

Land Management Planning for PARD Natural Areas

Progress Update and Anticipated Timeline

Briefing to Austin Parks Board
November 28, 2022



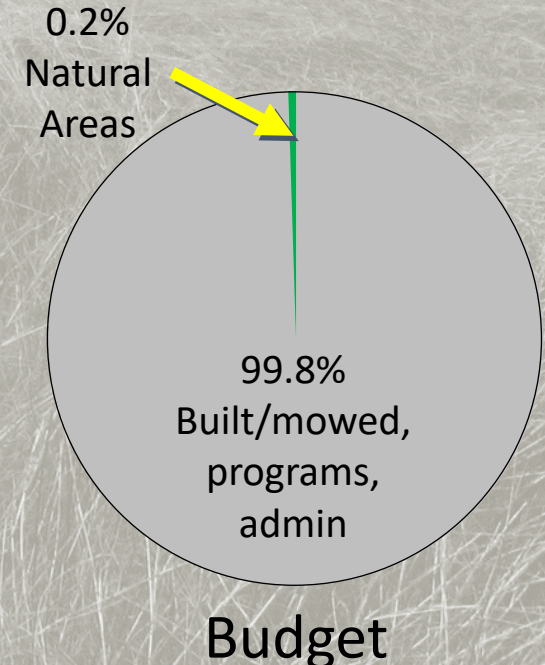
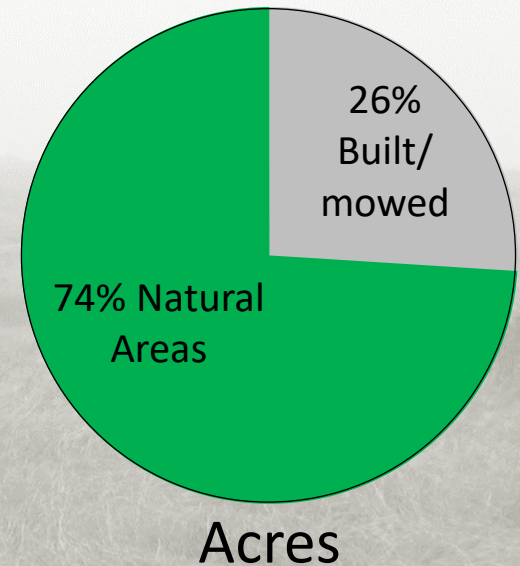
Presenter:

Matt McCaw

Environmental Conservation Program Manager
Land Management Program

Background

- A *natural area* is one with natural character, typically dominated by native plants and animals.
- The majority of PARD's ~ 17,000 acres are designated as natural areas.
- These natural areas provide critical services such as mental health benefits, social well-being, climate regulation, clean air and water.
- Most have not been managed to maintain ecosystem health.
- They are degraded and therefore threatened by heat, drought, disease, and wildfire.
- The need for comprehensive restoration of PARD natural areas has long been recognized by staff, partners, and the community.



Background

- The 2019 Wildfire Preparedness Audit highlighted this need from a public safety standpoint.
 - Recommended that PARD create and implement land management plans with a priority on “high-risk properties.”
 - PARD has establish a land management program to do this.
- This land management plan will help PARD achieve conservation goals in existing parks master/vision plans.
- This land management plan will also help to address the following goals in the Climate Equity Plan:
 - Manage all natural areas under land management plans to improve resilience and reduce carbon emissions.
 - Achieve (and maintain) at least 50% citywide tree canopy cover by 2050.

Timeline

- RFP Published 02/01/2021
- RFP Close Date 03/04/2021
- Re-Bid RFP Published 07/26/2021
- RFP Close Date 08/24/2021
- Recommended Awardee Posted
on Austin Finance Online 10/05/2021
- Project kickoff January 2022
- Public outreach to 30+ stakeholder groups Summer-fall-winter 2022
- Final draft anticipated February 2023
- Board and Council approval Feb-Mar 2023

Public Engagement

- Before plan development:
 - Parks master/vision plans, PARD Long Range Plan, Climate Equity Plan
 - Wildfire Preparedness Audit, existing CAPP projects
 - Two presentations to PARB, City Council approval
- During plan development
 - Targeted and general outreach to 30+ stakeholder groups
 - Austin Parks Foundation, PARKner groups, Adopt-a-park groups, Friends groups, conservancies, volunteer groups, neighborhood associations, Master Naturalist chapters
 - Involvement and briefings with key City staff: BCP, AFD, others
- During implementation
 - Engagement with key stakeholder groups during prioritization, project planning, volunteer involvement, scheduling.

Background

Site analysis - 100% complete

- Soils, hydrology, existing vegetation communities, endangered species, other elements

Climate vulnerability analysis – 70%

- *Identify* physical components of ecosystems that affect vulnerability to intense heat, drought, disease, and wildfire
- *Map* these components
- Will help prioritize work

Management goals 70%

Vegetation types expected to be most resilient in the coming decades.

Restoration strategies – 70%

...that may be effective and appropriate for achieving management goals.

Monitoring design – 50%

...to evaluate progress.

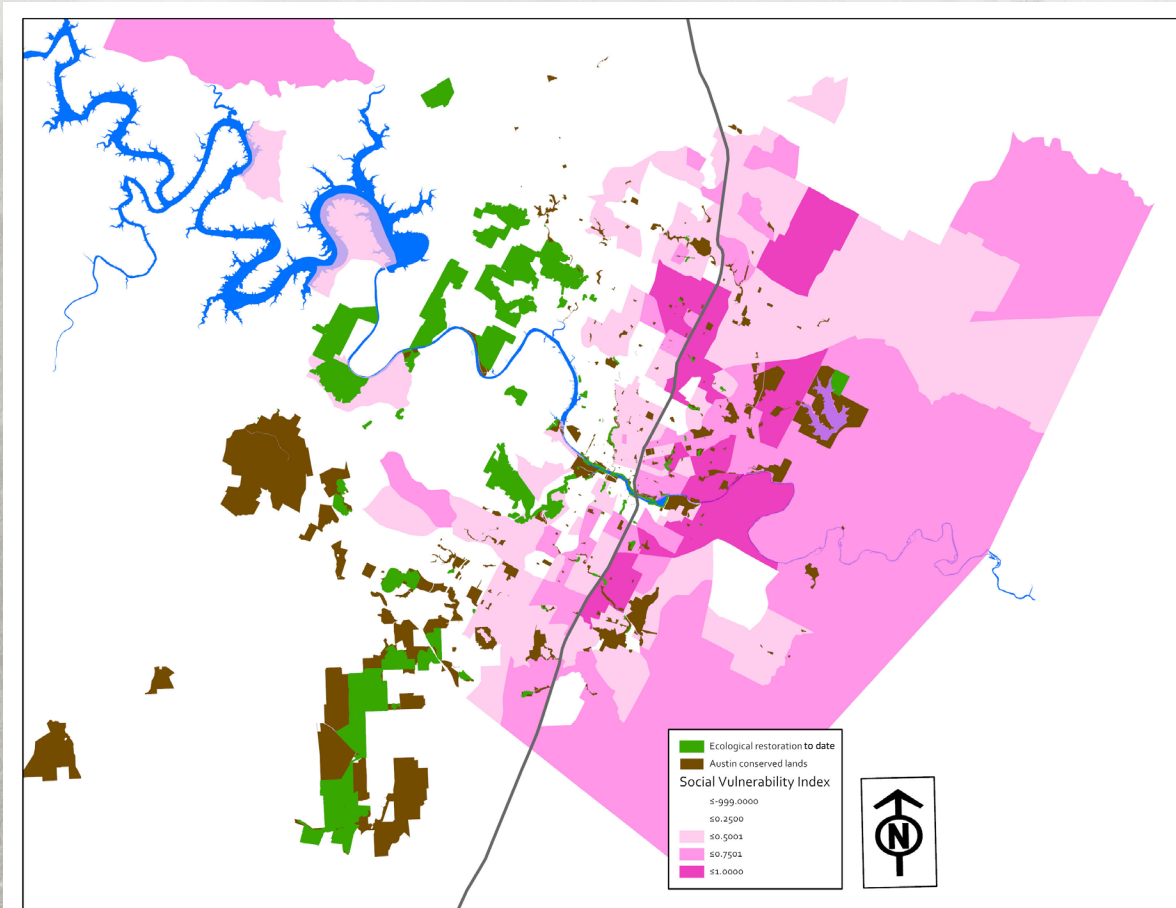
~10-year document: 50-year horizon.



Implementation

Key strategies

- Woodland health
 - Reduce: Density, competition, fuel loading
 - Increase: Diversity, resource availability, sight lines
- Prescribed fire
 - Improves diversity, reduces fuel loading, reduces restoration costs
- Invasive species mgmt
- Seeding, planting
- Grassland restoration



Prioritize work where climate vulnerability and Social Vulnerability Index are high.

Requested Committee Action:

- None at this time.
- Anticipated presentations to PARB in early 2023. At that time, the requested action will be a recommendation to the City Council to vote to approve a resolution to direct City staff to begin implementation of the PARD land management plan.
- Questions?