

Open Space Working Group
Report and Possible Action on Items
for the
Bond Election Advisory Task Force

Members: Estrella De Leon, Tom Nuchols, Jeff Smith and Rob Walker, chair

November 16, 2017

- I. Purpose - 2018 election bond funding for
 - A. Watershed protection land acquisition, and
 - B. The Parks and Recreation Department

- II. Watershed Protection land acquisition
 - A. Our water quality is at risk, and the available and affordable land is diminishing. See the slides of Edwards Aquifer recharge zone swallets and the land impacts on the contributing zone.
 - 1. There has been significant development growth in the watershed since 1998
 - 2. See the 1998, 2006, 2012 and 2017 slides of maps showing the increase in developed tracts of land in the watershed area over those years. Time is running out and land prices are rising.

 - B. The objective is to limit development to 10% impervious cover in the Edwards Aquifer recharge and contributing (source-water protection) zones. This requires permanently protecting 100,000 acres of land to mitigate flooding and to protect water quality in the creeks and the aquifer.
 - 1. Presently we only have 28,000 acres permanently protected.
 - 2. The Finance Dept has proposed \$20 million which will acquire 800 acres based on Watershed's estimation, yet that will bridge barely 1% of the 72,000-acre gap. Hence we recommend at least \$50 million for 3,000 acres or about 4% of the gap.
 - 3. Popular proposition with the voters - 62% average voter approval in 4 bond elections from 1998 through 2012
 - 4. Good investment of bond funding.
 - a. Of the bonds approved from 2006 through 2013, Drainage and Open Space funding has the highest percentage of funds expended to date of any of the bond propositions - 96%.
 - b. The majority of funding is spent within the first 2-3 years of a bond program.
 - 5. Currently, bonds are the only funding source for significant Watershed Open Space land purchases

III. Parks and Recreation Department (PAR) bond funding

- A. The Finance Dept has proposed \$30 million which will acquire an estimated 830 acres.
1. The City's standard is 24 acres of parkland per 1,000 population yet we have just dropped below 20 acres in 2017 and will be near 19 acres in 2020, a deficiency of about 5,000 acres (please see the attached graph)
 2. Many areas in Austin lack parks within 1/4 mile walking distance in the urban core of Austin and within 1/2 mile walking distance outside of the urban core
- B. We recommend the allocation for land acquisition be \$35 million, allocated as follows:
1. \$10 million for acquiring 200 acres of critical parkland in Oak Hill out Highway 71 for a destination park.
 2. \$5 million for 5-10 infill parks in park-deficient areas of our City.
 3. \$5 million for 10 miles greenbelt acquisition including completing the northern Walnut Creek park and trail system
 4. \$15 million for a parkland reserve fund to help in preserving or acquiring strategic properties as they become available, including
 - the Lions Municipal Golf Course. It's time sensitive as the lease expires in 2019. This reserve fund will demonstrate to the University, the State Legislature and private donors that Austin is committed to preserving and perhaps acquiring Muni for parkland, watershed protection, clean air, and recreation. Preserving or acquiring Muni will give Austin added leverage with respect to future uses of the Brackenridge tract, one of the first areas of affordable housing in our city
 - State and AISD properties, e.g., the Austin State Hospital, the Austin State Supported Living Center, and the Palm School.
 - Other parkland acquisition opportunities for destination parks, greenbelt and infill parks
 - a. Although the reserve fund will not be sufficient to buy large properties, it will give PAR and the City Council leverage in negotiations to buy them. We don't want a repeat of The Grove.
 - b. The reserve fund may yield an excellent return on investment through judicious selling off portions of acquired properties not used for parks, affordable housing and watershed protection.
 - (1) Austin could have made millions on The Grove while having it developed in an appropriate manner had we been able to buy it for the \$27 million TXDOT asking price.
 - c. It will give PAR the flexibility and speed needed when strategic tracts come on the market



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Water Quality Protection Lands Program





Recharge Zone

Swallets showing groundwater directly entering the aquifer

1. Whirlpool swallet showing groundwater directly entering the aquifer.

This recharge swale was injected with Eosine dye on 8-6-02 at Cripple Crawfish Cave by Onion Creek. The dye showed up at Barton Springs 17 miles away in less than 3 days. Photo by David Johns.

2. Another swallet. If the swallets get paved over, where will our aquifer water come from? Or, if the contributing water is polluted, then what?

Land Impacts: Developed vs. Undeveloped

Developed land:

- Pollution in runoff
- Increases flooding
- Reduces recharge
- Decreases creek base flow
- Impacts are irreversible



Undeveloped land protects water resources:

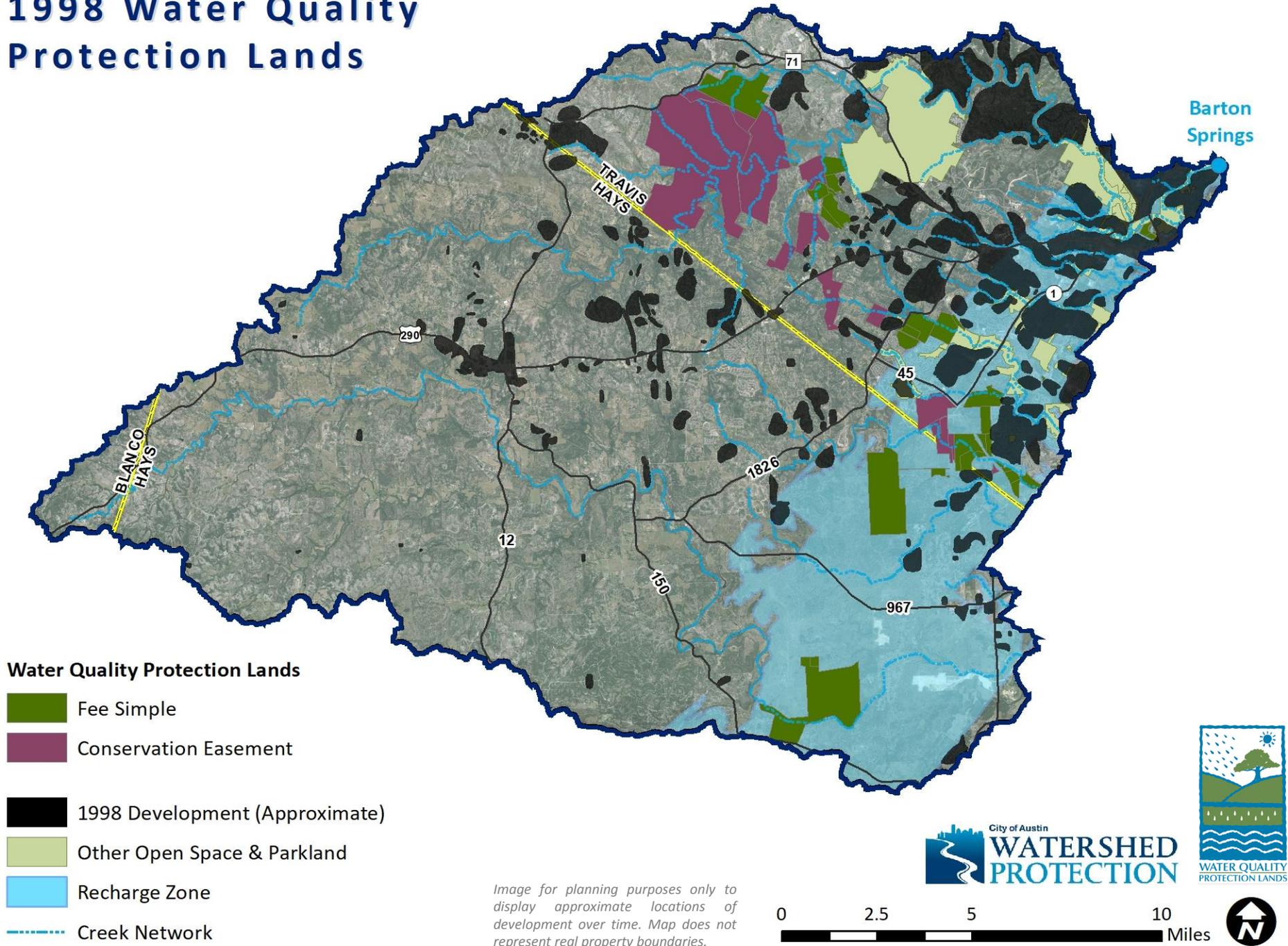
- Cleaner runoff
- Mitigates flooding
- Maintains recharge



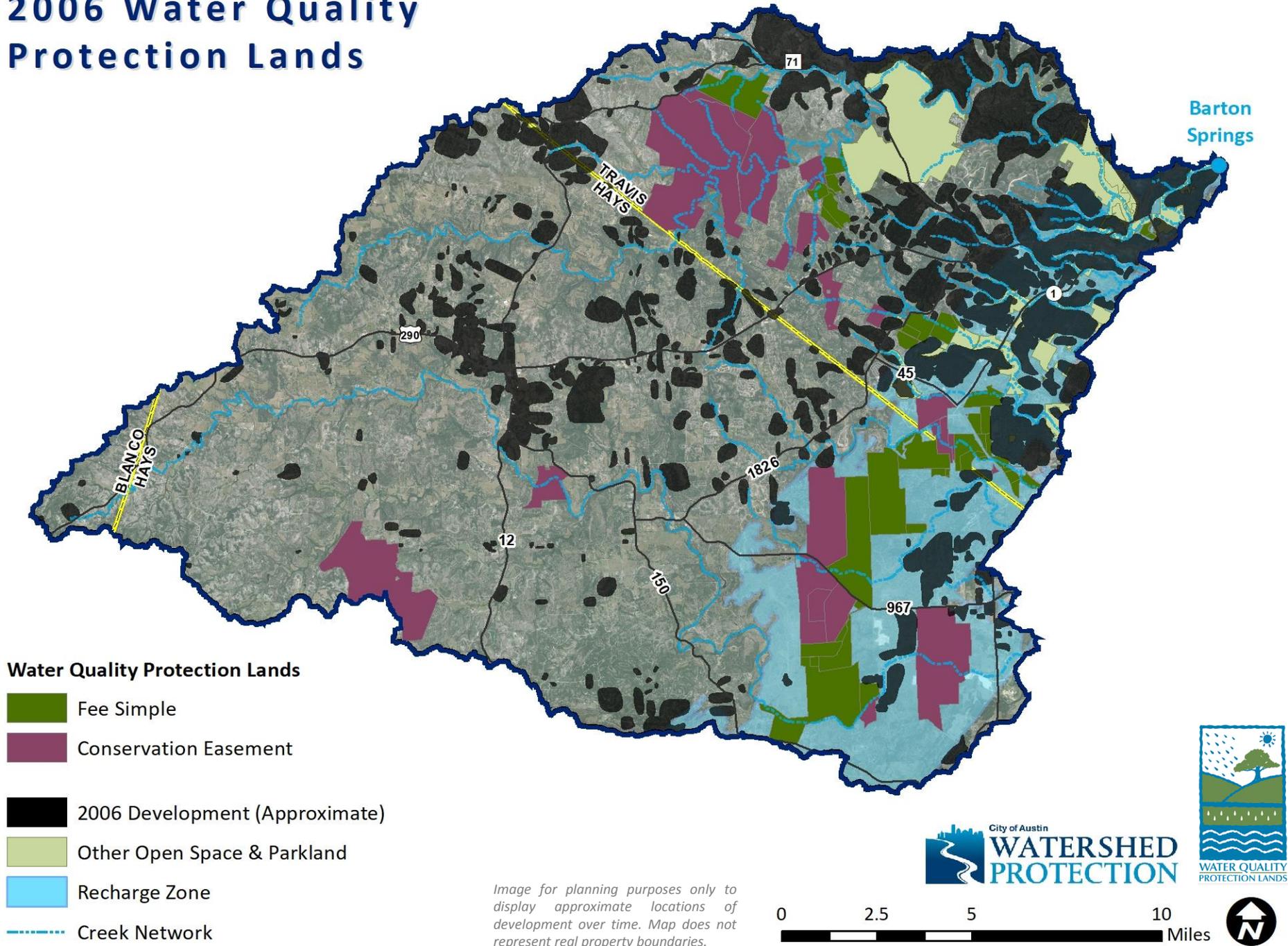
Edwards Aquifer recharge & contributing zones

- Clean, plentiful water is a citywide priority for Austin.
- As the Austin area continues to grow, the land that provides clean water is being developed.
- Water originating west of Austin becomes drinking & recreation water for SE, S central & SW Austin.

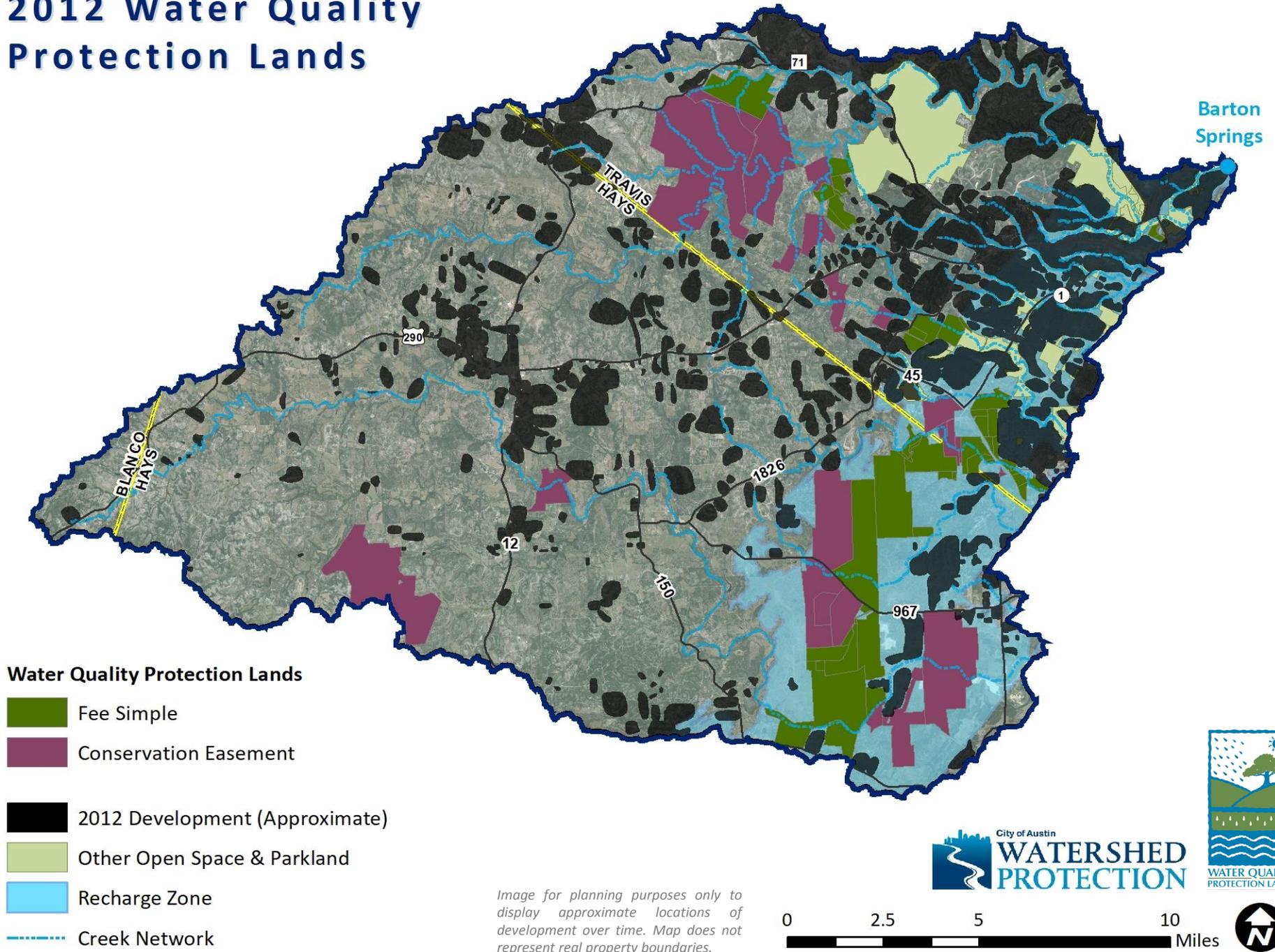
1998 Water Quality Protection Lands



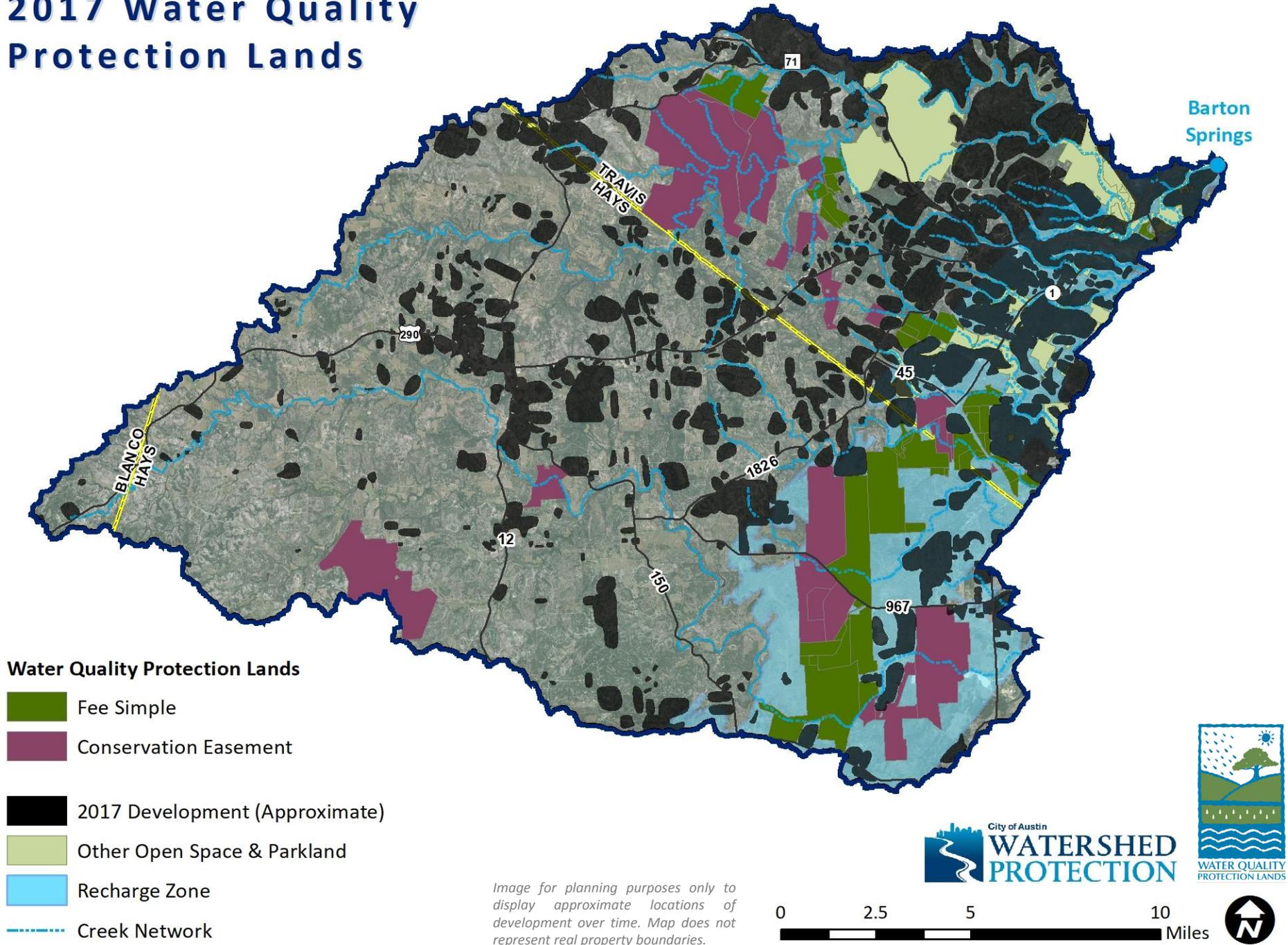
2006 Water Quality Protection Lands



2012 Water Quality Protection Lands



2017 Water Quality Protection Lands



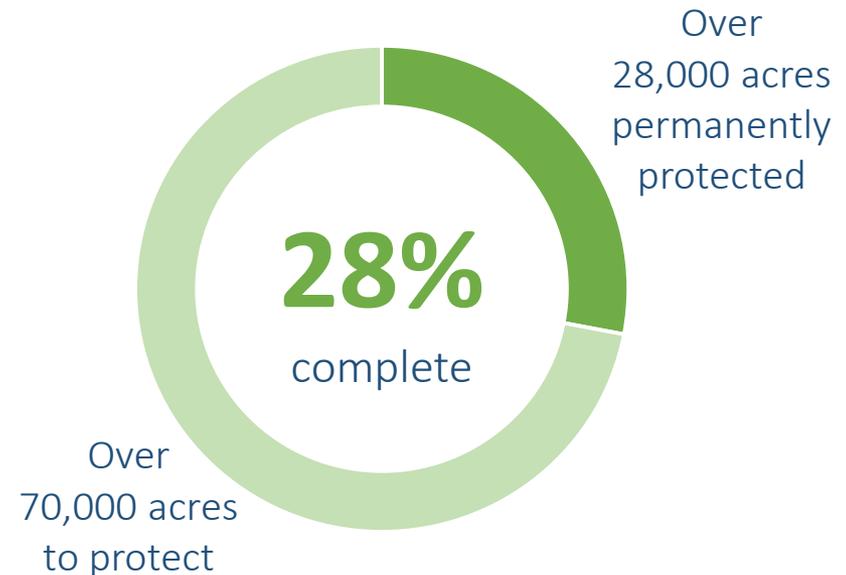
Watershed Protection Open Space Goal

Protection of critical areas in Source Water Protection Area to preserve or mitigate water quality and quantity through the strategic acquisition of land along main channels, tributaries, and significantly large upland tracts.

Long-Term Protection Goal:

Maintain overall impervious cover percentage **at under 10%***

- Permanently protect up to 100,000 acres of land in the Source Water Protection Area



**Irreversible water quality impacts observed when total impervious cover exceeds 10%*

2018 Bond Needs Assessment: Funding Scenarios

More funding = more leveraging opportunities and more permanent land protection

Current Status



\$20M Scenario



+800 acres

\$50M Scenario



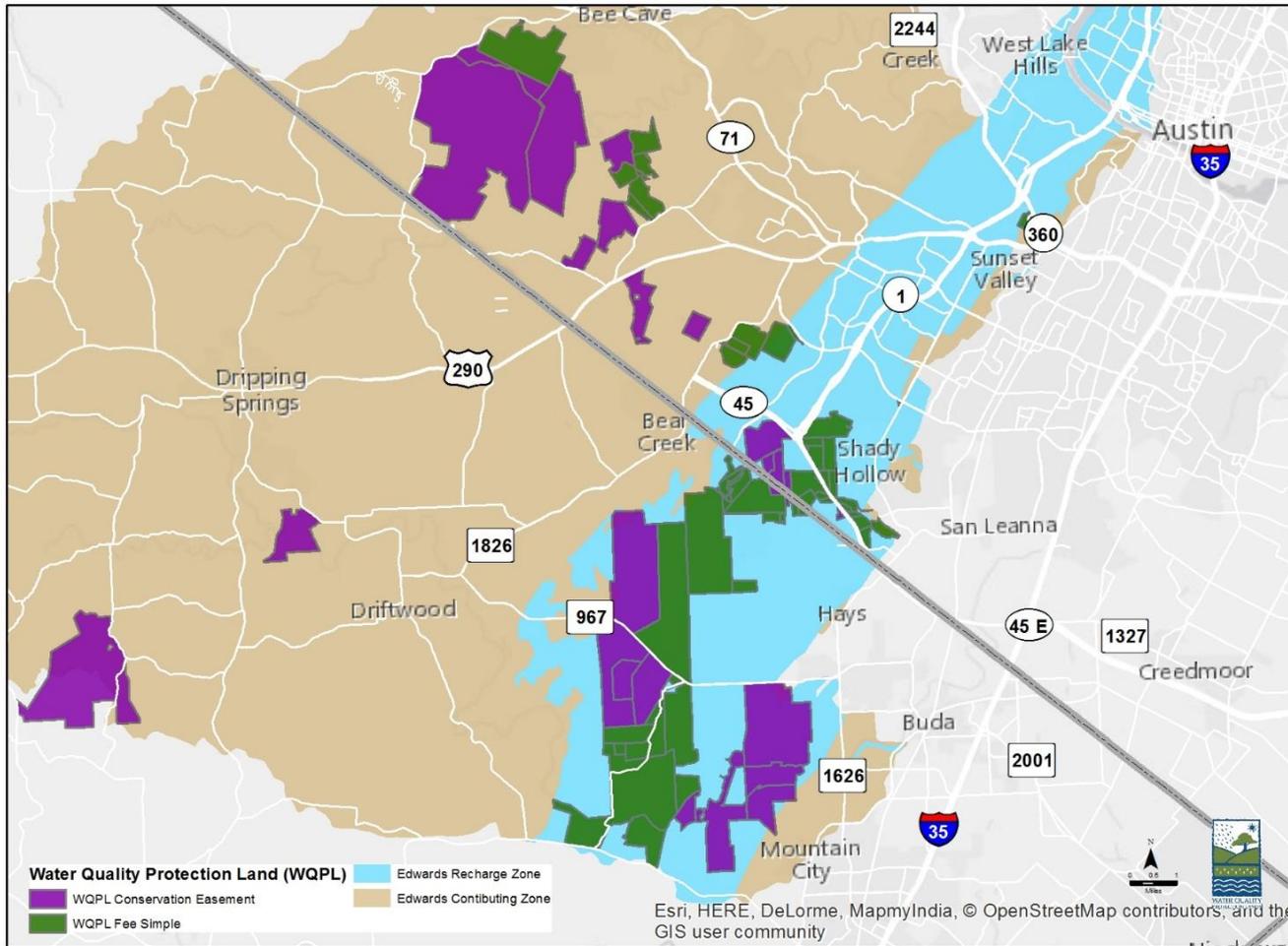
+3,000 acres

\$150M Scenario



+9,000 acres

Water Quality Protection Lands Program



Contributing Zone

- **7% protected**
- **2/3** Barton Springs Zone outside Austin's jurisdiction
- Development regulations in other jurisdictions are less protective of water quality

Recharge Zone

- **25% protected**

Irreversible water quality impacts observed when total impervious cover exceeds 10%

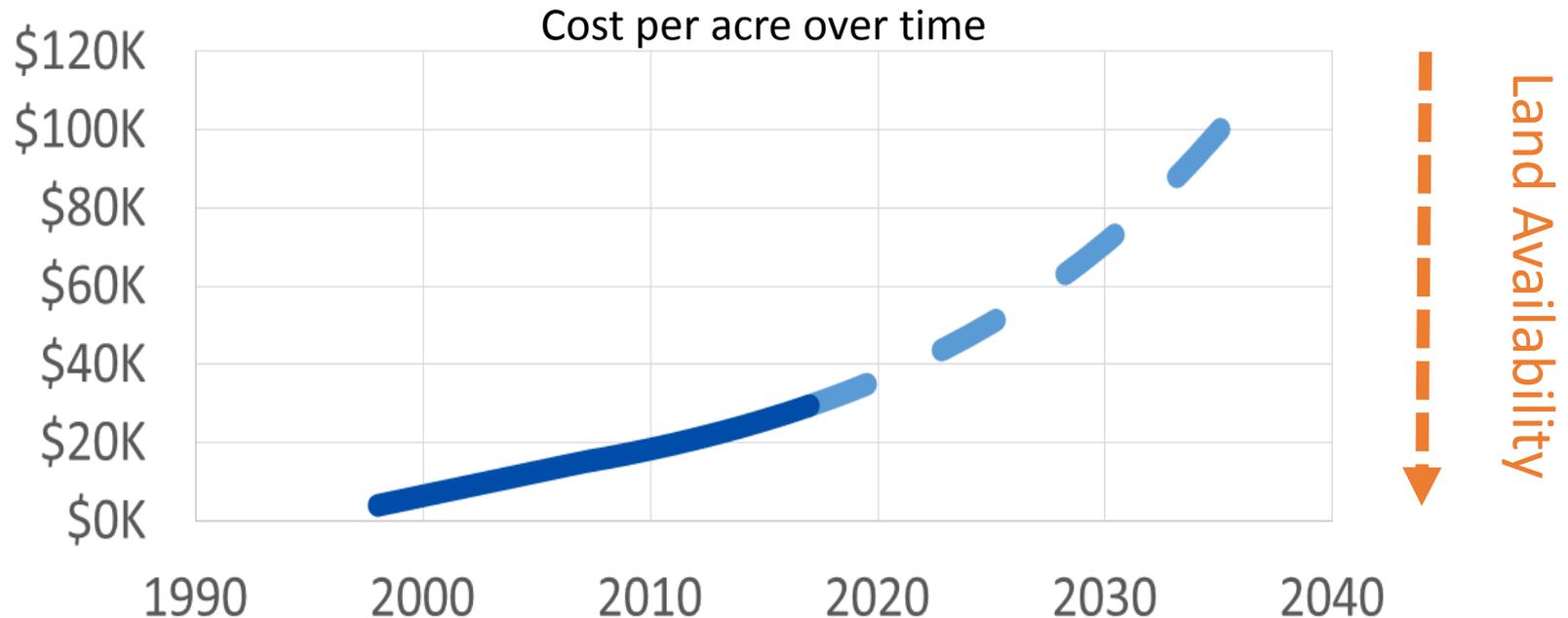
High Voter Appeal/Rising Land Costs

All Four Water Quality Protection bonds voter-approved:

May 1998 - Nov 2012 *62% average approval vote*

4 elections total: \$157.6M for 28,354 acres plus partnership contributions of \$24M = \$181.6M (\$6,405/acre average)

Need for Watershed acquisition now



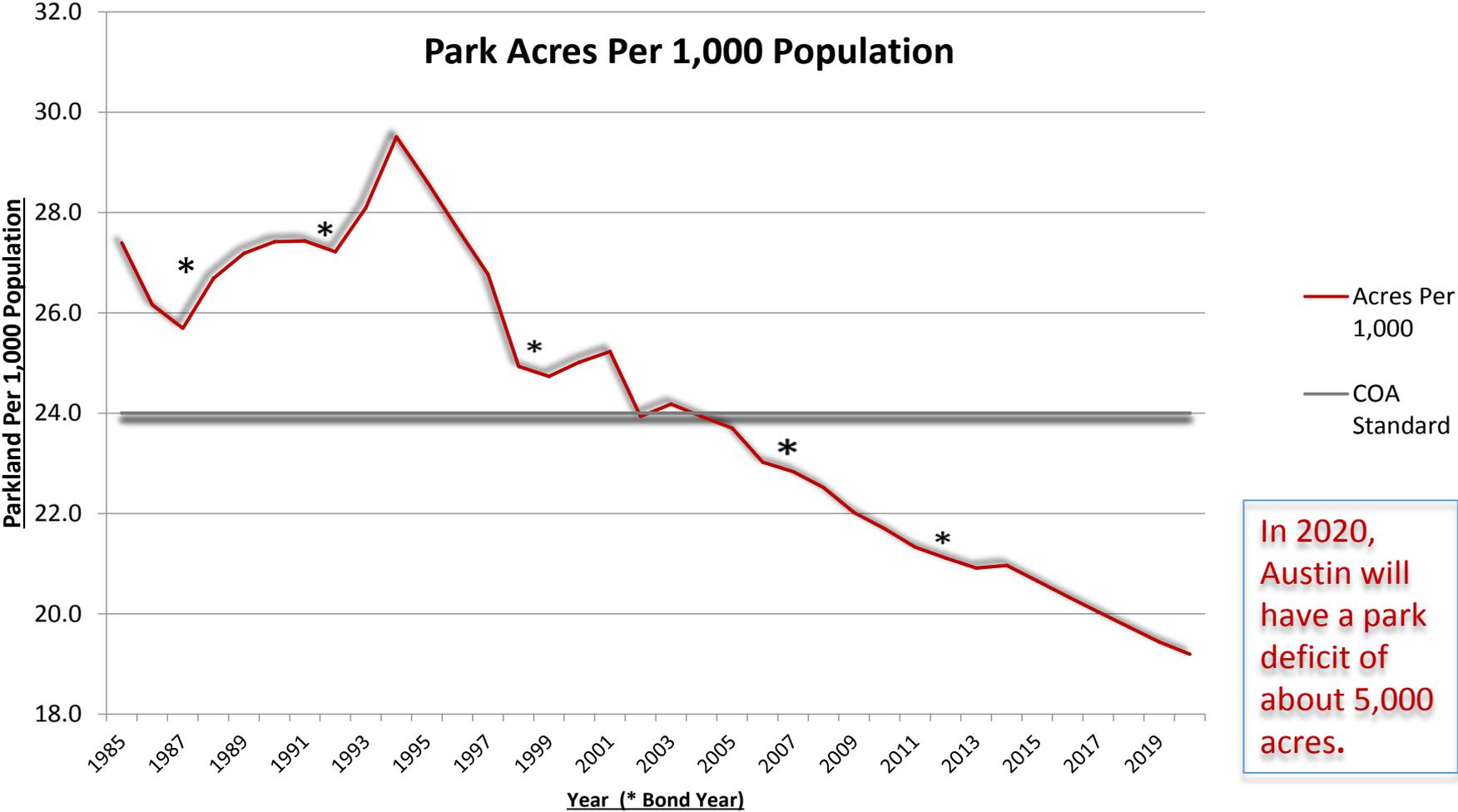


St. Edwards Park

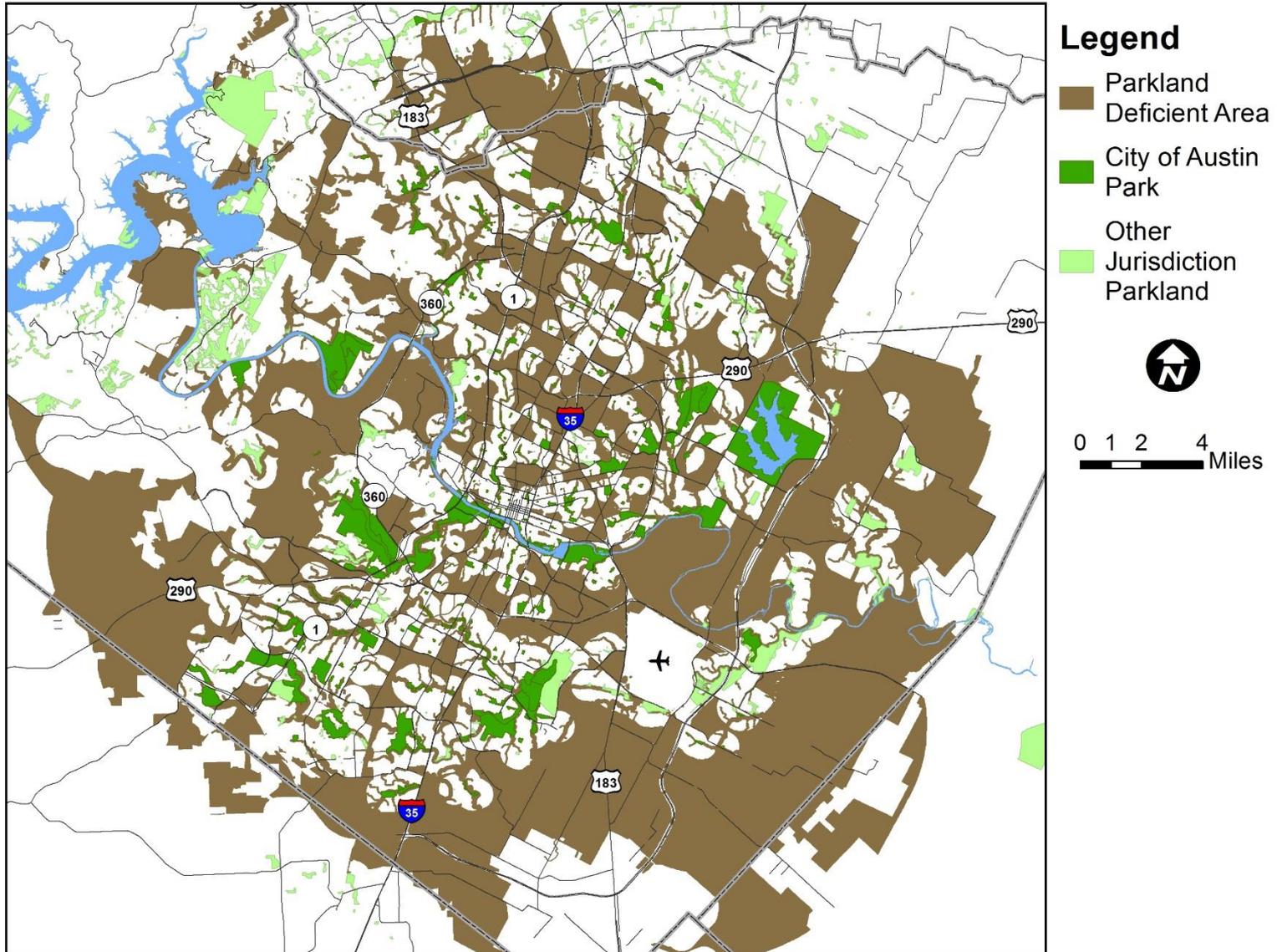
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Parkland Acquisition Fund Overview

How park-deficient are we?



Where Austin is park-deficient



Infill parks to serve existing residents

Located in park-deficient areas.

The Imagine Austin goal for access to parks is:

- ¼ mile walk in urban core
- ½ mile walk outside the urban core

Pocket parks: up to 2 acres; Neighborhood parks: 2–30 acres



*Tom Lasseter-South Lamar
Neighborhood Park*

Parkland bonds and purchasing power have diminished over time

Bond Year	Funds	Acres	Parks Acquired, Expanded or Proposed		
			Destination Parks, Sports Complexes & Centers	Neighbor-hood & Pocket Parks	Green-belt miles
1998	\$40,000,000	2,045	7	3	8
2006	\$20,000,000	264	5	4	3
2012	\$ 4,000,000	99	0	3	3
<i>2018*</i>	<i>\$30,000,000</i>	<i>500</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>2018**</i>	<i>\$20,000,000</i>	<i>300</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5-10</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>2018**</i>	<i>\$15,000,000</i>	<i>Reserve fund to help acquire strategic tracts like Muny & the State Hospital</i>			

* As initially proposed by City Staff

** As proposed by the Open Space Working Group

Greenbelts to mitigate the impacts of urbanization on Austin residents

- Minimize flood potential
- Increase access to nature
- Connect neighborhoods to parks by trails



How bond funding plays a crucial role

- **Bond Funding is critical to:**
 - Acquiring destination or metropolitan parkland
 - Fill critical gaps in greenbelts (may include easements)
 - Acquire parkland where parkland dedication is not required due to commercial use, grandfathering, or affordable housing
 - Acquire parkland in park deficient areas
- **Opportunities to acquire desired parcels are quickly disappearing.**

Reserve Fund for Acquiring Strategic Tracts

- **A bond-funded reserve fund is critical for giving:**
 - PARD & the City the flexibility, speed & leverage in negotiating for strategic tracts such as MUNY and the State Hospital

