



JOE RIDDELL

Environmental Activist

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I fell in love with Barton Creek when I first inner-tubed it in June 1973, a week after I had taken the bar exam. My friends and I spent an unforgettable afternoon floating from Loop 360 to the Pool.

A few months later I took a hike in what is now part of Barton Hills. I saw where trees had been cleared and survey lines had been cut for new lots. Some of the development was very close to the creek. I decided I should find out what I could do to keep development away from the creek. Soon I began monitoring, as a private citizen, applications for “Creek Permits” required (under the new “Creek Ordinance”) prior to developing a tract of land adjacent to or crossed by a waterway. This started my years as a watchdog over the creek.

In June 1974, as a private citizen, I filed complaints in Austin Municipal Court over an illegal sewer line extension down in the bed of Barton Creek. The parties involved had not even applied for a permit required under the city’s new “Creek Ordinance.”

I was soon appointed to the city’s Environmental Board. As a board member from 1974-1976, I became aware of projects planned to provide infrastructure for new growth in the watersheds feeding Barton Creek and Barton Springs. For example, the Board reviewed a proposal to extend a big sewer line up Barton Creek to Travis Country and Lost Creek. I helped organize opposition to the extension, and the City Council did not approve it. This was one of dozens of particular proposals (like making Barton Skyway a cross-town thoroughfare by extending it across the Barton Creek Greenbelt) that citizens like me successfully challenged over the years.

In 1975 the City Council put some water and wastewater bonds on the ballot. The bonds would have subsidized urban sprawl outside the preferred growth corridor identified in the new master plan (“Austin Tomorrow”) that was being drafted. I helped rally opposition to the bonds, and voters rejected them.

In the early 1980s I was active with the Save Barton Creek Association (SBCA) and the Zilker Park Posse. I participated, as a citizen and/or as a task-force member, in the debates over new ordinances to restrict development in not only the Barton Creek watershed, but also in Williamson Creek and the other watersheds feeding the Barton Springs portion of the Edwards Aquifer. The Posse, a political action committee, successfully opposed bonds for water and sewer projects over the aquifer. The Posse was partially successful in supporting candidates for elective office who promised to protect the creek and the springs. Unfortunately, they didn’t always deliver.

In the early 1990s I helped in the drafting of the Save Our Springs Ordinance and in the successful campaign for its passage.

Over the years I have been involved in promoting public access to and use of the creek. I helped in the creation of the Austin Chronicle’s original map and guide to Barton Creek. SOS now publishes a more recent edition.

Attorney

Environmental Advocate

City of Austin Env. Board 1974-1976

Zilker Park Posse early 1980s

Save Barton Creek Assoc. early 1980s

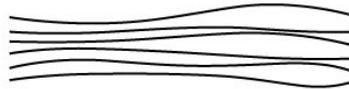
JOE RIDDELL CONT'D

Barton Creek is an irreplaceable natural mega-asset that can be enjoyed and appreciated in various ways by thousands of people on a given day. Its beauty has inspired generations of people to seek to protect it. In the process people have become more aware of environmental threats in general, and the need to protect our planet.

I most love kayaking or inner-tubing when the creek is flowing high and clear. I usually wait a couple days after a big rain--until the water is clearer and the sun comes out. I delight in the beauty of nature and revel in the challenge of the whitewater. I usually take along a mask so I can swim and explore underwater.

My daughter was born on a stormy day in May 1987. That June my parents visited Austin. The American-Statesman had just run a short article with my tips for safe inner-tubing on the creek. One afternoon my family went down to the creek from the Gus Fruh entrance and enjoyed a picnic. While there I took my daughter out on the creek in an inner tube--her baptism of sorts. Having seen and experienced the magic of the creek that afternoon, my father told me he gained a deeper appreciation for my efforts over the years to protect it.

BARTON CREEK



TIME STREAM