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Local Partners kick-off Construction of the Mission Reach Project

Event marks the first-steps in the restoration of eight-miles of the San Antonio River

Heralded as an ecosystem restoration project that will transform the section of the San Antonio River south of downtown from a trapezoidal flood control channel back to a more natural environment, local officials gathered to celebrate the first turning of dirt on the \$126.6 million **Mission Reach** portion of the San Antonio River Improvements Project (SARIP).

“Today marks a step forward in a historic journey,” says County Judge Nelson Wolff. “The start of the Mission Reach restoration is the result of a cooperative effort of government and community partners. We recognize the importance of the San Antonio River and together we will provide a new setting for this jewel. Restoring native habitat, the original meanders, improving flood control, and ecosystem restoration will result in residents and visitors being able to enjoy this treasure for generations.”

The first step in the construction of the multi-phased project is the relocation of water and wastewater lines located within the Phase I of the project, which extends from Lone Star Boulevard south to the confluence of the San Antonio River with San Pedro Creek. The San Antonio Water System (SAWS) awarded a contract earlier this month to initiate the utility relocations. The utility relocation work will continue until the beginning of next year, followed immediately with the beginning of the ecosystem restoration improvements, which will be bid by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in December with a contract award planned for March 2008.

Assistant Secretary of the Army John Paul Woodley and Congressman Ciro Rodriguez praised the local partners for preparing the way for the Corps project to begin. “This groundbreaking ceremony for the Mission Reach Ecosystem Restoration project is the opening of a new chapter in the long relationship between San Antonio and the Corps of Engineers,” said Woodley. “The outcome of this partnership will create a treasure that will be a great benefit to this region and the nation.” Congressman Rodriguez added, “As San Antonio’s only representative on the House Committee on Appropriations, I was able to work with the Chairman to help expedite this important process, and I will continue to advocate for funding for the River Improvement Project.”

The Mission Reach will reintroduce native vegetation, create an environment more suitable for wildlife, add eight miles of trails and recreational amenities and reconnect the historic San Antonio Missions to the river. It will establish 24,000 native trees, 56 acres of native grasses, 113 acres of aquatic habitat, 320 acres of riparian habitat (landscape features that support fish and wildlife in areas near water bodies) and restore two river remnants.

Five tributary mouths (a smaller body of water flowing into a larger one); nine embayment areas; and 31 riffle structures will also be established. A riffle is characterized by shallow water two inches to one foot deep, moderately swift moving water and a rocky stream bottom consisting of gravel from 1/4 inch to 10 inches in size.

Enhancements to this stretch of the river will support recreational activities such as birding, jogging, bicycling and canoeing. Portals will be designed near Mission Concepción, Mission San Jose, Mission San Juan and Mission Espada to re-establish a link between the river and the missions, allowing them to serve as gateways between the city's Spanish Colonial heritage and miles of riverside pathways. Private dollars raised by the San Antonio River Foundation will fund the portals, as well as other amenities.

"This project matters to our community's wholeness, because in San Antonio, the river is what knits us together as a community," says Mayor Phil Hardberger. "It binds us from north to south and draws us to our center. This linear park will be a jewel of our city which will one day connect us from Mission Espada to Brackenridge Park. It is a well-spring of energy and economic activity around which all of San Antonio revolves. It will flow long after we are long gone, connecting us to our past and present, celebrating our culture and moving us toward a positive future."

Bexar County Commissioner Sergio "Chico" Rodriguez, Precinct 1, voted to include \$11.7 million for the acceleration of Mission Reach in the 2007-2008 Bexar County budget, ensuring its start as well as the completion of Phase I while waiting for federal allocations.

"In many cultures, water symbolizes the renewal of life. The San Antonio River Improvements Project Mission Reach will not only serve as a symbol, but will also be a tangible first step toward the restoration of the southside," says Rodriguez. "With educational institutions, economic development, and world-class housing developments in the works, the Mission Reach Project continues to be the commitment of our local elected officials and our partners to support endeavors that will contribute to the overall quality of life of the community. The Mission Reach Project has it all: it will restore the ecosystem which will return the river to its natural meanders while increasing flood control and reducing erosion. Trails will connect for bike riders and pedestrians to use for exercising and private donations will work toward other aspects like public art."

"The San Antonio River Improvements Projects will earn a place among the greatest milestones in the profound history of the San Antonio River," says Louis Rowe, chairman of the San Antonio River Authority Board of Directors. "The Mission Reach will restore our river to a more natural state all while enhancing the quality-of-life for our community by linking the river to some of our greatest cultural and recreational assets."

"At SAWS, we are very proud to be a partner in this exciting addition to one of the gem's of our city, our San Antonio River," says San Antonio Water System Chairman Alex Briseño. "As we all realize, this project consists of many partners. SAWS' piece of the puzzle – the Utility Relocation – will launch within the next couple of weeks. This will be the first in a two-phase utility relocation process that will consist of the relocating 1400 linear feet main and relocating key facilities to make way for widening and improving the river channel."

The Mission Reach budget is \$126.6 million and the project is being funded by Bexar County (\$33.0 million); the City of San Antonio (\$15.4 million); U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (\$72.1 million) and through private donations collected by the San Antonio River Foundation (\$4.8 million). The San Antonio Water System (\$1.3 million) will relocate utilities in conflict with the proposed project. The San Antonio River Authority is the local sponsor of the project with the Corps, and therefore, is serving the San Antonio community as project manager of the Mission Reach.