

# LAKE CREEK GREENWAY PROJECT

The Lake Creek Greenway Project was initiated in 2011 as a cooperative effort between Keep Montgomery County Beautiful, the East1488 Community Association and Montgomery County Precinct 2 to protect bottomland forests and riparian areas in one of the last remaining creeks in the San Jacinto River watershed that still meets water quality standards for contact recreation and contains some large stands of bottomland hardwood forest, wetlands and very large Sabal minor and possibly Sabal major palmettos. Rapid development in the area is affecting water quality and threatening the clearing of portions of these habitats for timber, sand and gravel and other commercial enterprises. The objective of this project is to preserve about (evaluating) acres of Lake Creek and adjacent West Fork of the San Jacinto River bottomlands to provide protection from polluted runoff and downstream flooding while adding recreational and education opportunities along 20 miles of Lake Creek and West Fork of the San Jacinto River.

Specifics related to land acquisition funding needs are still evolving through discussions with area land owners, the City of Conroe and area developers and will be added as they are available. However, roughly 700 acres are already protected either by easement or court order with another 1400 under consideration for some form of protection. In addition, the Houston-Galveston Area Council is initiating development of a watershed protection plan for Lake Creek and the West Fork of the San Jacinto River. The Lake Creek Greenway will be a part of that plan. This will increase the need for educational facilities to emphasize the ecosystem services provided by these bottomland forest as well as education on stewardship of residential properties.

Lake Creek is one of the northernmost and least developed areas of the San Jacinto River watershed, yet it is also one of the fastest developing. Because of this, significant reductions in current habitats and poorly managed changes in the watershed are likely to show marked reductions in water quality and flow downstream into Lake Houston and ultimately in Galveston Bay. The greenway is focusing on the eastern segment of Lake Creek and nearby areas on the West Fork as they as they are currently relatively undisturbed and contain extensive mature floodplain forests containing large stands of large mature Water Hickory, Overcup and Water oaks magnolias and over 40 other species of trees interspersed with permanent wetland pools, depressions intermittently containing water during wet periods and stands of very large palmettos reminiscent of reconstructed scenes from Jurassic Park. It has also been mapped as containing the westernmost extent of some Big Thicket habitats.

The terminus of Lake Creek is directly north of the Goodrich Jones State Forest a destination of birders from around the world and offers a marked contrast to the upland birds and wildlife observed within the Loblolly Pine dominated forest. It is home to a wide variety of wildlife including, Bobcat, American alligator, beaver, the occasional cougar, Blue heron, Great egret, Ruby-crowned kinglet and a variety of native and migratory waterfowl. In addition, the relatively unaltered riparian corridor offers a migration path for wildlife from Grimes County to the San Jacinto River.