2011 ASLA Design Awards

Westside Creeks Restoration Plan
Merit Award
AECOM, Fort Collins

Planning & Urban Design
**Project Name:** Westside Creeks Restoration Plan

**Project Location, if applicable:** San Antonio, Texas

**3-5 Sentence Quick Project Summary:**
The Westside Creeks are heavily urbanized watersheds located predominantly west and northwest of downtown San Antonio, Texas. San Antonio’s west side has been built-out for several decades, and the creeks traverse many historic and active neighborhoods. The Westside Creeks Restoration Project identified restoration regimes, flood acquisition strategies, neighborhood redevelopment and sustainability concept designs for Alazán, Apache, Martínez and San Pedro Creeks, offering design alternatives and community enhancement to these areas which were channelized by the U.S Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) during the 1960s.

**Purpose of Project:**
The Westside Creeks Restoration Project was a community-based planning effort initiated in 2008 with support from the San Antonio River Authority’s Board of Directors. The project’s mission was to develop concepts for restoration of the Alazán, Apache, Martinez and San Pedro Creeks, maintain or enhance the current flood control components of these creeks, improve water quality, increase biological diversity, provide increased opportunities for people to enjoy these urban creeks and suggest potential redevelopment opportunities along their margins. Through a lengthy and intensive public process, the following goals were established for the Westside Creeks Restoration Project: environmental enhancement; aquatic and riparian restoration; flood control enhancement; recreational uses for all ages; water quality enhancement; low maintenance and sustainable design; fluvial geomorphology concepts; continuous hike and bike trails; transportation connectivity; public gathering places; cultural/historical awareness; public art; economic development; and neighborhood and business connections.

San Antonio’s Westside Creeks run through the heart of the City’s inner west side, which is rich in culture and history. During each of the public workshops and meetings, local residents recalled using these creeks (Alazán, Apache, Martínez and San Pedro) for recreation and enjoyment, and shared stories of learning to swim and fish in the creeks, as well as picking plants for cooking.

History has shown these creeks have also been subject to some of the City’s worst flooding. In 1921, flood waters claimed the lives of 51 people and left behind an estimated $3.7 million in property damage. Twenty-five years later in 1946, another flood claimed the lives of six people and an estimated $2.1 million in property damage. Following the 1946 flood, the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) began working with the USACE and the Natural Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) to develop strategies to address flooding within the Westside Creeks and San Antonio River, ultimately resulting in the straightening and channelization of approximately 31 miles of the San Antonio River and Westside Creeks.

Recently, SARA has looked to apply more modern, environmentally sensitive and aesthetic construction methodologies to enhance the flood carrying capacity of the eight miles of San Antonio River that were channelized. This Mission Reach project will restore much of the native habitat that once thrived along the river, as well as provide recreational amenities and environmental improvements to the San Antonio River. The Westside Creeks Restoration Project builds upon the successes and lessons learned from the ongoing Mission Reach Project. As part of the next generation of restoration within the watershed, the Alazán, Apache, Martinez and San Pedro Creeks have offered opportunities for ecosystem restoration, enhanced flood control and to serve as a catalyst for revitalization of the surrounding community.
Construction Budget Amount: N/A

Role of landscape architect / entrant vs. the role of other participants, including owner / client and collaborators.

The Landscape Architect served as project manager for this intensive project. Not only did the Landscape Architect lead within a design capacity, but also led and coordinated a large team of biologists, hydrologic engineers and public involvement consultants.

Special Factors:

*Not just Ecological Restoration.* While the primary focus of this project was on the ecological restoration of the streams, mitigation of existing flood hazards and access along and across the streams, the surrounding land uses stand to benefit from these improvements through community revitalization and economic development opportunities. Considerable effort was expended by community members in the long range planning of economic opportunities that should be available as a result of this project. A number of long-term, land use-based design elements were developed to address connectivity and security. These elements were designed to increase access and usage by the public while maintaining the flood hazard reduction and ecological functions of the restored creeks. Social restoration design included the development of amenitized catalyst sites based on public workshops and stakeholder input.

Significance:

*Plan Process.* Again, because the project was not only a restoration process, but also an intensive design effort, the project was divided into Inventory + Analysis, Vision, Restoration Concepts, Catalysts Sites, Design Elements and Implementation. While the first and third phases focused on hydrology, hydraulics and restoration, the remaining phases included more focus on design and social restoration, highlighting community amenities and design elements that combine flood mitigation, stream restoration, neighborhood redevelopment and recreation enhancement and serve as catalysts for the revitalization of the community. The implementation plan identified opportunities to coordinate with other community development initiatives (flood mitigation, trails and parks, transportation, economic development), providing a more integrated concept for the future of the Westside Creeks area.

*Community Vision.* While the Westside Creeks have attracted humans for over 10,000 years, from Native Americans to Spaniards, to a variety of European settlers, to San Antonio's current residents, the community significance of the creeks has been reduced since their channelization by the USACE in the 1960s and 70s to reduce flooding. While most restoration projects are scientifically based and limit involvement to engineers and scientists, this project included an extensive public process. This plan involved the community through three public workshops, a week-long stakeholders’ charrette, and continual involvement by the Westside Creeks Restoration Oversight Committee as well as by individual Creek Advisory Subcommittees.

The resulting vision was founded on four core philosophies – Water, Restoration, Connections and Security. The plan and its concepts are founded on the story of water and its importance to residents. Watershed hydrology, existing flood hazards and structural constraints dictate the range of feasible restoration concepts. The restoration concepts are predicated on the fluvial geomorphology, native local ecosystem, practical constraints and the desired final condition of each stream. Integrated with the restoration concepts are connections consisting of trails, crossings and wildlife corridors. Redevelopment nodes created along these connections capitalize on new and enhanced recreational amenities and on economic development opportunities that engage the water and land interface of the stream corridors. To complete the vision, the Plan emphasizes public and neighborhood security through appropriate design elements, stewardship, patrols and maintenance.
These philosophies and community vision materialize in physical form through the restoration plan and catalyst sites. The restoration regimes include both project-wide and creek-specific concepts for flood hazard mitigation and stream restoration. Eleven neighborhood catalyst sites within the restoration framework describe multi-purpose projects that combine many of the vision elements to serve as the seeds of community revitalization. Within each catalyst site are typical design elements, representing smaller areas where people interact with the creek and include key design features such as trails, crossings, plazas and stormwater best management practices.