

RESOLUTION 2021-R-131

DESIGNATING THE RIVERBEND AS LAREDO'S FIRST NATURE PRESERVE

WHEREAS a nature preserve is an area of land that is protected and managed in order to preserve a particular type of habitat and its flora and fauna which are often rare or endangered;

WHEREAS the City of Laredo, population 270,000, sits along the banks of the Rio Grande, a riparian ecosystem that teems with wildlife, especially bird life;

WHEREAS Laredo has no designated landmarks for the preservation and protection of nature, or promotion of ecotourism;

WHEREAS the Riverbend is a city-owned riparian area of 77 acres located along the Rio Grande floodplain in Laredo, so named because of the 90-degree bend of the river below Laredo College and San Francisco Javier Catholic Church, where the river takes a sharp turn east and flows toward downtown Laredo and Nuevo Laredo;

WHEREAS the Riverbend has been vastly improved by a federal and city collaboration, which has converted a forgotten and neglected eyesore into a restored natural habitat that has become a treasured asset for our area;

WHEREAS the Riverbend was originally designed as a refuge for the federally listed endangered Inland Least Tern, an avian species that had been observed in Laredo numerous

times since the 1980s;

WHEREAS the Riverbend project was also designed to remediate the abandoned gravel pits into functional ponds and enhance their suitability for wildlife habitat;

WHEREAS the City of Laredo implemented this \$5.5 million ecological restoration project, known as Section 206, in collaboration with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers;

WHEREAS the process began in 1998 and construction started in August 2016 and was substantially complete in May 2018;

WHEREAS the Section 206 project helped transform the area to a more natural state by improving the quality and quantity of aquatic, wetland and riparian habitat;

WHEREAS this project was designed to create a refuge-like property for all wildlife but especially a nesting area for the Inland Least Tern which included landscaping unsuitable gravel pit margins into small lakes, with natural shorelines planted with native aquatic plants;

WHEREAS the most special feature was the creation of two nesting islands for the Inland Least Tern composed of five freight containers each;

WHEREAS another priority was the management of three widespread invasive species: bufflegrass, giant river cane, and salt cedar by the Army Corps of Engineers and Homeland Security;

WHEREAS this area is a critical wildlife corridor where

sighting reports still surface of federally endangered small wild cats that include the ocelot and jaguarundi;

WHEREAS the first Texas mussel designated as a federal endangered species, the Texas Hornshell, also inhabits the riverbanks parallel to this area;

WHEREAS seldom seen neotropical birds, such as the Roseate Spoonbill, Green Heron, roosting Black-crowned Night Heron, and Laredo's signature bird - the Morelet's Seedeater (formerly White-collared Seedeater) have been observed here. The extremely rare Blue Mockingbird was seen from here during the 2018 Laredo Christmas Bird Count;

WHEREAS the City of Laredo is currently in the process of constructing low-impact, non-motorized nature trails and other passive recreational amenities within the Riverbend;

WHEREAS the Riverbend is a prized location during the annual Laredo Birding Festival – which is organized by the Rio Grande International Study Center, Monte Mucho Audubon Society, and Laredo Convention & Visitors Bureau – and draws in nearly 150 birders from around the country and other nations, and has helped put Laredo on the map of the birding world;

WHEREAS ecotourism is a thriving and sustainable growth industry that generates hundreds of millions of dollars annually in South Texas and should be nurtured in Laredo;

WHEREAS, the establishment of this Nature Preserve will create a landmark designation and amenity for Laredo and the South Texas region;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LAREDO THAT based on the foregoing, the City Council of the City of Laredo, Texas declares the designation of the Riverbend as Laredo's first Nature Preserve that requires limited human interaction with limited viewing areas and continued prohibition of motorized vehicles within the Preserve due to the presence of the federally listed Inland Least Tern and potential for the presence of other endangered species.

PASSED BY THE CITY COUNCIL AND APPROVED BY THE MAYOR ON THIS THE ____ DAY OF _____, 2021.

PETE SAENZ JR.
MAYOR

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

RENE C. BENAVIDES
CITY ATTORNEY

ATTEST:

JOSE A. VALDEZ JR.
CITY SECRETARY