

# RIO BOSQUE NEWS

A newsletter reporting on events at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park

Center for Environmental Resource Management  
The University of Texas at El Paso



No. 73

September 2020

## A PARTNERSHIP WITH NATURE

Our efforts to restore native ecosystems at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park are built on a broad partnership, and we value the contributions of our many partners to its success. Especially Mother Nature. For we are not the ones doing the actual work of restoring Rio Bosque's ecosystems. The park's plants and animals do all that work! Through their interactions with one another and with the physical environment, they are the ones weaving those ecosystems together over time. We just play a supporting role. We provide certain components, like selective plantings of native species. We try to create favorable conditions – such as through control of invasive species and provision of adequate water – for the park's organisms to work their magic. And, over time, natural ecological processes shape the landscape at the park. Rio Bosque Wetlands Park truly is a partnership with nature. ✨



Rio Grande cottonwoods and Goodding's willows continue to grow increasingly prominent along the old river channel at Rio Bosque. Photo: 2 Sep 2020.

## ISLA RIO BOSQUE

Take a walk through Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, and it can seem like a very large area. Viewed from a wider perspective, though, the park is just a tiny island of natural habitat in a highly modified river-valley environment. At 372 acres, it represents less than 0.5% of the floodplain land in the river valley in El Paso County.

Actions on the lands surrounding Rio Bosque can affect that tiny island of habitat. The months ahead will bring two reminders of this influence, along both the east and west boundaries of the park.

On the east side, El Paso County Water Improvement District No. 1 is poised to begin the final phase of its multi-year project to concrete-line some 3 miles of the Riverside Canal near Rio Bosque. Expect work on the final ~6,100-foot segment – including ~4,230 feet along the east edge of the park – this fall and winter.

On the west side of the park, the dominant feature today is an 18-foot-tall steel-mesh wall, part of a 37-mile-long section of border wall built in

### Friends of the Rio Bosque Membership Application

Name:

Address:

E-mail:

- Life Member ..... \$1,000
- Wetlands Society ..... \$500-\$999
- Restoration Patron ..... \$250-\$499
- Cottonwood Commando ..... \$75-\$249
- Bosque Booster ..... \$50
- Family ..... \$20
- Individual ..... \$15
- Student or  Senior (62+) ..... \$10
- Bosque Buddy (12 and under) ..... \$6

Please make checks payable to *Friends of the Rio Bosque* and mail to: Friends of the Rio Bosque, CERM-UTEP, 500 W. University Ave., El Paso, TX 79968-0684.



El Paso County in 2008-09. U.S. Customs and Border Protection is now moving forward with plans to modify that wall by removing the current steel-mesh panels and replacing them with closely spaced 30-foot-tall steel bollards topped with solid steel plates. Also planned: new lighting and road modifications.

This work is being done using funds Congress authorized for the Department of Defense but the Trump administration redirected to border-wall construction under a “national-emergency” declaration in Feb 2019. The American Civil Liberties Union, Sierra Club and Southern Border Communities Coalition immediately sued to challenge this diversion of funds, as did others.

Both the U.S. District Court for Northern California (on June 28, 2019) and the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Ap-

peals (on June 26, 2020) ruled the diversion unlawful. But both times, the U.S. Supreme Court, in 5-4 decisions, chose to allow construction to proceed while the case continues to work through the legal system.

The Supreme Court’s most recent decision came July 31. Twelve days later, stacks of bollards began appearing along the river floodway in El Paso. By Aug 17, work was underway. It started near the Yarbrough exit on the César Chávez Border Highway and is now proceeding rapidly both upstream and downstream, towards Rio Bosque.

Little by little, Isla Rio Bosque is becoming more isolated and losing biological connectivity with other areas. As it does, its value as a natural area also gets diminished. ✂



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

## COVID-19 CORNER

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) continues to dictate the nature of public use at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park. On April 2, the park was closed to all public use. On May 23, we began allowing access to the park’s trails, provided group size was kept small, social distancing was observed, and masks were worn when in groups or when encountering other visitors. That is still the case today.

There have been no tours or workdays since February. We hope to resume them soon on at least a limited basis. Given the continued uncertainty associated with COVID-19, we present no schedule here. Check the park’s [website](#) for current information. We aim for a workday on Sat., September 19, with a project well-suited for maintaining social distance: pruning along one of the park’s trails.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

[www.riobosque.org](http://www.riobosque.org)

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