



# BARTON CREEK GREENWAY STUDY

December 1991

## COOPERATING TO SAVE A GREENWAY

Threats to the natural and recreational resources of the Barton Creek watershed led the Austin City Council to request a study of the potential for conservation and enhancement of the river corridor for public use.

In response, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department has entered into a formal agreement with the National Park Service, through the latter's Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program, to study Barton Creek Greenway opportunities. With the cooperation of many other entities, this study will develop a range of recreational management and conservation strategies for the corridor. These strategies will form a conceptual plan for a Barton Creek Greenway, designed to enhance public recreation opportunities while conserving the integrity of the creek's outstanding resources.

The Barton Creek Greenway Study will include three major activities:

- 1 An inventory and analysis of natural, recreational, and cultural resources;
- 2 The identification and evaluation of management options for enhancing public recreation opportunities while protecting critical resources, and;
- 3 A process for encouraging citizen participation in the development and implementation of the Greenway plan.

To date, the study has concentrated on collecting information about the important resources associated with Barton Creek (see accompanying article). This information will serve as a basis for identifying potentially suitable areas for a range of recreational activities and targeting features that must be protected to conserve a high-quality environment in the river corridor. The National Park Service and the Austin Parks and Recreation Department

will ask management professionals and the interested public to evaluate various options for recreational management and river-corridor conservation in order to produce a Barton Creek Greenway plan that is realistic, and meets the objectives of the community.

The Greenway plan will attempt to provide increased public access to the river corridor; and to enhance opportunities for hiking, biking, equestrian use, camping, boating, fishing, swimming, picnicking, environmental education, and other "passive" recreational uses. However, an over-riding emphasis will be placed on protection of Barton Creek's unique and sensitive resources. Management options to be evaluated will include public and private land acquisition, negotiation of conservation and public use agreements with landowners, facilities development, road and trail construction, educational and interpretive programming, and maintenance and other operational activities.

The Barton Creek Greenway Study is intended to be a joint effort that can be supported by local, state, federal, and private activities. Accordingly, a broad spectrum of agencies, organizations, and individuals are being asked to participate in the study of the area and, potentially, with the implementation of the Greenway plan. The National Park Service and the Austin Parks and Recreation Department are placing a strong emphasis on the coordination of this study with the variety of ongoing efforts aimed at the protection of water quality, the regulation of development, and the conservation of wildlife habitat within the watershed. Planning and management of public recreation in the Barton Creek corridor will only be effective if it is coupled with these related initiatives.



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## BARTON CREEK AND AUSTIN

### A NATURAL TREASURE IN THE CITY

Barton Creek is one of Austin's most prized environmental and recreational assets. As the city has grown and developed, the creek, and much of its watershed, have become one of the last vestiges of natural environment in the metropolitan area. The limestone-bottomed creek, with crystal-clear pools, rushing cascades and springs surrounded by towering bluffs and inviting crevices, is an oasis that harbors rare animals and plants, vast woodlands, and an untamed character that contrasts strikingly with the urban surrounds.

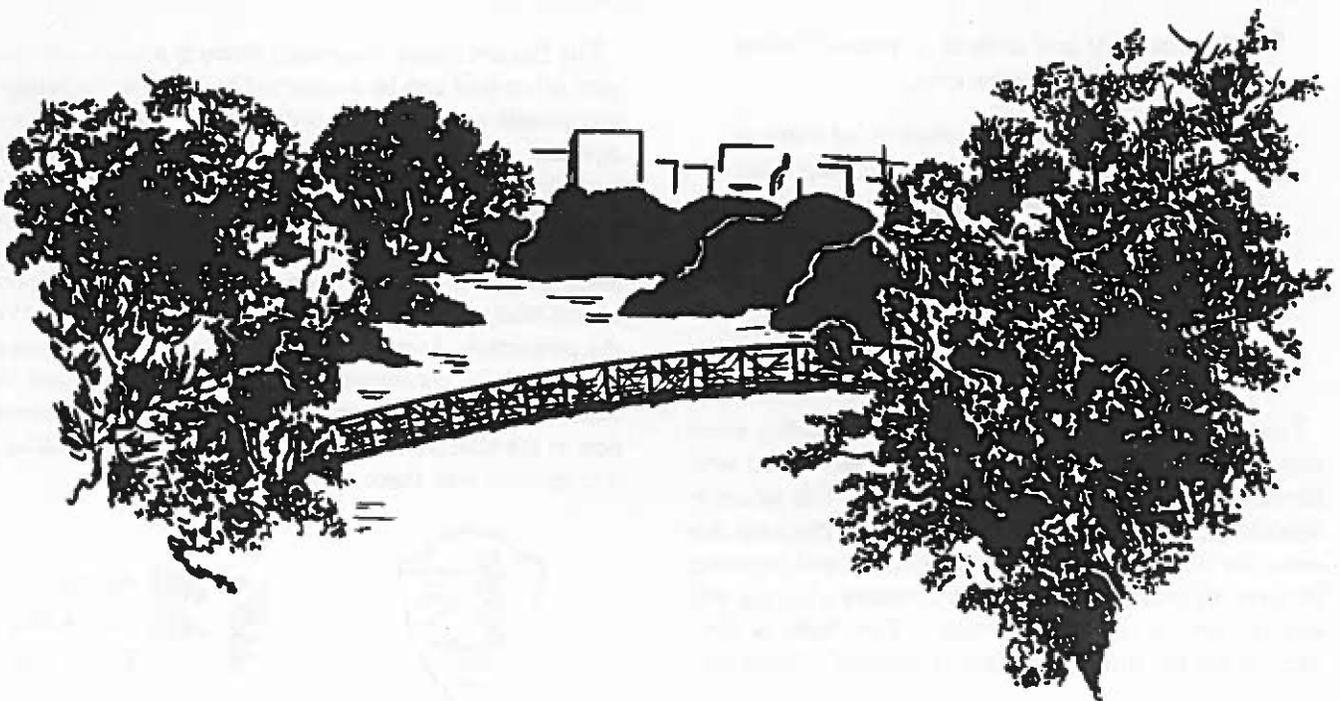
While much of the Barton Creek watershed remains wild and undisturbed, there are signs of human habitation in the Barton Creek area that date back thousands of years.

Now, as the City of Austin expands, demands for use and development of the creek corridor have reached a critical stage. Questions regarding the appropriate use of the Barton Creek watershed have become a focal point of controversy and heated debate. Barton Creek springs and the adjacent greenbelt are unique recreational facilities, and among the most popular in Austin. Expanding residential developments and proposals for additional growth in the watershed have created significant concern that the special qualities of the natural area are endangered. There are widespread fears that increasing development may make inaccessible, or even destroy, the outstanding water quality of Barton Creek, the scenic open space and woodlands along the waterway, and the unique wild inhabitants of the area.

### ▶ PLANS AND MORE PLANS

The Barton Creek watershed is valued for a variety of reasons: The creek and surrounding habitats support rare and endangered species, the outstanding water quality is critical to both wildlife recreation in the creek and Barton Springs, and the scenic quality of the watershed is prized by recreational users and development interests. A number of ongoing planning, management, and regulatory efforts are striving to protect the fundamental environmental integrity of the watershed.

While this study will focus on evaluating the opportunities for a recreational greenway in the watershed, all resulting plans and recommendations will be in concert with the City of Austin's comprehensive watershed ordinance, regional habitat conservation plans, and other public and private strategies to protect the Barton Creek area. Every attempt will be made to share information and link these complementary efforts to meet multiple objectives and avoid unnecessary conflicts.



## AN INVENTORY OF BARTON CREEK RESOURCES

### WHAT'S OUT THERE?

The first step of the Barton Creek Greenway Study has been an inventory of the important resources of the area. Natural, cultural, and recreational resources are being documented and evaluated in the inventory. Because of long-standing interest in the special features of the Barton Creek watershed, several agencies and organizations have already collected extensive information on the area. This resources inventory has largely consisted of a compilation of existing data.

For the purposes of the inventory, a study area was defined, beginning at Loop 360 in Austin and following the creek west to the Hays-Travis County line (see area map). The study area is roughly 17 miles long and 3 to 5 miles wide, covering approximately 50 square miles. The entire study area is within the Barton Creek watershed, and covers approximately 40 percent of the watershed. While the Greenway plan will focus on the creek corridor, which winds over 30 miles from the county line to Loop 360, information on the surrounding area will be relevant in targeting access routes, upland recreational opportunities, and watershed conservation strategies.

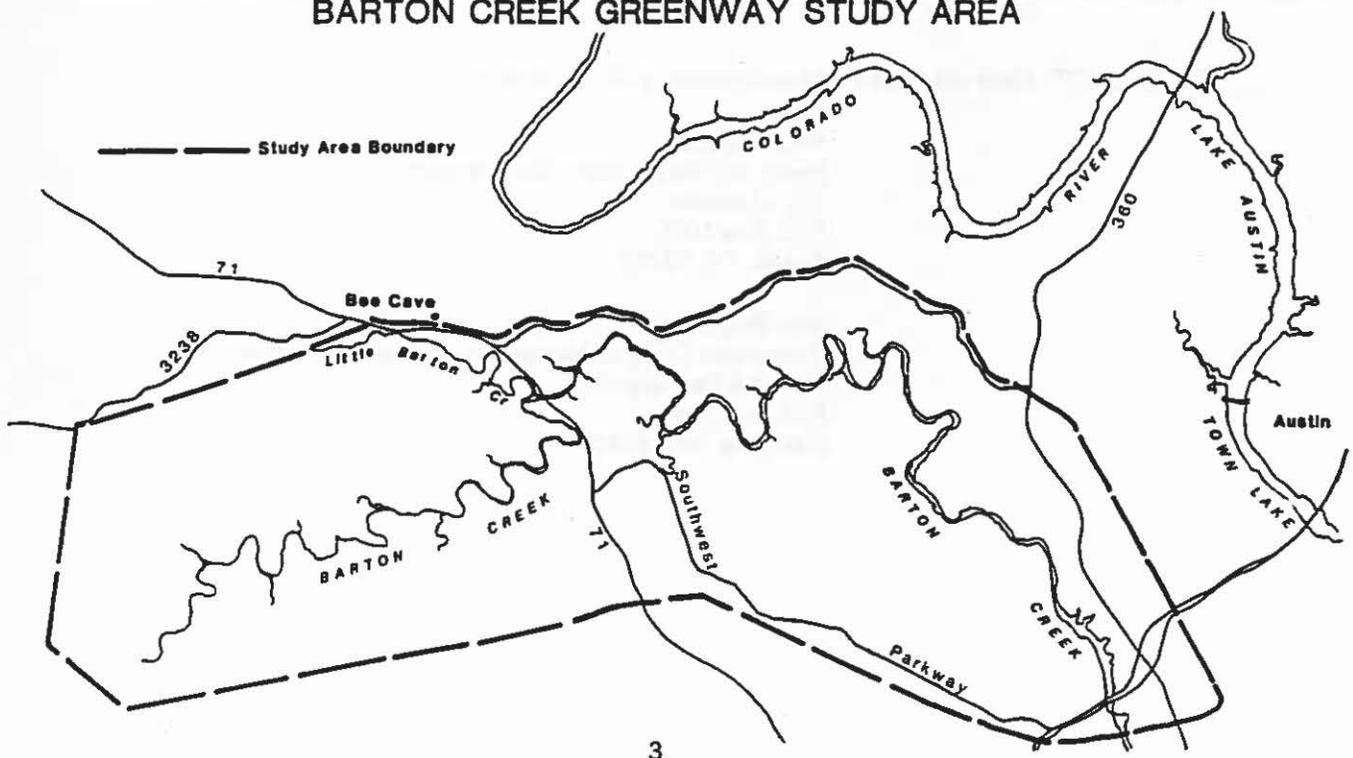
As the inventory progresses, information will be collected related to a number of basic categories:

- **Special Environmental Features:** Caves, vistas, etc.
- **Cultural Resources:** Historic and archeological sites
- **Geomorphology:** Geology, soils, slopes
- **Hydrology:** Streams, floodplains, springs, recharge zone
- **Land Use:** Activities, ownership, and infrastructure
- **Recreational Resources:** Facilities, activities
- **Vegetation Types:** Woodlands, grasslands, riparian areas
- **Wildlife Habitat:** Quality, species of special concern

Information collected about these resources will be incorporated into a computerized Geographical Information System (GIS), and evaluated with respect to the significance for public recreation activities and conservation options. The comprehensive inventory will allow planners to consider the variety of resources present at any given site, and identify appropriate uses for the area. Some of the features will require special management consideration due to sensitivity to human interaction.

Endangered species, caves, and archeological sites are examples of resources that may not be compatible with public recreation activities. In contrast, the scenic and natural character of bluffs or dense woodlands may offer unique recreational opportunities. Experts will be consulted to ensure that any management options proposed do not threaten significant resources.

### BARTON CREEK GREENWAY STUDY AREA



## YOUR ROLE IN GREENWAY PLANNING

We have already contacted a diverse group of agencies, groups, and individuals for their assistance in the Barton Creek Greenway Study. The continued participation of a broad spectrum of interests and experts will help to ensure that we collect accurate information, evaluate it correctly, and propose equitable management decisions. Here are some of the ways you can help:

- **Information exchange** - We are trying to collect as much information as possible about the important resources of the Barton Creek corridor, ongoing plans and developments, and your perceptions of management needs in the corridor.
- **Evaluating management options** - Proposals for recreational development and management of Barton Creek will need to be critically evaluated in terms of their potential impacts on the corridor and the degree to which they meet your needs as Barton Creek constituents.
- **Coordinating with related activities** - Development and implementation of the Barton Creek

Greenway plan must fit hand-in-glove with the broader plans for water-quality management, endangered-species protection, and regional open space conservation.

- **Long-term support** - We believe that the Barton Creek Greenway will be most effectively developed and managed through the cooperation of various entities. The Greenway plan may include projects that other agencies, organizations, and individuals are committed to carrying forward.

Over the next few months, we will be inviting many of you to working sessions in which these issues will be addressed. In addition, there will be a variety of opportunities through public meetings and the distribution of draft proposals for you to review and comment on our initial ideas. Those of you who are active in related areas will be called upon to provide advice and guidance as to how to forge effective linkages among our efforts. Finally, we encourage you to contact us with suggestions, information, or questions at any time. We request that you contact us in writing, by no later than January 31, 1992, to allow us to give your input due consideration.

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Questions??? Here are Barton Creek Greenway Study contacts:

Butch Smith  
Parks and Recreations Department  
City of Austin  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, TX 78767

Alan Ragins  
Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program  
National Park Service  
P.O. Box 728  
Santa Fe, NM 87504

Are you interested in being placed on the Barton Creek Greenway Study mailing list? If so, please fill in this form and return:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Please characterize your primary interest(s) in the Barton Creek Greenway Study:

Developing Recreational Opportunities

Endangered Species Protection

Water Quality Management

Conservation of the Barton Creek Corridor

Watershed Land Owner

Environmental Education

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
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City of Austin  
Parks and Recreation Department  
Attn: Butch Smith  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, TX 78767

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**Butch Smith**  
**Parks and Recreations Department**  
**City of Austin**  
**P.O. Box 1088**  
**Austin, TX 78767**

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*Library  
New 1992 Study area*



# BARTON CREEK GREENWAY STUDY

May 1992

## PLANNING A GREENWAY

Over the past six months, the Austin Parks and Recreation Department and the National Park Service have been working closely with others in a partnership designed to develop conceptual plans for a Barton Creek Greenway. Our intent in these plans will be to outline options for a public/private Greenway along the creek that can meet a broad range of objectives, with an emphasis on enhancing public access to the area and conserving the integrity of the creek's outstanding resources.

Based on an evaluation of the diverse environmental resources in the Barton Creek area, and input from meetings with public and private interests, we have developed a number of options for management of the Greenway. While these proposals are broad and conceptual in nature, they can serve as a framework that both public agencies and private landowners can use to guide the development and coordination of more specific management strategies. The following short articles provide an initial description of the developing Greenway concept. A more detailed draft plan will be published and made available for public review and comments in late May 1992. We anticipate—and welcome—your continued help in developing this plan, and in making the Barton Creek Greenway a reality.

## ANALYZING A UNIQUE ENVIRONMENT

The outstanding and unique environmental features of the Barton Creek area form the cornerstone for Greenway planning and management. Accordingly, one of our first steps in the planning process was to identify important conservation areas—that is, those places possessing special environmental importance and/or sensitivity.

In order to delineate these conservation areas, we considered a variety of environmental factors. We identified the following specific elements as critical environmental considerations for the planning and management of the area. These elements represent a wide variety of environmental concerns, and include resources that warrant protection and conservation; factors that potentially constrain intensive development; and features that may be either attractions, or constraints, for public access and use of the area:

- Archeological Sites
- Caves
- Sinkholes
- Springs
- Water Protection Zones
- Aquifer Recharge Zones
- Floodplains
- Woodlands
- Steep Slopes
- Cave Species of Special Concern
- Golden Cheeked Warblers
- Black Capped Vireos
- Rare Plant Clusters (continued page 2)



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We compiled information concerning each of the elements listed from several available sources in a computerized mapping Geographic Information System (GIS) format. We depicted the distribution of each element throughout the study area on a separate map. These maps were then overlaid, one on top of the other, to identify areas containing the greatest concentrations of important environmental features. The attached Conservation Area Map shows the distribution of all areas containing any of these environmental features.

In planning for the Greenway, we have used this composite both to identify special resources that need to be conserved in order to maintain the basic environmental integrity of the Barton Creek corridor, and to determine the appropriate uses of sensitive areas. As more detailed site-specific planning progresses, this information on the underlying resources will continue to be an important guide for management decisions.

## PRINCIPLES GUIDING GREENWAY MANAGEMENT

In the course of collecting information for the Barton Creek Greenway plan, we have not only compiled data on the environmental resources associated with Barton Creek, but also worked with a diverse group of public and private interests to assess their concerns regarding management of the area. There are certainly many different visions of the preferred future for Barton Creek—but, as you will see, there is also substantial common ground. We will be basing our definition of the Barton Creek Greenway concept on a growing consensus concerning several key principles:

1. **Resource Protection:** A primary purpose of the Greenway will be to protect and interpret the exceptional resources of the Barton Creek area. Management of the Greenway, along with existing land- and water-use controls, will strive to ensure that any additional public and private activities in the area do not adversely impact the

area's critical wildlife habitat; outstanding water quality; unique cultural resources; and scenic, undeveloped character. **2**

2. **Education:** The Barton Creek Greenway will include a wealth of relatively undisturbed natural and cultural features within the greater Austin metropolitan area. The juxtaposition of the natural Greenway with urban settings will create an unmatched educational opportunity that will be heavily emphasized in planning for the area. Through informal and formal programs, an outdoor classroom will be developed to study and explain our current, historic, and pre-historic relationships to the land. Greenway management may include environmental- or cultural-education centers, interpretive exhibits and signs, cooperative research and monitoring efforts, and programmed activities with schools or other educational groups.

3. **Private/Public Partnerships:** An effective Barton Creek Greenway must be a coordinated partnership among private landowners and public land management agencies. Those who live, work, and play on private lands in the Barton Creek Greenway will continue to be important stewards of this special place. Greenway management should include formal and informal agreements with landowners to conserve traditional land-use practices, protect the integrity of the area, and accommodate public uses in ways that do not interfere with landowners' rights and responsibilities.

4. **Recreation:** The Barton Creek Greenway will represent a unique recreational opportunity in the greater Austin area. Trails, primitive camping, picnicking, and day-use facilities are envisioned. However, in order to ensure that the environmental quality is not impaired, efforts to provide public access to the area will be limited, slow, and accompanied by a continual

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monitoring of the impacts associated with recreational uses. Recreational development and use of the corridor will be gradually phased in over time as it is determined that they can be accommodated. Access nodes, with parking, information, trash and sanitary facilities, will be developed to minimize the adverse impacts of unmanaged use.

## PLANNING FOR PUBLIC USE

Barton Creek runs for approximately 30 miles within the Greenway study area. In order to better plan for the variation in resources and land use that occurs along the corridor, we have divided the study area into more manageable segments, which can be grouped by similar characteristics:

1. **Urban Natural Area:** This area of the lower Barton Creek watershed runs from about Highway 360 to the Lost Creek subdivision. The environment is remarkably natural and undisturbed, even though it lies close to the urban center. The existing Barton Creek Greenbelt runs along the creek corridor. Access is enhanced by Loop 360 and MoPac.
2. **Suburban Area:** This area is characterized by existing residential subdivision development. The area extends from Lost Creek Subdivision out to the property known as "The Uplands." Access opportunities in this area are more limited due to the bluffs and steep slopes along the creek and private land developments.
3. **Regional Park/Preserve:** The area along Barton Creek both east and west of Highway 71 contains large blocks of land that provide significant wildlife habitat. These lands are also suitable for compatible public uses. Potential

access is via Highway 71, Bee Cave Road (2244), and Southwest Parkway.

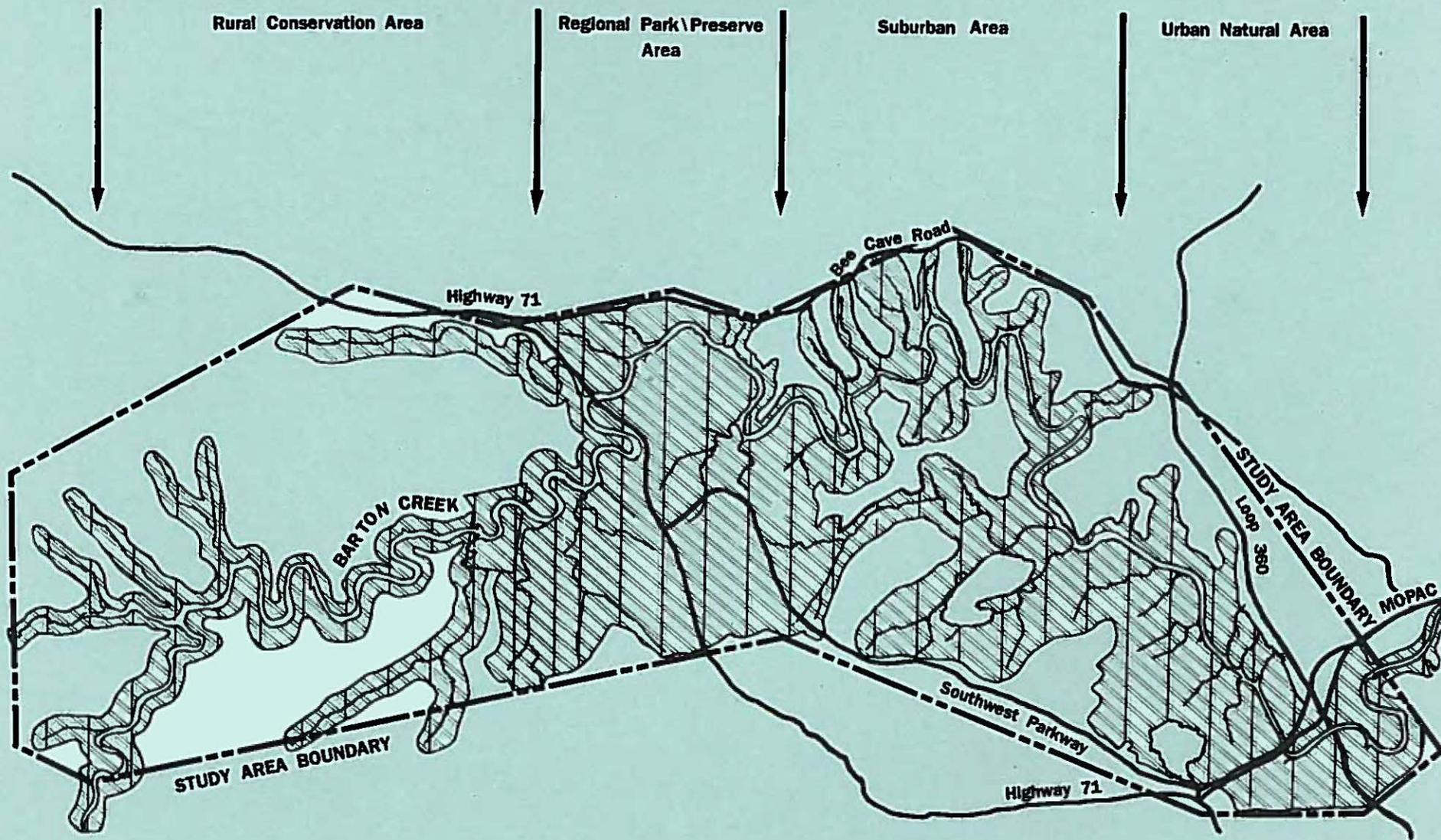
4. **Rural Conservation Area:** The western-most part of the study area is characterized by large ranches and agricultural land uses. This area is not as accessible as the other areas.

You will find the management goals, considerations, and constraints of each of these areas briefly compared in the following chart. The potential public-use activities and facilities described in the table on the accompanying map suggest general concepts that may be appropriate for each area. Specific decisions concerning what uses can be accommodated in a given area within the Greenway will require more detailed site planning—a process that will gradually continue as lands are made available for public use.

## THE GREENWAY STUDY

For purposes of the upcoming Barton Creek Greenway Concept Plan, we defined a study area, which begins at Loop 360 in Austin and follows the creek west to the Hays-Travis County line (see area map). The study area is roughly 17 miles long and three to five miles wide, and covers approximately 50 square miles. All of the study area lies within the Barton Creek watershed; and the area covers approximately forty percent of the watershed. Although the Greenway plan will focus on the creek corridor, which winds over 30 miles from the county line to Loop 360, information on the surrounding area will be relevant in targeting access routes, upland recreational opportunities, and watershed conservation strategies.

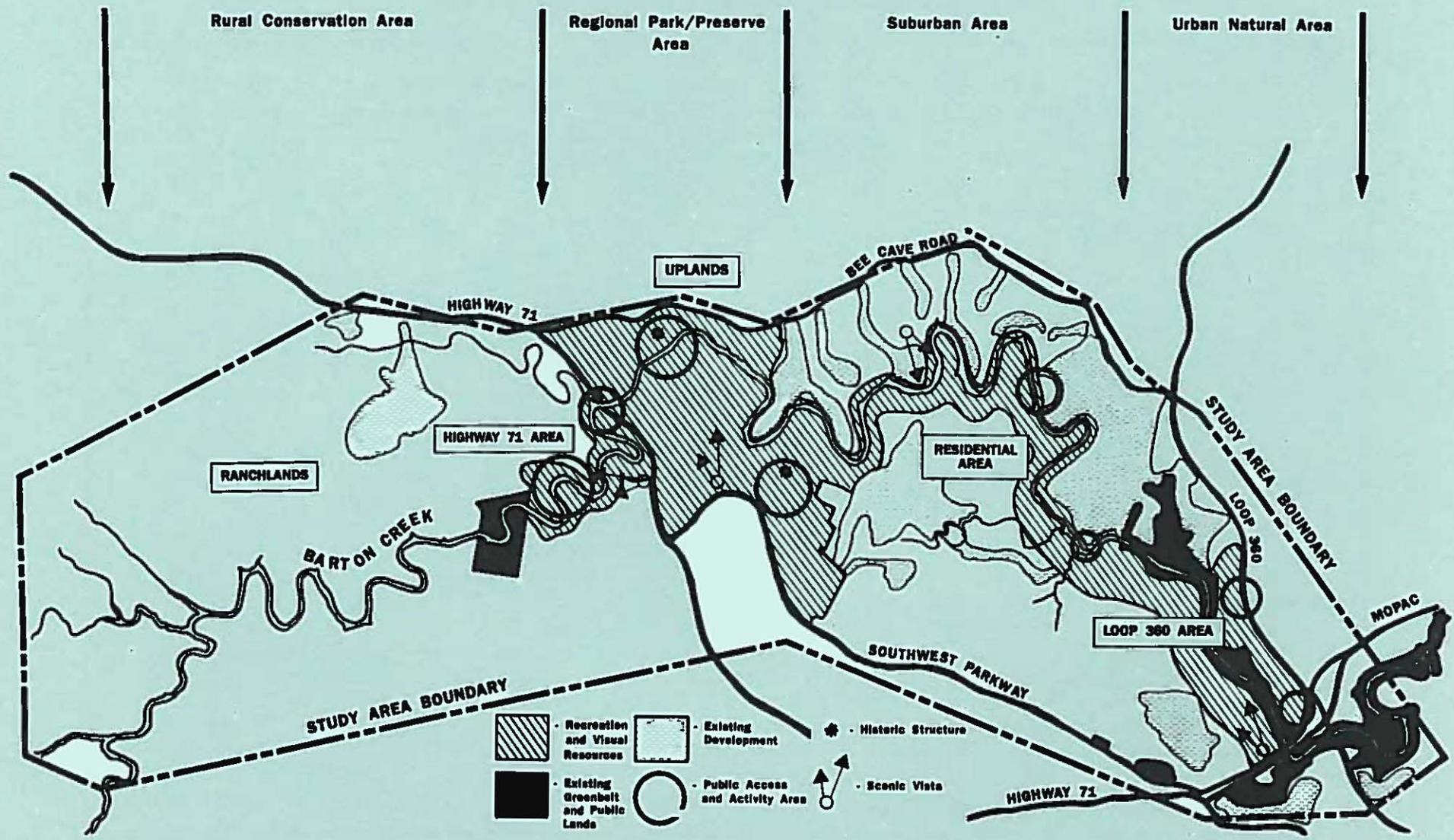
**BARTON CREEK GREENWAY PLAN  
Conservation Management**



Area	Urban Natural Area	Suburban Area	Regional Park/Preserve	Rural Conservation Area
<b>Management Goal</b>	To accommodate an increased level of public access while preserving outstanding environmental values and scenic qualities.	To conserve scenic and natural qualities while respecting private property.	To allow public access and use while protecting wildlife habitat.	To preserve environmental qualities through private landowner conservation.
<b>Management Considerations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High visitation levels</li> <li>• Increased maintenance</li> <li>• Emphasis on environmental education</li> <li>• Use by a wide variety of visitors</li> <li>• Typical facilities: parking, restrooms, trails, interpretive signage and exhibits, scenic overlooks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fewer visitor impacts</li> <li>• Use by adjacent residents</li> <li>• Limited access</li> <li>• "Pass-through" area to open countryside</li> <li>• No continuous trail system</li> <li>• Use of conservation easements</li> <li>• Minimal facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlled recreational use</li> <li>• Access by permit and/or fee</li> <li>• Typical activities: Hiking, primitive camping, horseback riding, bird watching, picnicking</li> <li>• Typical facilities: Trails, camping areas, restrooms, scenic overlooks, picnicking shelter, parking, historical structures</li> <li>• Historical resources conservation and interpretation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote private landowner's conservation plans</li> <li>• Use of conservation easements</li> <li>• Limited access, controlled by landowners</li> </ul>
<b>Management Constraints</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endangered species</li> <li>• Aquifer recharge zones</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjacent private property owners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Endangered species</li> <li>• Non-endangered wildlife habitat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Private lands</li> <li>• Agricultural land uses</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Barton Creek Greenway - Public Use Management**

**PUBLIC ACCESS MANAGEMENT AREA**  
**Working Draft**



## *What now?*

In May and June, we will distribute a draft Barton Creek Greenway Concept Plan, and hold public meetings, to receive your comments and suggestions. We encourage you to contact us with your thoughts, additional information, or questions at any time at either of the following addresses:

Butch Smith  
Parks and Recreations Department  
City of Austin  
P.O. Box 1088  
Austin, TX 78767

Alan Ragins  
Rivers and Trails Conservation Assistance Program  
National Park Service  
P.O. Box 728  
Santa Fe, NM 87504

If you did not receive this newsletter through the U.S. mail, you may not be on our mailing list. If you wish to be added to the list, please fill in this form and return to one of the above addresses:

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments** \_\_\_\_\_

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Fold Line

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