Riparian Zone Mitigation Fund (RZMF)

Briefing to Environmental Commission

Austin Watershed Protection | December 2, 2026

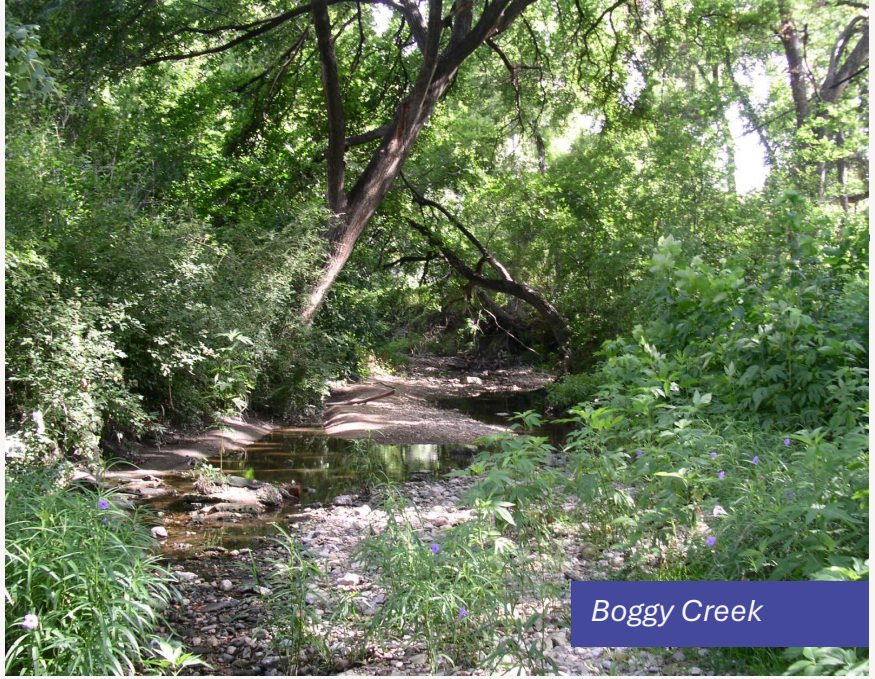
Outline

- History
- Recent changes
- Process improvements



Blunn Creek

History


Boggy Creek

Watershed Protection Ordinance (2013)

Provisions governing floodplain modification in the Land Development Code 25-8-263

A) All floodplain modifications must:

1) be designed to accommodate existing and fully-vegetated hydraulic conditions;
2) apply sound engineering and ecological practices, prevent and reduce degradation of water quality, and demonstrate the stability and integrity of floodplains and waterways, as prescribed in the Environmental Criteria Manual;
3) **restore floodplain health, or provide mitigation if restoration is infeasible**, to support natural functions and processes as prescribed in the floodplain modification criteria in the Environmental Criteria Manual; and
4) comply with the requirements of Chapter 25-7 (*Drainage*), the Drainage Criteria Manual, and the Environmental Criteria Manual.



Dry Creek East

History

LDC 25-8-263(D)

If on-site restoration, as prescribed in the Environmental Criteria Manual, **is infeasible and mitigation is required** under this section, it may be satisfied by:

1) **paying into the Riparian Zone Mitigation Fund** a nonrefundable amount established by ordinance;
2) transferring in fee simple or placing restrictions on mitigation land approved by the director and meeting the following conditions:...
3) a combination of the mitigation methods described in Subsections (D)(1) and (D)(2), if approved by the director.

History

Environmental Criteria Manual 1.7.6

Condition of the Area Proposed for Floodplain Modification (as determined by Functional Assessment)	Location of Proposed Modification	
	Outside Critical Water Quality Zone	Critical Water Quality Zone
Good or Excellent	4:1*	8:1*
Fair	3:1	6:1*
Poor	2:1	4:1*

** Not allowed by Code without a variance from the land use commission*





Little Walnut Creek



Recent Changes

In 2023 staff proposed a change in the enabling language of the Riparian Zone Mitigation Fund to allow for restoration projects and programs in addition to land acquisition:

> The Riparian Zone Mitigation is established. The director of the Watershed Protection Department may allocate money from the Riparian Zone Mitigation Fund for the purchase of restrictions on or fee title of property, **or for the implementation of projects or programs to restore or protect floodplain health**, within the same watershed classification as the proposed floodplain modification either inside or outside the City of Austin's jurisdiction, as provided [...]

Recommended by the Environmental Commission and approved by City Council in July 2024

Purpose of the Change

- Clarifies the original intent of the floodplain modification provisions in code and criteria
- Helps emphasize addressing urgent restoration needs, particularly in the urban and suburban watersheds within the Blackland Prairie ecoregion
- Advances the strategies in the new Rain to River Strategic Plan to:
  - implement a proactive approach to infrastructure;
  - promote opportunities for shared stewardship; and
  - understand and address past environmental harms



Multiple study Blackland Prairie ecoregion sites



Process Improvements

Project eligibility:

- Be located within a floodplain or have a spatial nexus that improves floodplain health
- Not be used to meet an existing regulatory requirement
- Provides meaningful uplift in floodplain function and shows how the project is necessary to achieve that enhancement
- Provides assurances for lasting improvement in floodplain function
- Provides multiple environmental services (e.g., enhanced baseflow, carbon sequestration)

Examples of Potential Projects:

- Small stream and floodplain restoration projects constructed by in-house crews or through our IDIQ contract
- Floodplain reforestation
- Small-scale green stormwater infrastructure that improves riparian/floodplain infiltration
- Restoration projects implemented by community members (future phase)

Process Improvements

Proposed projects will be reviewed on a semi-annual basis by a panel of WPD staff and available funds will be allocated to the highest scoring projects.

Project Prioritization Criteria:

- Cost
- Size of Area
- Environmental Integrity Index Score
- Equity Considerations
- Functional Assessment of Floodplain Health
- Wetland or Spring Protection
- Soil Enhancement
- Increased Infiltration
- Erosion Risk Reduction
- Riparian Re-engagement
- Decreased Impervious Cover

Types of projects

- Erosion Risk Reduction
- Floodplain tree cover



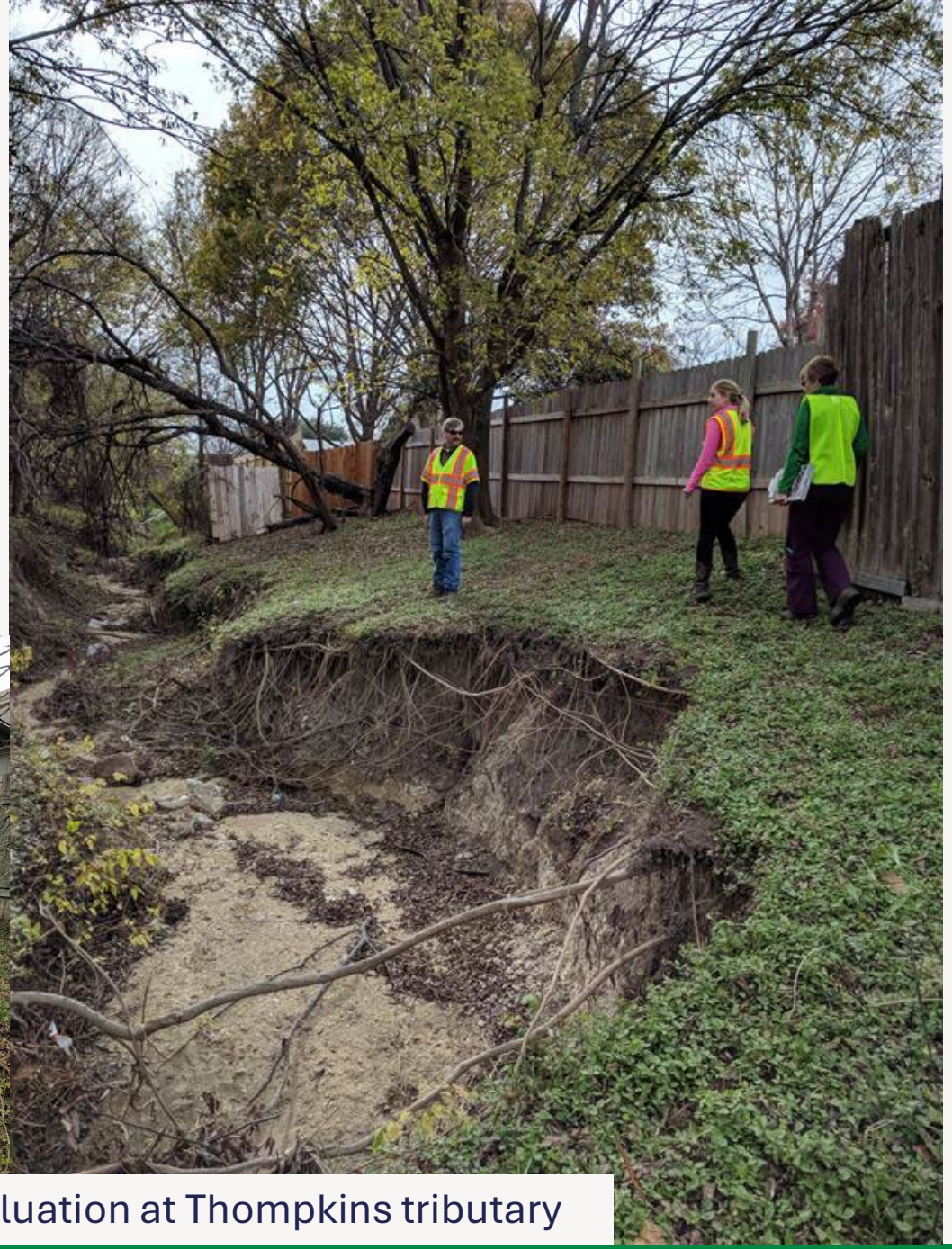
	Acres	Trees
Wetland:	2.29	2,416
Upland:	7.73	11,504



Floodplain reforestation at Agave Park

Types of projects



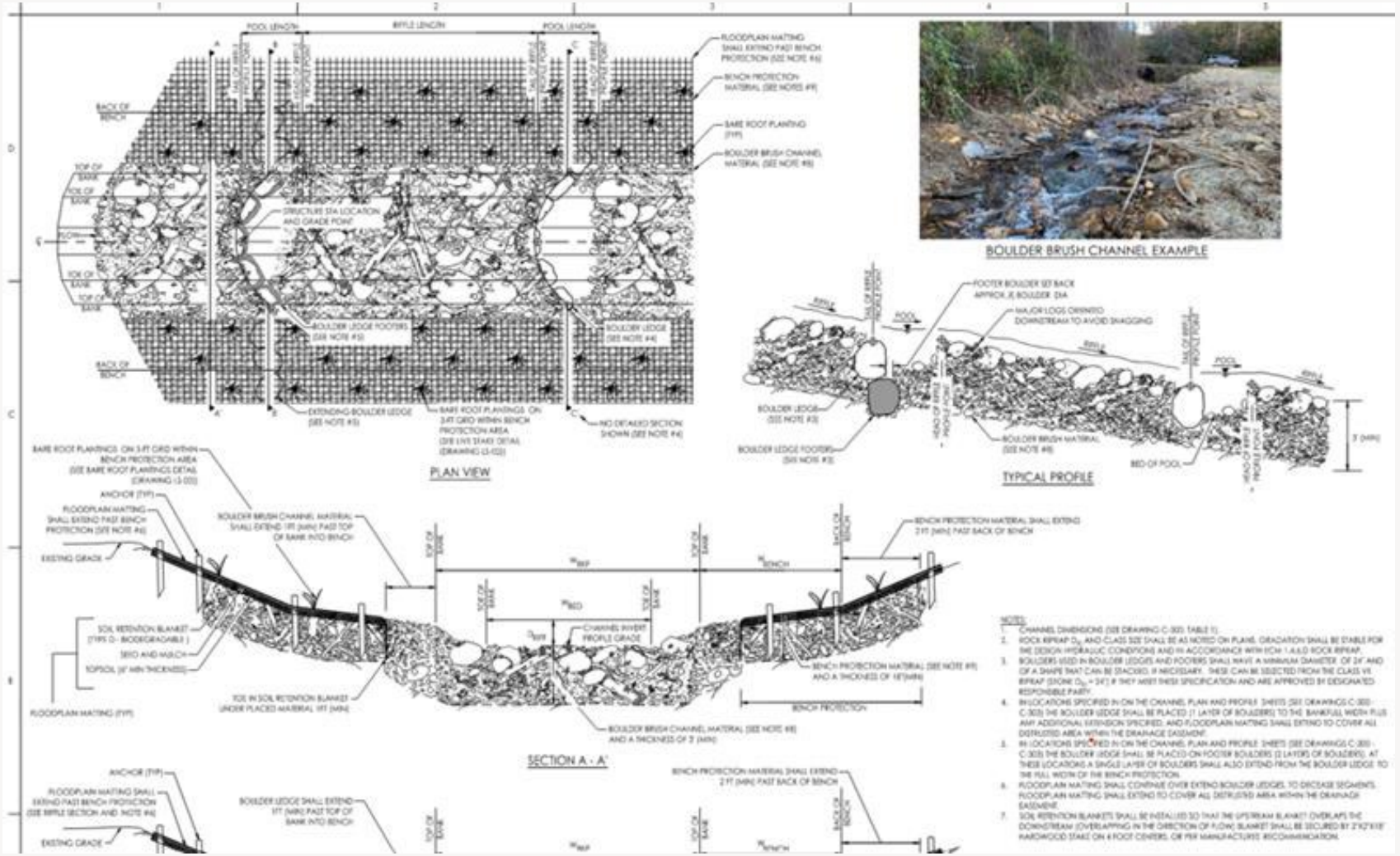


Active erosion evaluation at Thompkins tributary

Types of projects

- Soil Enhancement
- Increased Infiltration
- Erosion Risk Reduction
- Riparian Re-engagement

Thompkins tributary stabilization and restoration plans



https://youtu.be/NlBLYQ870tA?si=iS1WtMnfmALTZYto









Types of projects

Thompkins tributary stabilization and restoration project a few months after completion

Questions?