



Friends of Barton Springs Pool

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Mary Ann Neely & Scott Harris, TreeFolks;
Jon Beall, Save Barton Creek Association;
Andrea Rado, Hill Country Conservancy;
Emily Little, Austin Heritage Society;
Glee Ingram, Greenbelt Guardians.

November 12, 2009

Mayor & Council Members, City of Austin
P.O. Box 1088
Austin, Texas 78767

Reference: Barton Springs Pool gravel bar must be removed.

Dear Friends,

We write to support the city staff's plan to remove the gravel bar from Barton Springs Pool. The gravel bar is a large collection of flood debris (1500 cubic yards of gravel and boulders, and growing) that is spread over the downstream portion of the pool. The Barton Springs Pool Master Plan, which was developed to end decades of neglect at the pool, rightly calls for removing the gravel bar.

Removing the gravel bar is part of an overall effort to restore the pool to a more natural state. In a natural free-flowing creek, the flood debris would be washed down the creek. Instead, the dam that forms Barton Springs Pool traps the flood debris, and the flood debris acts as a second dam, trapping more flood debris.

The giant bulge grows inexorably, slowly filling the pool and increasing stagnation. It also traps silt, building up a deep oozing sludge on the bottom behind its rocky wall. When the pool is full of swimmers, they stir up the sediment, turning the water thickly murky.

Once flood debris was dredged from the pool regularly, but the debris has not been thoroughly cleaned out since 1991. This was part of a pattern of neglect.

Swimmers rebelled against the neglect of the pool in 2006, and began organizing volunteer cleaning sessions. We called for action. After a long public process, the Barton Springs Pool Master Plan was written, urgent short-term projects were funded, and the long-term projects were adopted.

Among the short-term projects is removal of the gravel bar. After lesser measures failed, the current plan was devised to get the job done.

Contrary to certain alarmist reports, the proposed debris removal project is not a "monster dredge" project that will destroy the pool and "kill every living thing in the dredge zone." Rather, we believe that city staff has crafted the project as a reasonable and measured response for correcting a very large problem while minimizing disruption of the pool.



The notion that we need a "water flow modeling study" before removing the gravel gets it backwards. Indeed, the gravel bar is blocking the completion of scientific studies at the pool. The Master Plan process identified six short-term water quality studies for the pool. One, a topographic survey, can't be finished because the buried bottom of the pool can't be surveyed, and another, the hydrodynamic study, waits on the completion of the topographic survey.

A few cling to a policy of benign neglect at the pool. But there is nothing benign about the neglect that allows the pool to deteriorate year in and year out. The neglect must end. And the gravel bar must be removed.

Again, we call for action.

Respectfully,

Robin Cravey
President

Copies to:

Austin Planning Commission
Austin Environmental Board
Austin Parks Board