Introduction 1

What is the Colorado River Corridor Plan?

The Colorado River Corridor Plan represents a collaborative effort by Travis County and the City of Austin (COA), with technical assistance from the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA), to reach across jurisdictional boundaries in effort to comprehensively plan the long range future of the Colorado River Corridor (referred to herein as the "Corridor"). Land use, regulatory authority, water resources, transportation, parks and land conservation issues are addressed in this plan.

Why Prepare the Colorado River Corridor Plan?

Residents' concerns about the impact of development and aggregate mining on their quality of life in the Corridor have prompted the County, City officials and LCRA staff to explore ways in which they can influence the long term land use character of the area. The Colorado River Corridor Plan was developed for this reason. The plan establishes goals and associated action items for providing residents with the community services they desire and optimize the environmental, cultural, recreational and economic potential of the corridor. As such, the Colorado River Corridor Plan communicates the values and intentions of the respective partners and helps ensure continuity in policy application and capital improvement project expenditures within and across jurisdictions.

Plan Intent

The intent of this plan is to leverage the respective roles of the County, City and LCRA to achieve shared, long range goals for the Colorado River Corridor. More specifically, the plan will serve the following purposes:

- Identify opportunities and constraints affecting land use patterns,
- Evaluate potential for orderly and compatible land use transitions over 25 years,
- Articulate shared goals and objectives,
- Illustrate a conceptual plan for achieving goals and objectives,
- Recommend standards and protocols for mining and reclamation,
- Recommend standards for restoring bottomland woodlands and grasslands,
- Propose policy initiatives and implementation strategies,
- Clarify the respective roles of the County, City, and LCRA in implementation, and
- Identify gaps in jurisdictional authority.

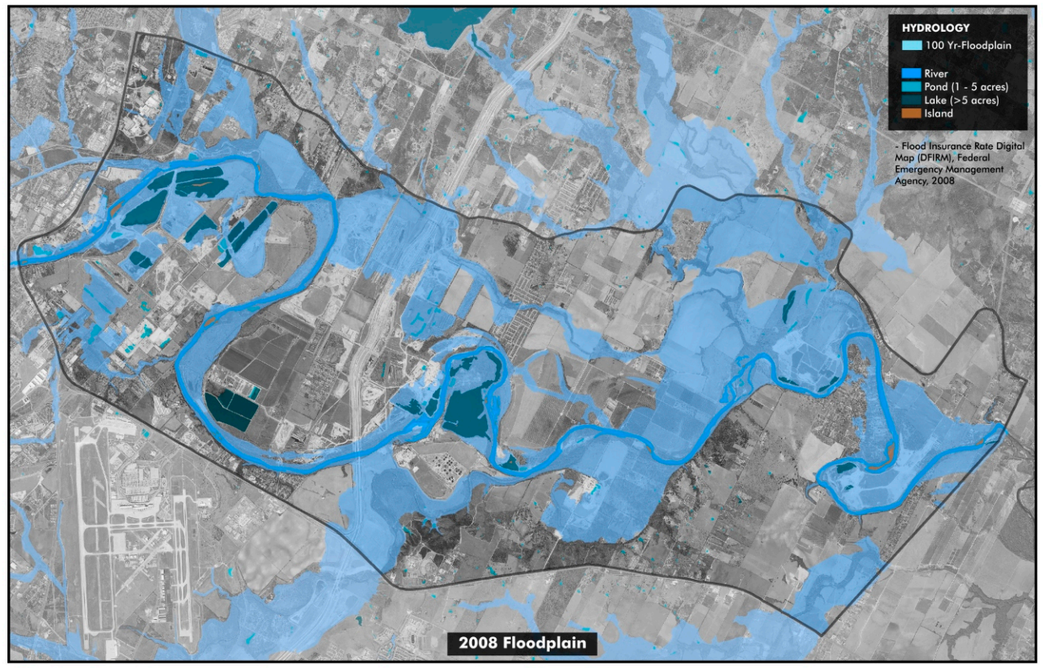
Study Area

The study area covers approximately 30,565 acres in eastern Travis County, centered on a 32-mile stretch of the Colorado River. It is bounded by US 183 on the west and the Travis/Bastrop county line on the east; its northern boundary is FM 969 and the southern is SH 71. It is estimated that 12,350 people live within its limits.[1] Although a less densely populated part of the county, the Corridor's population has grown by approximately 20 percent since 2000, with much of this growth occurring in the Austin's Colony development.

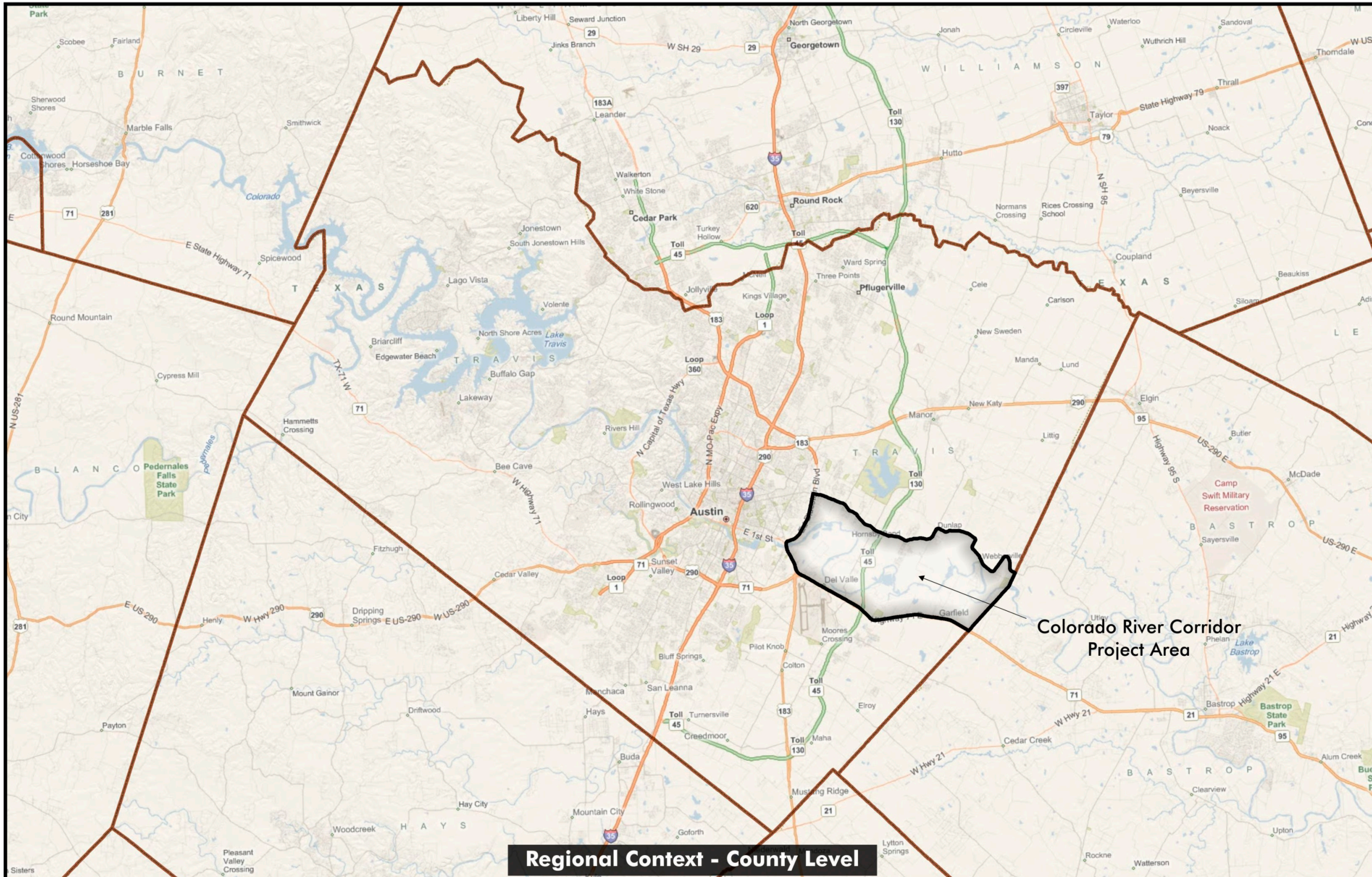
As with most of eastern Travis County, the land in the Corridor has historically been used for agriculture, beginning in 1832 when Stephen F. Austin first brought settlers – including members of the Hornsby, Gilleland, and Wilbarger families – to "Austin's Little Colony." The rich "…alluvial 'bottomlands', that promised agricultural success, the stands of timber along the river, and the abundance of wild game…" attracted them to the area.[2] By the end of the 1800s, the river corridor was dominated by agriculture and only a thin remnant of the great forest that once stood in the bottomlands was found along the river and the "ryegrass prairies" found in forest openings were gone.[3] Today, just as the forests and grasslands gave way to agriculture, farming is giving way to aggregate mining: nearly one-third of the corridor – approximately 10,825 acres – is now dedicated to extracting sand and gravel.

As the 2008 floodplain map clearly shows, a large part of the study area (about 13,000 acres or 43 percent) lies in the 100-year floodplain, and therein lays its attractiveness for aggregate mining. Over the millennia, as the river meandered between older, upland terraces, it deposited silt, sand and gravel to depths from a few feet to several hundred feet depending on the underlying geology. Today these alluvial sand and gravel deposits near the river are extracted from a depth of twenty to thirty feet below the surface.[4]

In addition to the commercial value, the corridor has ecological, recreational, and cultural value: although disturbed, the bottomlands still mitigate the impact of storm water and filter and recharge groundwater; the river is still a place where people boat, fish and enjoy nature; the land is still farmed; and the Village of Webberville – once known as "Hell's Half Acre" – still stands at the site of a historic river crossing and steamboat landing.



[1] CAMPO 2035
[2] Discovering the Colorado: A Vision for the Austin-Bastrop River Corridor
[3] Discovering the Colorado: A Vision for the Austin-Bastrop River Corridor
[4] Discovering the Colorado: A Vision for the Austin-Bastrop River Corridor


Regional Context - County Level
Colorado River Corridor
Project Area
Austin
Georgetown
Round Rock
Pflugerville
Cedar Park
Del Valle
Garfield
Bastrop
Taylor
Elgin
Manor
Hutto
B U R N E T
W I L L I A M S O N
T R A V I S
B L A N C O
H A Y S
B A S T R O P
L E E
Lake Travis
Pedernales Falls State Park
Bastrop State Park
Camp Swift Military Reservation