



Agenda Item: Discuss \$1.4 Million RESTORE Grant Opportunity For East End Lagoon

Background: The East End Lagoon Nature Park and Preserve (EEL) is a project of the Park Board of Trustees, the City of Galveston and the Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council.

A Galveston treasure, the 684-acre East End Lagoon nature preserve is one of the few remaining sizable tracts of undeveloped coastal prairie and salt marsh on the island. The property was dedicated to the City by the US Federal Government under the agreement that it would be developed as a recreational area.

The area is home to a diverse collection of birds and marine mammals that thrive in the brackish waters found here. And is highly popular as a free fishing area. It also serves a venue for several of GINTC's popular FeatherFest activities given the dense bird populations that frequent the area.

For the last several years, Park Board staff has directed a community-based East End Lagoon Advisory Committee charged with seeking funding sources for improvements to the area while protecting its natural beauty. The committee has made great strides for the area. Since assuming leadership of the project in 2017, the Park Board and EEL Committee have raised the following contributions to supplement funding from the City.

EEL Funders	Amount
City Contributions	176,000.00
Kempner Foundation	100,000.00
GINTC Contributions	25,000.00
Concession Fees	9,144.32
Grant Funding	1,585,497.52
Total Contributions since 2017	1,895,641.84

This represents a 10:1 return on local funding and has achieved the following pre-development work and 'on the ground improvements' at the EEL Nature Preserve:

- Delineation of the 648 tract of land and certification of the same by the US Army Corp of Engineers,
- Creation of an ADA accessible trail loop with interpretive signage (see photos below),
- Clearing space for parking and remediation of debris to rehabilitate the boat launch to allow for human-powered vessels like kayaks and paddleboards,
- Placement of signage, bollards and sand berms to control access and preserve the site,
- Development of a EEL Business Plan to identify the competitive advantage of the site, undertake needed conservation measures and means by which to support the site based on generated revenues for outdoor recreation.

Recently, the Park Board received notice of the solicited \$1.4 million grant award from RESTORE for the construction of Phase 1A (from the City of Galveston's EEL Master Plan, AECOM, 2010). This initial infrastructure project has 3 components and is envisioned to be a free public access amenity, including;

- Elevated 2,897 sq ft open-air, interpretative center with tables, benches and bathrooms
- 1,374 sq ft ADA-compliant “experience pier”,
- parking, signage and interpretive trails encompassing different habitat types.

Architectural, permitting and design work for Phase 1A have been completed and the project is ‘shovel ready’. The Park Board voted to accept the RESTORE contract in April 2021.

With the initial infrastructure phased funded, the Park Board is now turning its efforts to creating outdoor recreational opportunities that will be ‘for fee’ services, such as camping and improved fishing. Per the approved Business Plan, these items are contemplated as either a public/ private partnership or Park Board managed amenities.

Recommendation

With the view to continue development of the EEL Nature Preserve, the Park Board is soliciting;

- Release of \$50,000 annual City of Galveston contribution to undertake pre-development and grant writing work for Phase 2 development of outdoor recreation amenities, and a
- commitment to improve conditions on Boddekker Drive to facilitate the use of the area by visitor.