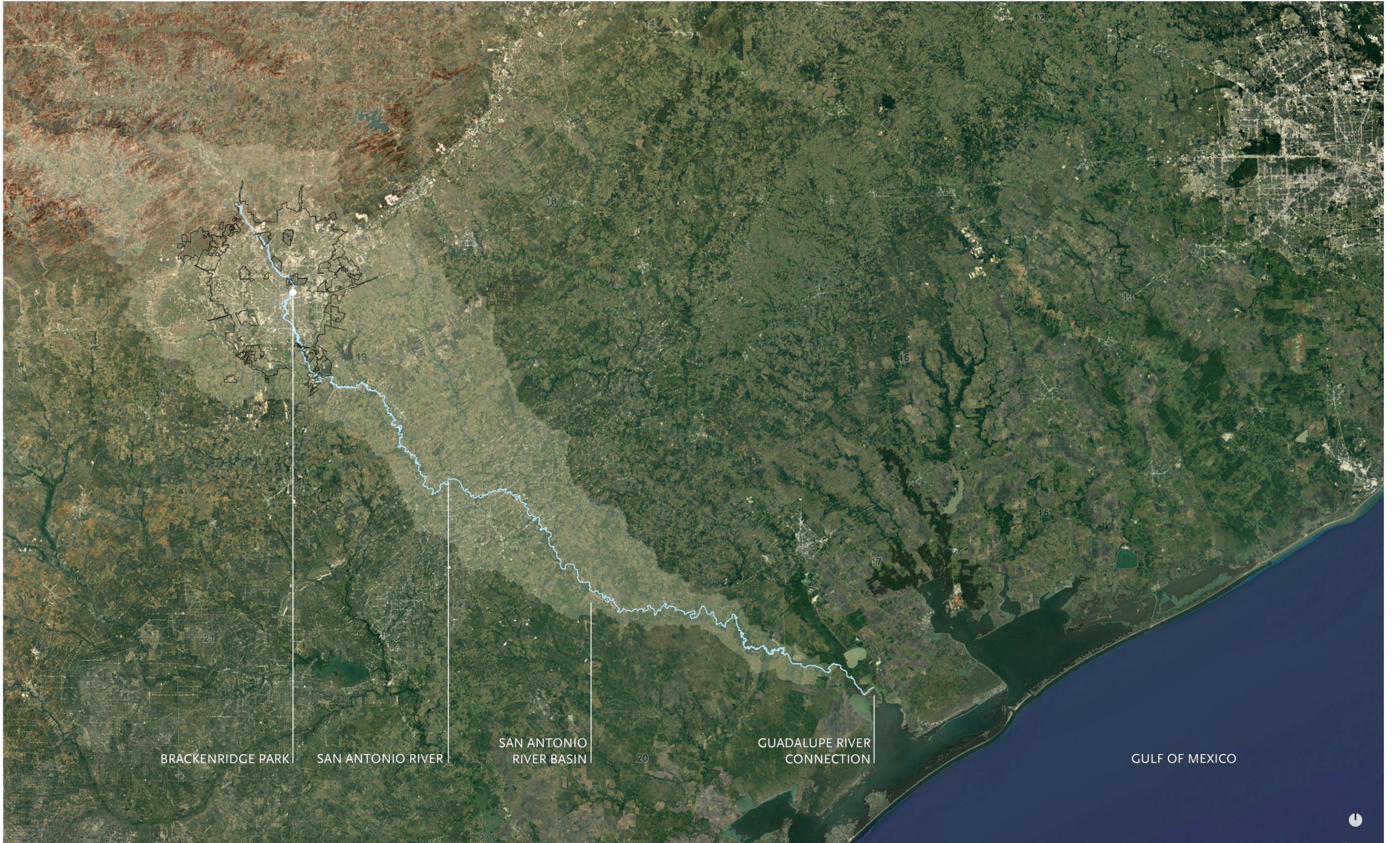


FIGURE –13. A map shows the geographic context of Brackenridge Park within South Texas. A portion of the Houston metropolitan area can be seen in the upper right. Source: Reed Hilderbrand

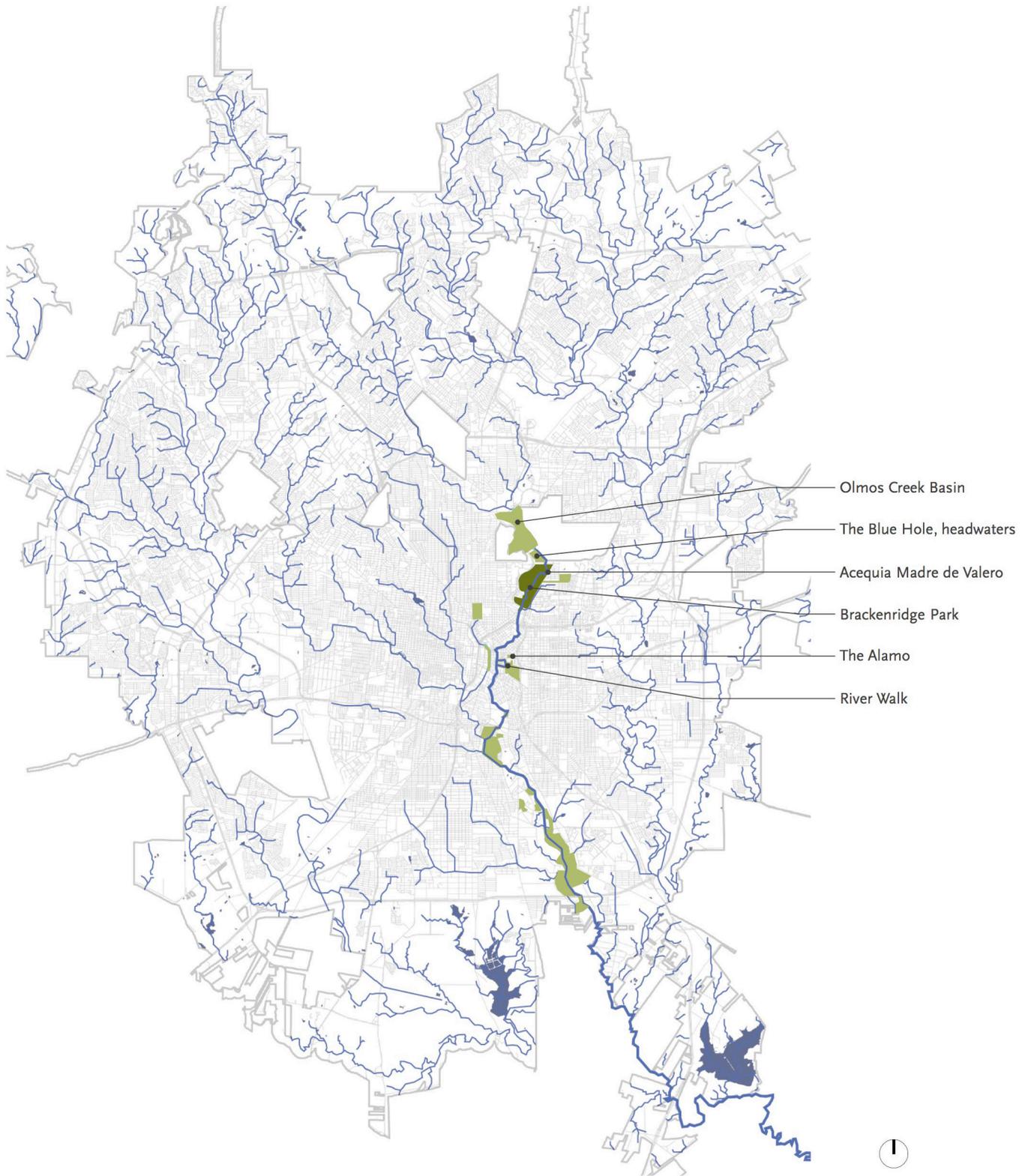


FIGURE –14. Major drainages associated with Brackenridge Park. Source: Reed Hilderbrand

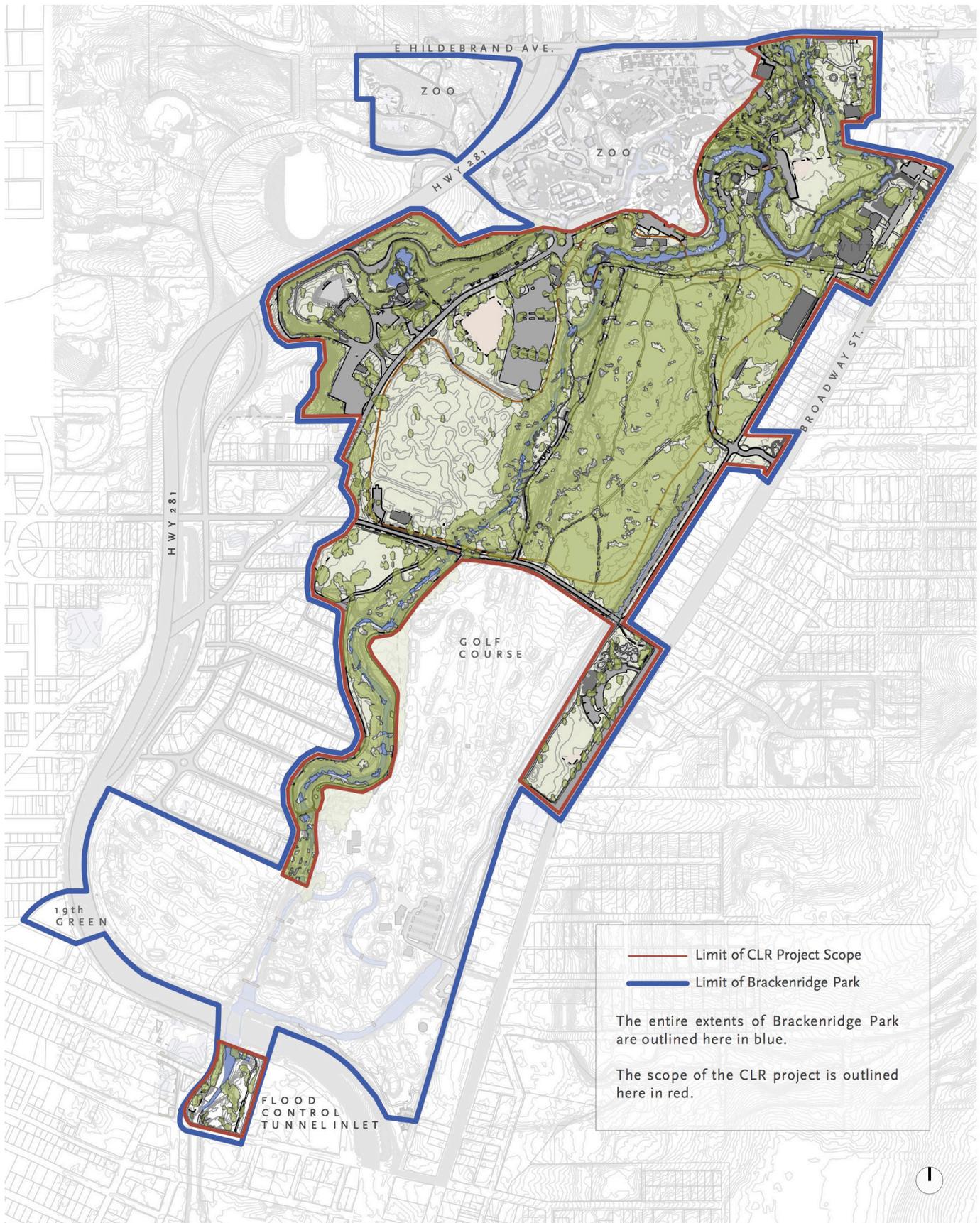


FIGURE –15. A Brackenridge Park Project Boundary map shows limits of the CLR study and the overall park, which differ. Source: Reed Hilderbrand

the Driving Range and the First Tee charitable organization, which was one of George Brackenridge's last land donations to the city (1917).

The zoo and golf course are not within the project bounds of this CLR. The Brackenridge Park CLR focuses primarily on the expansive open space through which the San Antonio River flows—in a sense, it is a study of the connective thread between the Witte Museum, the golf course, and the zoo. Therefore, although the latter two are not addressed at length, these cultural institutions are included in the timeline and mentioned in the site history and are represented in various diagrams and maps throughout this report. In **figure 15**, the bounds of this project are outlined in red, with the bounds of the entire park outlined in blue. In developing the Treatment Plan, the park's preservation and future development is considered as a whole, as it is impossible to physically, factually, and culturally extract these historic institutions from the park's history.

METHODOLOGY

The process used by the landscape architectural historians, landscape architects, and ecologists working on this CLR is based on methods prescribed by the Historic Landscape Initiative of the National Park Service (NPS). It was adapted to include a greater focus on the site ecology.

The level of investigation in this CLR responded to a combination of opportunities, limitations, and a series of deliberate decisions. The amount of material and local knowledge available to the researchers presented an opportunity. But although there was a bounty of information, time was a major limitation. It is not unusual for a CLR to be completed over the span of two to four years—this project spanned eighteenth months. Another limitation existed in the amount of available research related to the park during the Civil War and, in particular, of information about the enslaved who labored on the site.

With a site that has such a long and complex history, narrating and illustrating its stories becomes a series of choices. Tracing cultural influences and sifting through research to understand geophysical forces such as the Balcones Escarpment; the megafauna that once inhabited the area; the site's relationship to the regional Edwards Aquifer; a complex system of historic acequias and dams; and more recent engineering interventions, such as the Tunnel Inlet, one of the world's largest drainage diversion tunnels at the southern end of the site, can seem like a daunting task for cultural landscape historians. Determining what is relevant and important, what connections should be made for the reader, what depth of information should be provided, and what to leave out as well as finding a way to provide an objective outsider's view into the site in balance with local experts—these are always the challenges and opportunities.

The CLR process included seven steps. These steps are listed below and then discussed in greater detail:

1. Project Kickoff and Initial Site Reconnaissance
2. Wildflower Center Ecological Site Assessment
3. Historical Research and Ongoing Site Reconnaissance
4. Documentation of Existing Conditions
5. Site Context and History
6. Analysis and Evaluation
7. Development of a Treatment Plan

1. PROJECT KICKOFF AND INITIAL SITE RECONNAISSANCE

A project kickoff meeting was held on June 19, 2018. During this meeting, the CLR consultants, including John Grove and Christina Sohn of Reed Hilderbrand, John Welch and Herpreet Singh of Suzanne Turner Associates (STA), and Matt O’Toole and Adam Barbe of the Wildflower Center, presented an overview of the process for conducting a CLR and an Ecological Site Assessment (ESA). The team met the clients, including representatives from the BPC, SARA, and San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department. The consultant team also met stakeholders who represented various institutions, organizations, and academic and professional disciplines, including BPC board members, local historians, archaeologists, hydrology experts, landscape architects, architects, engineers, and others. During an extensive tour of Brackenridge Park, the consultant team photographed the park and listened to stakeholders. Thus the team was introduced to the complexity of the site, challenges of the physical landscape, conditions of the historic fabric, previous and existing plans related to the site, and current projects planned or underway.

Site reconnaissance also included an evaluation of several key documents related to the site, including the Brackenridge Park National Register Nomination Form (2011) and the Brackenridge Park Master Plan (2017). The goals of the adopted Master Plan follow:

1. Improving water quality/restoring natural features
2. Restoring and preserving cultural and historical features
3. Studying circulation as a cultural resource

These goals were carefully considered throughout the development of the CLR.

2. WILDFLOWER CENTER ECOLOGICAL SITE ASSESSMENT

Michelle Bertelsen and Adam Barbe of the Wildflower Center conducted an ESA of Brackenridge Park from July 30 to July 31, 2018. Bertelsen assessed the findings and authored the ESA, which provides an overview of existing plant communities, soil surface condition, analysis of site drainage, and the relationship of the site to the surrounding area. It examines current conditions and identifies opportunities to improve the overall ecological health of the site and to improve the resilience of natural plant communities and hydrologic function. The final ESA brings together multiple aspects of ecology (soils, vegetation, and hydrology) with consideration of human use of the landscape, cultural resources, and maintenance parameters.

3. HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND ONGOING SITE RECONNAISSANCE

Historical research and ongoing site reconnaissance included an additional site visit and the collection of electronic resources. From November 12 to 16, STA visited the park to meet and speak with Marise McDermott, president and CEO of the Witte Museum; and with representatives from the San Antonio Zoo, including Chris Vanskike, vice president of operations, and Ben Barton, director of maintenance and construction for the San Antonio Zoo. STA also toured these institutions. Later, STA toured and photographed areas of Brackenridge Park and its surroundings for a second time, including visits to Flood Control Inlet Park, Miraflores Gardens, exposed portions of the Acequia Madre de Valero (on Witte Museum property), exposed portions of the Upper Labor acequia (located in the zoo), and the San Antonio Spring, or Blue Hole” just north of the park. During this visit, STA interviewed or met with historians Maria Pfeiffer and Lewis Fisher, archaeologist Clinton McKenzie, engineer and former general manager of SARA Fred Pfeiffer, and landscape architect Everett Fly.

The researchers also met with Bill Pennell, assistant manager of the San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department, to cull through its extensive archives of park plans and with librarian Beth Standiford of the San Antonio Conservation Society. STA reviewed Ms. Pfeiffer’s collection of research and news clippings related to Brackenridge Park, preliminarily reviewed the Witte Museum’s archival collection with chief curator Amy Fulkerson, and met with Pamela Ball, executive director of the University of Incarnate Word, to investigate the location of George Brackenridge’s library collection.

Working remotely, STA consulted with environmental scientist Gregg Eckhardt. STA also obtained an extensive collection of books, articles, and historic news clippings relevant to the occupation, evolution, and development of the Brackenridge Park landscape. Historic photographs were collected with the help of Ms. Pfeiffer, Ms. Fulkerson, and Mr. Fisher, as well as through online repositories. Aerial photographs were also obtained from USGS repositories and USDA National Archives.

4. DOCUMENTATION OF EXISTING CONDITIONS

The documentation of Brackenridge Park’s existing conditions is based on a combination of site visits, field notes, and photographs; the conditions are presented through ecological and cultural lenses, and they are addressed at varying scales.

From July 30 to 31, 2018, the Wildflower Center visited the park to conduct the ESA, which included “an overview of existing plant communities, soil surface condition, analysis of site drainage and relationship of the site to the surrounding area”¹¹ with a focus on understanding the site’s current ecological conditions. STA used the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form as a guide for determining which cultural features should be assessed as part of the existing conditions.

Between February 25 and 26, Reed Hilderbrand visited the site to assess existing conditions. They focused on collecting photographs and assessing larger site systems of circulation, vegetation, character, and use as well as the relationships between these larger components.

¹¹ Michelle Bertelsen. “Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment.” (San Antonio, TX: Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas at Austin, 2019), 5.

Reed Hilderbrand met with Ms. Pfeiffer to review historic images and plans and with Mr. Pfeiffer to discuss the Flood Control Tunnel Inlet. Mr. Pennell, of the San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department, shared current practices for site care, maintenance, and use. Reed Hilderbrand walked the site with Eckhardt to understand the hydrology system on site: its artesian wells, acequias, tunnels, and pumps.

Site Mapping

Site mapping of existing conditions was created using a combination of sources; site contours, aerial images, and a detailed survey of a northern section of the park were provided by the San Antonio River Authority. The remaining site linework was created using a CAD file provided by Jay Loudon, principal at Workshop, who shared information compiled during the 2017 master planning process.

5. SITE CONTEXT AND HISTORY

STA began compiling a comprehensive timeline for Brackenridge Park following the project kickoff. This timeline was essentially completed over the course of six months, between June and December 2018. It continued to evolve throughout the process, however, as new information was discovered or as analysis revealed that certain contexts or events were relevant that may not have been thought relevant during earlier phases of the CLR work.

Using the initial timeline as a measure, STA determined the most critical narratives related to the site:

- Stories of humans and hydrology, including the park’s ecological transformation over time and interpretation of future projects that aim to restore riparian health
- Prehistoric and historic life, including hidden and difficult cultural histories, such as those of Indigenous people, the enslaved, and early Mexican occupants
- Regional vernacular character, including the river as the park’s form-defining element, early vehicular circulation in the park, cultural access to the river, and regional art and craftsmanship
- Cultural layering that has contributed to the park’s physical and ritual development, with intentional focus on historic ties to San Antonio’s Indigenous people, the enslaved and their descendants, and the Mexican American community

These narratives became the framework for determining which broad contexts should be elaborated on in the CLR in order to help readers understand Brackenridge Park’s development over time in relationship to national and local events and movements.

The timeline also helped the consultants understand the major periods of occupation and development of the site and determine which of these should be considered periods of significance. With these periods defined, STA began to draft the site history—a chronological narrative detailing the site’s most transformative and meaningful changes.

The timeline, in conjunction with historical aerial photographs and plans, informed Reed Hilderbrand’s work developing period plans. These plans—created by comparing historical maps dated 1908, 1921, and 1929—clearly and concisely illustrate the evolution of the park, enabling users to make important comparisons and draw relationships between the park and its key narratives.

6. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

Evaluating the timeline, contexts, site history, and period plans alongside the existing conditions and the Wildflower Center’s ESA, the team analyzed the overall cultural significance of the landscape. A Statement of Significance was formulated and is included in this introduction and in the analysis chapter. With an understanding of how the site is culturally and historically significant, the team formulated a Determination of Integrity—an assessment of the site’s physical fabric and whether the landscape and its components maintain historical integrity that makes visible its cultural and historical significance. The Determination of Integrity is also included in this introduction and in the analysis chapter.

7. DEVELOPMENT OF A TREATMENT PLAN

On August 13, 2019, the consultant team met with the clients at the BPC. During a one-day Treatment charette, fourteen stakeholders articulated goals and dreams for Brackenridge Park. The consultant team asked the stakeholders to share what they consider to be sacred at Brackenridge Park and what they consider to be character-defining in the park. The following day, the team met and began to develop a framework for Treatment.

CLR OUTCOMES

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Brackenridge Park landscape is highly significant due to multiple periods of its development, at the national, state, and local levels. At the national level, it is significant on five fronts. First, the site’s complicated evolution of water diversion for the provision of public water, agriculture, and flood control represents one of the first municipal water systems in the country and a broad pattern of the country’s history of managing water as a resource. The initial system of acequias, built by Indigenous laborers, successfully provided public access to water beginning in 1719, and a more recent tunnel inlet system located at the base of the park continues to manage river flow and flood control today. (NPS Criterion A)

A second aspect of national significance is that Brackenridge Park is likely to yield archaeological information from prehistory, protohistory, and history—this single landscape possesses the ability to tell a contiguous story of occupancy and development from the prehistoric to historic periods. Although much of the park has not yet been examined, archaeological surveys have been conducted at Brackenridge Park. Each survey has yielded artifacts and information related to multiple periods of occupation and development. It is extremely likely that future research will yield additional prehistoric, protohistoric, and historic information, including evidence of Indigenous people, the enslaved, and the early Mexican population. Properties both north and south of Brackenridge along the San Antonio River have yielded paleontological artifacts; it is highly probable that site exploration at Brackenridge would yield similar artifacts. (NPS Criterion D)

A third aspect of national significance, as well as state and local significance, is the park's regional vernacular development and character as an early urban municipal park. This character is exemplified by an extensive collection of vernacular regional features, including a historic system of roads in the park that dates to the early 1900s, a network of pedestrian bridges, rock house architecture, rock house retaining walls, and other vernacular objects, structures, buildings, and built landscape works, such as low-water crossings that enabled carriages and vehicles to directly cross the San Antonio River in an immersive manner. As a regional vernacular park that emerged in the latter half of the nineteenth century and on the heels of the highly designed Central Park, Brackenridge Park represents the other end of the municipal park spectrum. (NPS Criterion C)

The landscape is also nationally significant as a result of numerous sculptures located in the park. These were designed by Mexican-born artist Dionicio Rodriguez and by Italian-born artist Pompeo Coppini. (NPS Criterion C)

Finally, the twentieth-century Easter tradition that is known to have emerged after World War II, and possibly as early as the 1930s, had evolved to an annual picnic and tent tradition and was widely associated with San Antonio's Mexican American community by the 1950s.¹² The tradition has spread to parks throughout the city as it has taken root. This recurring ethnographic event is significant at the national, state, and local levels because it conveys a broad pattern of ethnic migration and settlement. It is a newer cultural tradition and ritual that has symbolically imbued Brackenridge Park. (NPS Criterion A)

Brackenridge Park is significant at the state and local levels for its association with George W. Brackenridge, who was a cotton broker and banker before he traveled the state of Texas to conduct business and philanthropic work. He made major contributions in Austin, through his work as a University of Texas board member, and in Seguin, Texas, where he helped establish Guadalupe College for African Americans. Brackenridge was especially active in San Antonio, where, to give two examples, he donated the initial 199 acres for Brackenridge Park and established the San Antonio Water Works Company. His vision for Brackenridge Park was its first vernacular imprint. (NPS Criterion B)

Considered holistically for its archaeological, hydrologic, regional vernacular, artistic, and ethnographic evolution and development, the Brackenridge Park landscape possesses national, state, and local significance—and likely even international significance.

DETERMINATION OF INTEGRITY

A significant span of Brackenridge Park's history precedes its development as a park. Its archaeological heritage contains clear evidence of the prehistoric and historic continuum of the site. Although the archaeological resources are not visible throughout, they are largely undisturbed, and the entire park can be considered an archaeological site. Disturbance has been associated with construction of the Confederate tannery and, later, the Alamo Portland Cement site, the development of the San Antonio Zoo and the Brackenridge Park Golf Course, and foundations for buildings throughout the site. Disturbance has primarily not been at depths that would destroy the prehistoric archaeological fabric and record, however.

¹² "Park and Zoo Draw Huge Crowd." *San Antonio Express*, B-1. April 10, 1950, Newspaperarchives.com.

Because the archaeological resources are largely intact but not visible or easily understood, the archaeological integrity ranges from high to medium.

Brackenridge Park was first designated as a municipal park after George Brackenridge's original 1899 donation of 199 acres, and additional bequests and purchases over the next two decades completed the 343-acre park that now exists. The various regional vernacular components that were constructed during the park's first five decades (1899–1949) are clearly visible and remain largely intact, however, they are not completely understood as significant.

The only major change in park boundaries occurred between the late 1960s and late 1970s, when federal dollars were widely distributed throughout the country to improve and expand infrastructure investments that involved the automobile and trucking industries. One of these investments was the expansion of the interstate highway system. The expansion of the McAllister Freeway, which opened in 1978, carved off a slice of the park on the north side adjacent to the Sunken Garden Theater and the Japanese Tea Garden.

Taken as a whole, the significant components of the Brackenridge Park cultural landscape retain a high level of integrity in terms of physical intactness but a medium-to-low level of integrity in terms of the way their significance is visible and understood by the public.

TREATMENT APPROACHES

The NPS uses the term *Treatment* to describe the management plan that results from CLR analysis of a landscape's historical context, site history, existing conditions, significance, and integrity. Treatment is the work carried out to achieve a cultural landscape's long-term preservation goals—in effect, it is an *action plan*.

The NPS prescribes four treatment approaches:

Preservation requires “retention of the greatest amount of historic fabric, including historic form, features, and details as they have evolved over time.”

Rehabilitation “acknowledges the need to alter or add to a cultural landscape to meet continuing or new uses while retaining the landscape's historic character.”

Restoration allows for “the depiction of a landscape at a particular time in its history by preserving materials from the period of significance and removing materials from other periods.”

Reconstruction establishes a framework for “recreating a vanished or non-surviving landscape with new materials, primarily for interpretive purposes.¹³

¹³ *The Secretary of Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties and Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*, US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Washington, DC, 1993.

Alongside recommendations that correspond to the Secretary of the Interior’s approaches for treating cultural landscapes, the Brackenridge Park Treatment Plan includes recommendations developed in collaboration with the Wildflower Center for protecting and celebrating the site’s ecology through **Ecological Restoration** (*Eco-Restoration*).

Eco-Restoration is the process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged, or destroyed.¹⁴ Eco-Restoration is typically focused on the goal of repairing the function, or health, of damaged ecosystems, but not necessarily recreating a historic ecological community. Often, Eco-Restoration is achieved through Low Impact Development (LID).

Although there is no one-to-one correlation between Eco-Restoration and the four NPS-prescribed cultural landscape treatment approaches, Eco-Restoration most closely matches the approaches of Reconstruction and Rehabilitation.

The level of integrity a cultural landscape possesses—“the ability of a property to convey its significance”—is “a primary consideration in determining treatment...of the landscape... The level of integrity influences treatment decisions regarding what features to preserve, where to accommodate change for contemporary use, and where to reestablish missing features.”¹⁵

The NPS notes that “because of the complexity of many cultural landscapes, a primary treatment often serves as a general treatment for the entire landscape. The primary treatment is defined by the overall level of intervention and change proposed for the landscape.”¹⁶ In addition to the primary treatment, other treatment approaches or elements of other approaches may also be employed to varying degrees.

RECOMMENDED TREATMENT APPROACHES FOR BRACKENRIDGE PARK

Given Brackenridge Park’s broad-ranging significance, multiple levels of integrity, ecological importance, and current and future uses, the treatment recommendations will primarily employ a balanced mix of **Rehabilitation** and **Eco-Restoration**. Secondary treatments of **Preservation** and **Reconstruction** are recommended in certain areas of the park.

Because Brackenridge Park lacks one single period of significance—one particular time or style that should be celebrated, revealed, or preserved for the public to experience—we must look to the essential character or feeling that has resulted from its many periods of significance and attempt to celebrate and preserve that character. One can describe Brackenridge Park’s essential character as charming, quirky, surprising, patinated, layered, and containing a feeling of being handcrafted. These qualities, which have arisen from its long history, are the qualities to retain and maintain. In addition, the site contains some difficult histories as part of its layering. The very layering that contributes to the park’s unique character also presents a challenge. Brackenridge Park’s character today is disjointed, but this was not

¹⁴ “What Is Ecological Restoration?,” Society for Ecological Restoration, accessed. SER. Accessed November 22, 2019, ser-rrc.org/what-is-ecological-restoration/.

¹⁵ Robert Page, Cathy A. Gilbert, and Susan A. Dolan, *A Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports* (US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resource Stewardship and Partnerships, Washington, DC, 1998), 101.

¹⁶ Page, Gilbert, and Dolan. *Guide to Cultural Landscape Reports*, 86.

always the case. This means that the Treatment must return a sense of cohesion to the park while thoughtfully acknowledging the multiple periods of significance and difficult histories and retaining elements of surprise and charm.

SUMMARY OF TREATMENT PRIORITIES

A NEW FRAMEWORK

Every park contains a foundational framework of systems that define and impact the landscape in a holistic manner. Some systems are constructed, and some are natural. Brackenridge Park's eight defining systems are the Archaeology (hidden bones), San Antonio River/Riparian Corridor (heart), River Structures, Vegetation/Soils/Hydrology, Entry and Arrival Areas (face), Circulation through the Park (connective tissue), Edges between Cultural Institutions, and Collection of Historic Buildings, Structures, and Art. These landscape systems form the park's foundational framework. Because the existing framework is currently suffering, the culture and ecology of the park are endangered.

This CLR's findings conclude that Brackenridge Park's leadership must create a new framework by which each system is addressed comprehensively. Interpretation is a strategy that is critical to the health and longevity of any cultural park, and it is integral to the success of a new framework. Development of a new interpreted framework will holistically examine and design solutions for the park's systems. The framework will respect preservation treatment guidelines outlined in this CLR and the planning goals defined in the Master Plan.

A SYSTEMS APPROACH: SUMMARY OF TREATMENT PRIORITIES

Brackenridge Park's leadership must invest first and foremost in a new framework, focusing initially on five of its eight systems—its river and riparian corridor, its entry and arrival areas, its circulation, its archaeology, and its interpretation, which can be thought of as the park's soul. A new framework would set a future vision for the whole park while guiding key projects and growth over time and seeing site-wide goals realized.

This systems-based approach is not only vital but also possible. Designs and plans to restore the health of each system should be approached with the mind-set that implementation will occur in phases. Likewise, a piecemeal approach to funding and isolated development within Brackenridge Park must be rejected. The needs of site systems cannot be addressed one corner or parcel at a time. That approach has only added to the site's fragmentation over time; larger site needs and more complicated fixes have been passed over as this beloved park struggles to keep up with the needs of its diverse community. This piecemeal approach has served neither the park's cultural and historic significance nor its level of integrity thus far.

The following section summarizes Treatment Plan recommendation projects that rise to the highest level of action. These projects can be embarked on with the goal of healing the five priority systems. It is essential that these projects must be thought of as part of larger systems-related design efforts. The projects concern restoring a greater level of health to the park's ecology, preserving and maintaining its distinctive "homegrown" regional vernacular character, making ecological systems and prehistory and history—the difficult *and* the endearing histories—more evident and understandable, and creating a unified and

exceptional municipal park and cultural landscape—an *immersive landscape of learning* that lives up to Brackenridge Park’s astonishing heritage.

PRIORITY SYSTEM: THE RIVER AND RIPARIAN CORRIDOR (THE HEART)

The San Antonio River, with its associated riparian corridor, has functioned as the heart of the Brackenridge landscape for millennia. But it is no longer healthy or safely accessible. Improving the river’s health is imperative. Related projects align with the key recommendations found in the Ecological Site Assessment for Brackenridge Park.

1. **Riparian Buffer Design:** Establish a riparian buffer¹⁷ along the San Antonio River to reduce and eliminate erosion and to address compaction issues resulting from stormwater runoff. With guidance from the appropriate professional experts and practitioners, this design should:
 - a. Set minimum and preferred buffer widths along the entire river
 - b. Integrate viewing and access points to the river
 - c. Set goals for and achieve measurable ecological improvements
 - d. Interpret buffer for the public to promote riparian education and stewardship

2. **Park-Wide Ecological Restoration:** Design a phased park-wide system of ecological management areas and Low Impact Development (LID) features.¹⁸ Fundraising for this effort can also occur in phases. With guidance from the appropriate professional experts and practitioners, this design should:
 - a. Establish a park-wide goal for average annual runoff capture
 - b. Be tightly integrated with the circulation system
 - c. Include strategies to manage runoff from existing and new impervious cover and set an upper limit on impervious cover within the park
 - d. Establish soil protection zones to reduce extent and severity of compaction
 - e. Utilize plantings and mowing strategies to direct traffic away from critical root zones
 - f. Include an invasive plant species management plan

This project should be phased with an initial fundraising component that includes an Ecological Transect Design.

- a. Design a transect through the park that demonstrates the full range of possibilities for stormwater management and riparian improvement.
- b. Model the impacts through an initial computer-generated model created by ecologists with an interpretive specialist.
- c. The demonstration transect can show that the health of vegetation, soils, and hydrology across the site are interdependent.
- d. Interpret the transect to the public on-site and through an education program that traces the gradual ecological impacts on the site.

¹⁷ Bertelsen, “Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment,” 25.

¹⁸ Bertelsen, “Brackenridge Park Ecological Site Assessment,” 25.

PRIORITY SYSTEM: ENTRY AND ARRIVAL AREAS (THE PUBLIC FACE)

The park currently has no public face or physically defined presence in the community. The need exists to define the park's edge in connection with the community that surrounds it and to establish a hierarchy of park entrances. Newly defined park entry points and community-facing edges should appear to be related and should honor the park's regional vernacular character.

3. **Park Entrances Plan and Design:** Entry points should be assessed around the entire site. With guidance from the appropriate professional experts and practitioners, develop a design that identifies optimal entry points.
 - a. A “front door,” “side doors,” and “back door” should be located, and poorly situated entries should be decommissioned and eliminated.
 - b. Entries should be designed and improved to relate to each other, to be visible to the public, and to honor the park's regional vernacular character. Materials and aesthetics should be guided by historic and regional vernacular precedents.
 - c. The main entry to the park should respond to that area's historical significance and integrity.
 - d. External or public edges between the entries should be designed to clearly define the park's entire boundaries. The design should imply and function as a connection—drawing one's eye to the park and inviting people in—rather than as a border.

4. **The Front Door Project, Phase A:** Convert Lions Field into Brackenridge Park's “front door” and main entry, capitalizing on its highly visible location on Broadway, high historic significance, and relatively low historic integrity, which justifies a major investment. Lions Field falls between Hildebrand Avenue and Inlet Tunnel Park and is the geographic center point of the entire park. With guidance from the appropriate professional experts and practitioners, the design for this area contains many possibilities.
 - a. Design a first-rate visitors center that conveys the entire history of the site, orienting people to its core narratives.
 - b. Park leadership should work with the existing tenants of this space toward an acceptable relocation plan.
 - c. Interpretation within the visitors center might include interactive computer displays, a graphic timeline, and a display of archaeological discoveries. An interactive map might orient users to the park's history, trail systems, and cultural institutions, including the zoo and the Witte Museum.
 - d. The visitors center should house the Brackenridge Park Conservancy (BPC), which is currently housed in a former park storage room and functioning restroom facility.
 - e. The site design may call for a sustainable and interpreted meadow or pastureland, drawing on early park history as pasture for animals (the pasture did not get developed until 1923).
 - f. Lions Field was originally a property of George Brackenridge's San Antonio Water Works Company, so the story of San Antonio's public water system may be interpreted in this area.
 - g. Phases A and Phase B must be strategically conceived of together before determining which to phase in first.

5. **The Front Door Project, Phase B:** Expand the Lions Field front door across East Mulberry Avenue to create a magnificent central “double door” entry experience for the public. With guidance from the appropriate professional experts and practitioners, park leadership should
- a. Work with existing business owners on a relocation and/or land integration strategy.
 - b. Acquire land between Broadway and Avenue B and adjacent to Lions Field.
 - c. Design Catalpa-Pershing as a phase of this comprehensive Front Door Project. Design considerations for Catalpa-Pershing include the following:
 - i. Building on the park’s original vocabulary of bridges
 - ii. Leaving portions of the concrete ditch revealed to interpret a more recent component of the park’s lengthy history with water management and flood control
 - iii. Naturalizing portions of the ditch, interpreting this site as part of the physical evolution of water management on the site and in connection to Eco-restoration.

Phases A and B must be strategically conceived of together before determining which to phase in first.

PRIORITY SYSTEM: CIRCULATION THROUGH THE PARK (CONNECTIVE TISSUE)

Circulation is a critical landscape system, and the park’s ability to be experienced and conceived of as a cohesive park is heavily dependent on a comprehensive circulation plan. Today, circulation in Brackenridge Park is disjointed. It does not adequately provide for multiple modes of transportation. Historically, the park developed as a driving park, enabling people to use what was then the newest form of transportation in order to have multiple landscape experiences. This history is not understood on the site today.

6. **Comprehensive Circulation Plan and Design:** With guidance from the appropriate professional experts and practitioners, design a comprehensive pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular circulation plan to move people through the interior of the park.
- a. The plan should draw on the park’s history as a driving park and on its historical circuits.
 - b. It should also be integrated with care for the park’s natural plant communities and with the repair of damaged hydrology, including subtractive measures, such as eliminating invasive plant species.
 - c. Circulation should ensure that visitors can be immersed in a variety of landscape experiences as they move through the park.
 - d. Incorporate wayfinding and interpretation that is minimally intrusive, respectful of the regional vernacular, and effective in guiding people through the park, regardless of which landscape experiences they would like to encounter (arid desert vegetation, riparian landscape, woodlands, etc.) and regardless of the stories they seek to experience (eco-restoration, archaeological layers, cultural identity in the park, etc.).

PRIORITY SYSTEM: ARCHAEOLOGY (HIDDEN BONES)

Prehistoric and historic archaeological remnants exist throughout Brackenridge Park. The extent of potentially sensitive ground is therefore pervasive. It is increasingly common for cultural landscapes to take the approach of uncovering archaeological resources, preserving them in place, and interpreting them to the public. Advocating for a more public approach to archaeological resources, Dr. Matthew Reeves, the director of Archaeology and Landscape Restoration at James Madison’s Montpelier, states that “one of the best ways to have a community feel protective of sites is to know about them and become knowledgeable regarding their significance. And the best protection for sites against looting/disturbance is a local community’s eyes!”¹⁹

1. **Acequia Investigation:** Due to the high significance of the Acequia Madre de Valero and the Upper Labor Acequia, it is recommended that archaeological work be conducted to locate as much of the original two acequias as possible. With guidance from the appropriate professional experts and practitioners:
 - a. Remaining intact portions should be preserved and protected in place, under the guiding philosophy “first, do no harm.”
 - b. Areas that have collapsed should be examined by archeologists and preservation technologists who understand local stone and mortar materials and ways to preserve and possibly rehabilitate these resources.
 - c. The exposed and protected areas should be interpreted for the public to convey the story of water management and a public water system.
 - d. If there are areas that contain various layers, including precolonial, colonial, and Civil War, these remnants should be interpreted to convey the changes over time.

¹⁹ Matthew Reeves, director of Archaeology and Landscape Restoration, James Madison’s Montpelier, email correspondence, October 1, 2019.

INTERPRETATION STRATEGY (THE SOUL)

The four critical narratives noted throughout this CLR must be integrated into the pilot projects and any future projects. This requires specialized research. These narratives should be fully developed into interpretive plans that permeate the park. The narratives are

1. Stories of humans and hydrology, including the park's ecological transformation over time and interpretation of future projects that aim to restore the river's health
2. Prehistoric and historic life, including hidden and difficult cultural histories
3. Regional vernacular character, including the river as the park's form-defining element, early vehicular circulation in the park, cultural access to the river, and regional art and craftsmanship
4. Cultural layering that has contributed to the park's physical and ritual development, with intentional focus on historic ties to San Antonio's Indigenous people, the enslaved and their descendants, and the Mexican American community

Interpretation can and should be interdisciplinary and should span time. It should reveal the site's history and ecology, but the public must also understand how the past is relevant in the present and how it impacts the future. To this end, interpretation will need to convey the role that Brackenridge Park is actively playing in improving the present conditions and experience, whether the interpretation is related to Eco-restoration, circulation, or archaeological discovery.

Whether park leadership moves forward with a project related to one priority system or combines more than one system into a single project, interdisciplinary interpretation must drive the design approaches. Interpretation cannot be an afterthought. It will need to go beyond wayfinding and visitor center exhibits. By design, it must incorporate ways for park users to be immersed in the stories of the landscape's past and future; it should permeate the site.

NEXT STEPS

The CLR is a technical document that contains a vast amount of information. It will be used by park leadership as the primary management tool for Brackenridge Park. Therefore, the document must be read and digested by leadership from the BPC, San Antonio Parks and Recreation, and the San Antonio River Authority. Next steps toward implementation of the CLR Treatment follow.

1. Representation from these leadership groups must develop a shared understanding of the document and how to best use it to evaluate proposed projects and to guide new projects in Brackenridge Park.
2. When park leadership has developed a shared understanding of the CLR, fund-raising will be crucial to management and adoption of a systems approach. For more sustainable management practices, park leadership should look to other large municipal park conservancy models for guidance, which should facilitate conversation about funding models and about greater interface between Brackenridge Park and its cultural institutions.
3. Updates to the National Register Nomination can be made based on the content included in the analysis chapter of this CLR. This will begin the process of formally elevating Brackenridge Park to the national level of significance. It will also begin the process of laying further groundwork for a National Heritage Area designation.
4. One or more of the five priority systems should also be identified as a starting point for investment. Funds will be necessary to hire interdisciplinary teams to design for each system. It is critical that projects, such as those suggested in the Treatment Summary, be conceived of as part of a holistic strategic design; Boston's Emerald Necklace, discussed in the CLR introduction, is an example of systems-based planning and design at a larger scale. Once a system (or systems) has been planned and/or designed, implementation can and should occur in phases.
5. Using the systems framework as a guide, all existing and future large projects, smaller projects, and isolated efforts should be evaluated against the Treatment Plan guiding principles, Treatment Outcomes, Treatment Recommendations, and especially the prioritized systems. Such projects should be implemented only if they act as phases or segments of an established large-vision strategy. Again, to the degree possible, the three leadership entities should evaluate these projects together in order to assess them with a shared understanding of the CLR and its Treatment Plan.

If implemented successfully, this action plan will create cohesion for the park, providing clear direction to visitors and a consistency against which the layered, handcrafted elements of the site can be viewed and registered; it would remedy the currently deteriorating river banks and shade canopy, ensuring that these significant spatial experiences are protected for future visitors; and it would develop a strategy for telling the site's stories, ensuring that awareness of the site's history is integrated seamlessly.

MANAGEMENT MODELS

The emergence of formal stewardship of municipal parks arose concurrent with academic scholarship and the development of formal federal standards for documenting and preserving cultural landscapes. Central Park led the charge in 1985. This work provides a useful example for Brackenridge Park.

A benchmark for how the treatment of historic parks has changed over the century and a half since Olmsted and Vaux transformed the landscape of New York City is the preservation work, noted early in this chapter, led by Elizabeth Barlow Rogers. The 1985 report “Rebuilding Central Park: A Management and Restoration Plan” resulted from Rogers’s leadership and was the outcome of a three-year planning study by a large team of landscape architects, consultants, and planners who integrated the findings of ten individual planning studies. In many ways, this work—a phased, multidisciplinary, multiyear process with a critical interpretation and public information component—set the bar for much of the preservation work that would follow in American parks over the next few decades. For Central Park itself, the document became the road map and rationale for an ambitious fund-raising campaign. The Central Park Conservancy’s first capital campaign raised \$50 million over a five-year period and has been used to fund major restoration projects and annual maintenance.

The Central Park process not only emphasized the need for the preservation of the landscape’s significant features but also ensured that the municipal park would be understood in the public eye and experience as a cohesive setting that includes and visibly “shakes hands” with cultural institutions, including the Central Park Zoo, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Central Park, and the American Museum of Natural History. Likewise, the process placed management and ecological restoration front and center in the approach to healing the decades of neglect and overuse from which Central Park had suffered. Thirty-five years later, entire professional subdisciplines have grown up in order to provide expertise in the unique circumstances of landscape deterioration: vegetation loss, soil depletion, depletion of wildlife diversity, decay of historic landscape structures, the pollution of hydrologic systems, groundwater management, high crime statistics and perception of danger, outdated circulation systems, and loss of visitor services. Perhaps most important was the recognition that without well-researched and coordinated management of such a complex resource, decline was inevitable.

In 2013 the Central Park Conservancy Institute for Urban Parks was established as an educational arm of the Central Park Conservancy with the dual intent to teach park users and managers to care for urban parks everywhere and to share their experience in planning and management with other urban parks. Thus all urban parks can realize their potential to assume the role of “cultural and environmental treasures that have extraordinary capacity to educate, enrich, and inspire.”²⁰

Each cultural landscape is different and requires an approach that responds to the special qualities and situations of the particular landscape. Brackenridge Park is no exception, but the Central Park Conservancy provides one model for financial sustainability, viable management practices, and long-term stewardship.

²⁰ “Central Park: A Research Guide PDF,” 4, (New York, NY, 2016), centralparknyc.org/assets/pdfs/institute/Central-Park-Conservancy-Research-Guide.pdf.