

Workforce Development, Case Study: The Trails Across Texas Partnership and the Whispering Pines Trail, Tyler State Park

Texas Conservation Corps at American YouthWorks (Texas)

Workforce Development National Benefit Description: FHWA supports the development of initiatives that enhance workforce development, ability, and diversity in key transportation sectors and disciplines. RTP funding can add to the success of workforce development for young people in economically distressed areas.

Key Terms:

- ATV and OHV Trails
- Boardwalks and Bridges
- Multi-Use Trails
- Trail Assessment
- Vegetation Management
- Wilderness Stewardship

Project Partners:

- State Parks Division of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
- Texas State Parks
- Trails Across Texas

DOT Strategic Goal Alignment:

- Accountability
- Infrastructure
- Safety

Best Practices:

The Whispering Pines trail project utilized RTP funding from previously cancelled grant projects. RTP grant dollars funded one TxCC trail crew to meet specific project needs. The 20 percent RTP match requirement was made utilizing a combination of funds secured through TxCC's indirect cost rate, park staff time, volunteer time, and donated materials.

Background

Since 2009, the State Parks Division of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has utilized RTP funds to partner with American YouthWorks' Texas Conservation Corps (TxCC) and operate a State Park Trails Crew. The State Park Trails Crew, known as Trails Across Texas or TAT, is a crew of eight to ten AmeriCorps members dedicated to new trail construction or major trail renovations in Texas State Parks. Each crew serves a roughly six-month season, travelling and working on three to four trail projects in various state parks around Texas. Over the past 10 years, crews have worked in over 20 Texas State Parks, working on projects as

diverse as trail bridges and boardwalks in the swamps of East Texas, to rails-to-trails surfacing in the Panhandle, and new mountain bike trails in the mountains of West Texas. In addition to the Tyler State Park Project, the 2018 Trails Across Texas season also included continuing restoration of the Lost Pines Loop at Bastrop State Park, the beginning of multi-use trail development at the Bauer Unit of Guadalupe River State Park, and putting the final touches on the Ironweed OHV Trail System at Eisenhower State Park.

The Trails Across Texas partnership between TPWD and TxCC is funded utilizing RTP funds from previously cancelled grant projects. The yearly contract amount for one dedicated trail crew is roughly \$350,000, and TPWD has allocated additional money to the contract in recent years to allow for the hiring of additional crews to satisfy specific project needs. The 20 percent matching funds required for the Recreational Trails Program are made utilizing a combination of TxCC's indirect cost rate, park staff time, and in some cases volunteer time or donated materials. In the future, the agency aspires to contract with TxCC for two full-time dedicated trail crews.

The goal of the Whispering Pines project was to design and construct a resilient trail route that wove seamlessly into the natural setting and meshed with the existing structures built during the Great Depression by members of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). The western section of the trail was routed near the proposed site of a new Visitor Center and allowed for a trailhead connection to that area. The rerouted area consisted of widening the trail corridor, and construction of five trail bridges and one boardwalk.

Originally started with the Texas Conservation Corps (TxCC) 2018 Trails Across Texas Spring Crew, the majority of work on the Whispering Pines Trail was completed by Corpsmembers on the 2018 Fall Crew. Both iterations of the TAT crew lived on site while working on the trail and bridges. At every step of the project, the Corps was met with help, advice, supplies, and expertise from both the park staff and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). After many hours of hard work, the redefined Whispering Pines Loop Trail opened to the public on October 24, 2018.

Project Work

The primary purpose of this project was to reroute and replace a heavily eroded segment of the Whispering Pines Nature Trail with a sustainable and enjoyable trail route. The new 4,688-foot trail reroute was designed to allow a trailhead access point at the proposed site of a future Visitor Center. The Whispering Pines Trail Loop, originally constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), included two distinct eastern and western parts. The eastern segment that traveled along a creek and near several CCC-constructed pools, steps, and other rockwork, was in fairly good condition and required only minor maintenance work.

The heavily eroded western trail segment resembled a logging road and had no discernible CCC structures. This segment was rerouted to follow hillside contours and armored crossings. Additionally, four significant trail bridges were built to cross several drainages. The fifth bridge was built upon the site of a deteriorating bridge that was demolished and removed.

Prior to the TAT crew beginning work, TPWD and TxCC walked through the proposed site that would become the improved Whispering Pines Loop Trail. To give the crew an on-the-ground blueprint to build the trail, pin flags were laid where the trail was supposed to weave. When TAT initially arrived at Tyler State Park, the first task was to begin cutting in the trail tread using hand tools. Standard trail building methodology was employed, removing organic matter from the

surface and benching the uphill side. Cedar logs were locally sourced from a neighboring site and stacked on top of each other on the downhill side. One of the final steps was to rehabilitate the section of the trail that was closed. Large areas were camouflaged with downed branches and other material to keep visitors from accidentally wandering onto the old trail. Drains were built to divert excess water and slow erosion. Some native plants, such as American Beauty Berry, were sourced from elsewhere around the trail and transplanted to help revegetate the beaten path.

For More Information

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