



San Antonio  
Water  
System



Audubon

Mitchell Lake  
Audubon Center

# MITCHELL LAKE IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT

CONNECTING  
SAN ANTONIO  
TREASURES TO  
A WORLD-CLASS  
BIRDING CENTER

*“Mitchell Lake is the crown jewel in a historical and recreational necklace that will connect so many tourist destinations and natural resources of San Antonio. Let’s share this gem with the community.”*

**NELSON WOLFF**  
Bexar County Judge

# THE HIDDEN JEWEL OF SAN ANTONIO'S SOUTH SIDE

Sometimes a community's greatest assets can be hiding in plain sight, waiting for the right moment to be rediscovered and appreciated.

Eighteenth century Spanish settlers called it *Laguna de los Patos* — “Lagoon of the Ducks.” Today, birdwatching enthusiasts from across the globe call it a world-class destination. But whatever you call it, Mitchell Lake is a natural wonder that has gone unappreciated and underutilized for far too long.

Today, Mitchell Lake's ponds, grassland, wetlands, brushland and woodlands boast more than 330 bird species as well as a diverse assemblage of reptiles, amphibians, insects, mammals, and plants.

Located at the literal crossroads of San Antonio's thriving hike and bike trail system, this 1,200 acre hidden jewel of the South Side is uniquely positioned to become a vibrant, gateway destination for nearby residents, nature lovers throughout the region, and birding enthusiasts from around the world.

## MITCHELL LAKE AUDUBON CENTER IMPROVEMENTS: A PROPOSAL

The planned enhancements at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center will elevate San Antonio as a world-class eco-cultural tourism destination.

By creating a welcoming natural area for outdoor recreation — including birding, hiking, and biking — this investment enhances the area's economic value and provides an improved asset to this traditionally under-resourced community.

The park-like setting will augment and enhance the ecological assets around Mitchell Lake by providing amenities and expanding accessibility to this world-renowned birding site and outdoor recreation area.

Audubon, with assistance from San Antonio Water System, completed preliminary designs and continues to build stakeholder and community support.

The **total cost** for the project is

**\$12 million**

*Access to site with completed improvements  
will be free and open to the public.*





MITCHELL LAKE AUDUBON CENTER

# PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

Improving existing infrastructure, expanding accessibility and public access, and adding safety features and amenities are the core elements of the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center project.

In addition to enhancing the visitor experience, these additions and improvements will assist Audubon in their mission to connect people to nature, through community conservation and education, focused on birds and the places they need.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

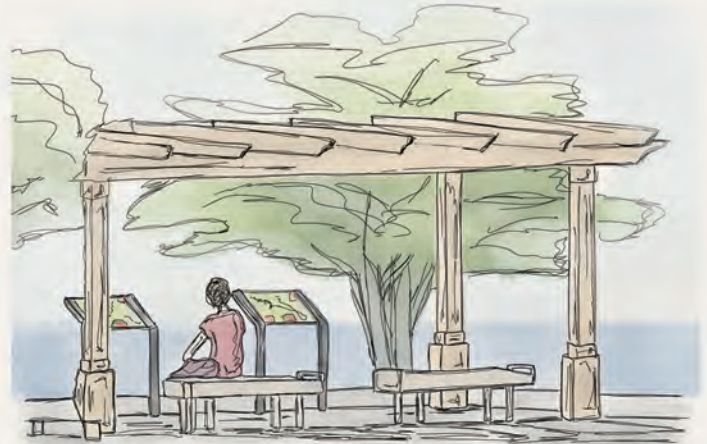
- Connection to existing hike and bike trails.
- Expanded educational pavilion.
- Enhanced native gardens.
- Wildlife viewing areas and picnic areas.
- Parking and restrooms.
- Improved roads and trails.
- Welcoming entrance and educational stations.
- Recreation of historical bat house and roosting site.







ENTRANCE

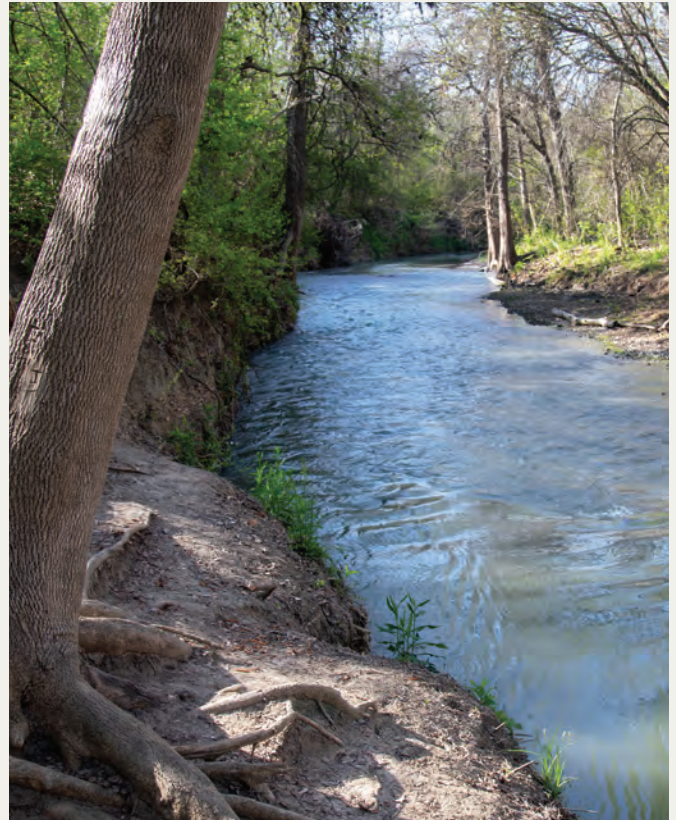


VIEWING STATION

## SOUTH SIDE SYNERGY

From the historic Hot Wells Hotel, to the World Heritage site Spanish missions, to the Medina River Natural Area, our city's South Side is a focal point of cultural and environmentally significant spaces. And Mitchell Lake lies at the center of it all.

This project will finally connect these destinations along the greenway trails and waterway systems within this corridor. Between the restored riparian habitat of the Mission Reach and the rugged banks of the Medina River, Mitchell Lake is ideally situated to be the gateway to South Texas cultural and eco-tourism.





PLEASANTON ROAD



# LEGEND



Leeper House



Existing city trail



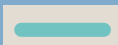
Entrance gate renovation



New parking at entry & improvements at existing parking



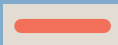
Educational pavilion improvements & expansion near Leeper House



Existing asphalt roadway improvements and control gates



Full service restroom and parking area north of polders



Repaired and improved base at polder drives and drive around Bird Pond



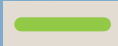
Parking and picnic areas at center Polder Drive



Event pavilion and overlook at top of hill on center Polder Drive



New viewing stations along polder roads



New east lake hike and bike trail



Replica of historic bat house





*Photograph by Rob Michaelson*

## BENEFITS TO THE

- Creates new opportunities for outdoor recreation in a traditionally under-resourced community.
- Increases the area's economic value by enhancing nearby property values, increases municipal revenue, and provides homebuyers and workers with desired local amenities.
- Supports San Antonio's Climate Action and Adaptation Plan by promoting biodiversity and healthy ecosystems, empowering residents to take personal action towards mitigating climate change.



*Photograph by Jack Rogers*





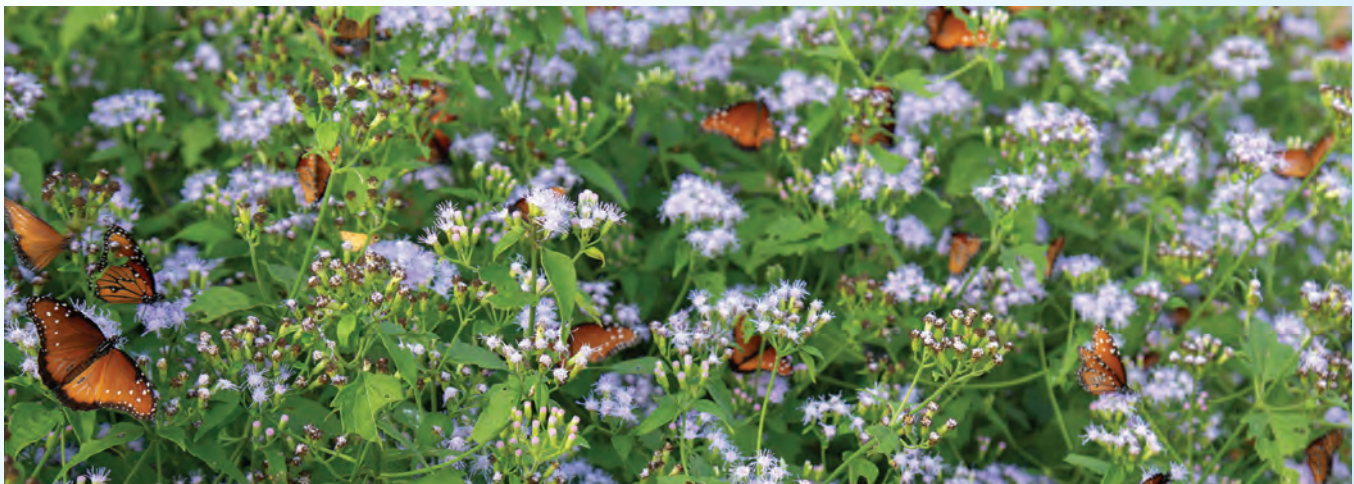
*“Mitchell Lake is an amazing story of recovery and redemption — a sewage cesspool transformed into a world-class wildlife sanctuary. We’re excited to share this hidden South Side pearl with our neighbors.”*

**ROBERT R. PUENTE**

President/CEO  
San Antonio Water System

## SURROUNDING COMMUNITY

- Offers a catalyst for responsible growth in one of the fastest-growing areas of San Antonio, adding beauty, breathing room, and value to our community.
- Enhances the site’s ability to serve thousands of students each year through outdoor educational field experiences, university research projects, and internships.
- Elevates San Antonio as a world-class, eco-cultural tourism destination and establishes the area as a unified visitor destination.



# BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

An extension of the existing hike and bike trail south of Mitchell Lake will provide connectivity to Audubon resources on the north end of the lake. This offers residents and visitors an opportunity for direct contact with nature, physical activity, and social interaction.

The goal is also to connect to Texas A&M University – San Antonio on the northwest side of the property, and to the Mission del Lago neighborhood to the east.

A new full-service restroom will offer a comfort station for hikers and bikers, whether they are just passing through or stopping to enjoy the natural resources of the park.

New parking will accommodate those arriving by vehicle, providing convenient access to birdwatching opportunities that are currently difficult to reach on foot.







MITCHELL LAKE  
TRAILHEAD  
13855 S HWY 281

*“Enhancing access to and improving the educational and visitor experience at Mitchell Lake will continue to build this important economic, recreational and environmental asset and support the community’s shared vision for the future.”*

**SUZANNE DIXON**  
Vice President  
National Audubon Society





New wildlife viewing stations will invite a new generation of enthusiasts to spend time in nature at this unique community asset.

Mitchell Lake is an essential stop for migratory birds on the Central Flyway, and viewing stations will help visitors develop an increased appreciation for the more than 330 species of migratory birds that rest and feed here.

# NEW WILDLIFE VIEWING STATIONS



# EXPANDED EDUCATIONAL PAVILION & NEW EVENTS PAVILION

From elementary grade levels to doctoral programs, Mitchell Lake offers unique educational and research opportunities for understanding the importance of ecological management and the link between a sound environment and economic vitality.

An expanded educational pavilion will better support this critical function of the facility.

On a hilltop between the Mitchell Lake polders, a new events pavilion will offer expansive views of the wetlands and the San Antonio skyline, providing a unique venue for special events and celebrations amid an ecological treasure. The area will also offer picnic shelters, parking, and a scenic overlook.





Mitchell's Lake Bat Roost. Portion of Mitchell's Lake in background.

# HISTORICAL BAT ROOST RECREATION

A recreated bat roost will evoke the spirit of an early 20th century tourist attraction, give visitors a sense of the unique and important history of this site, and complement the facility's mission of attracting and managing wildlife.

The original bat roost was built by Dr. Charles A.R. Campbell, an infectious disease specialist who served as the City of San Antonio health officer in the early 1900s. He conducted the world's first experiments for attracting large numbers of bats to fight malaria-carrying mosquitoes, inventing tall towers designed to attract them for roosting.

The Nobel Prize nominee designed and built 16 such towers around the country between 1907 and 1929, and his tower at Mitchell Lake was a major community magnet, attracting residents and tourists in addition to bats.





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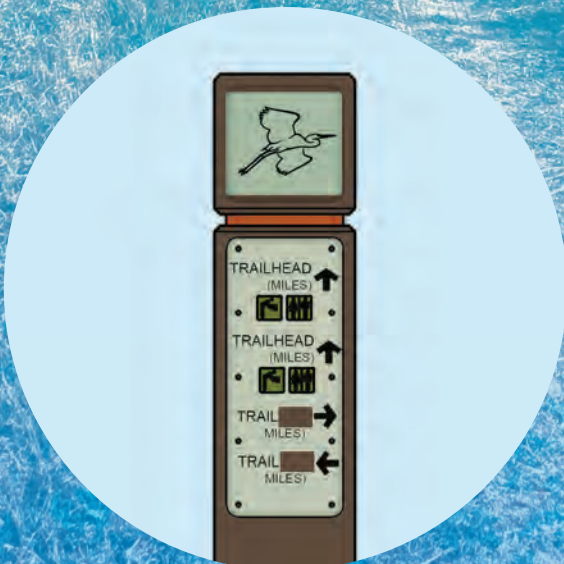
# SIGNAGE AND INTERPRETATION, ROADWAYS AND PARKING

Many residents and tourists are familiar with the idea that Spanish colonists built extensive irrigation systems to support San Antonio's Spanish missions. But how many have heard of the vast irrigation network around Mitchell Lake?

For almost 70 years, it was part of the fabric of everyday life and made San Antonio an early pioneer in the practice of recycling wastewater for beneficial use.

Throughout the improved Mitchell Lake facility, new interpretive signage will point the way and highlight the site's unique and colorful history, while providing interesting sidelights on the various ecosystems and wildlife species visitors will see.

Access to these resources will be improved through resurfaced roads and new parking facilities. The plan includes an entrance gate renovation, resurfacing of existing asphalt roadways, and needed improvements to the drives around the birding areas.





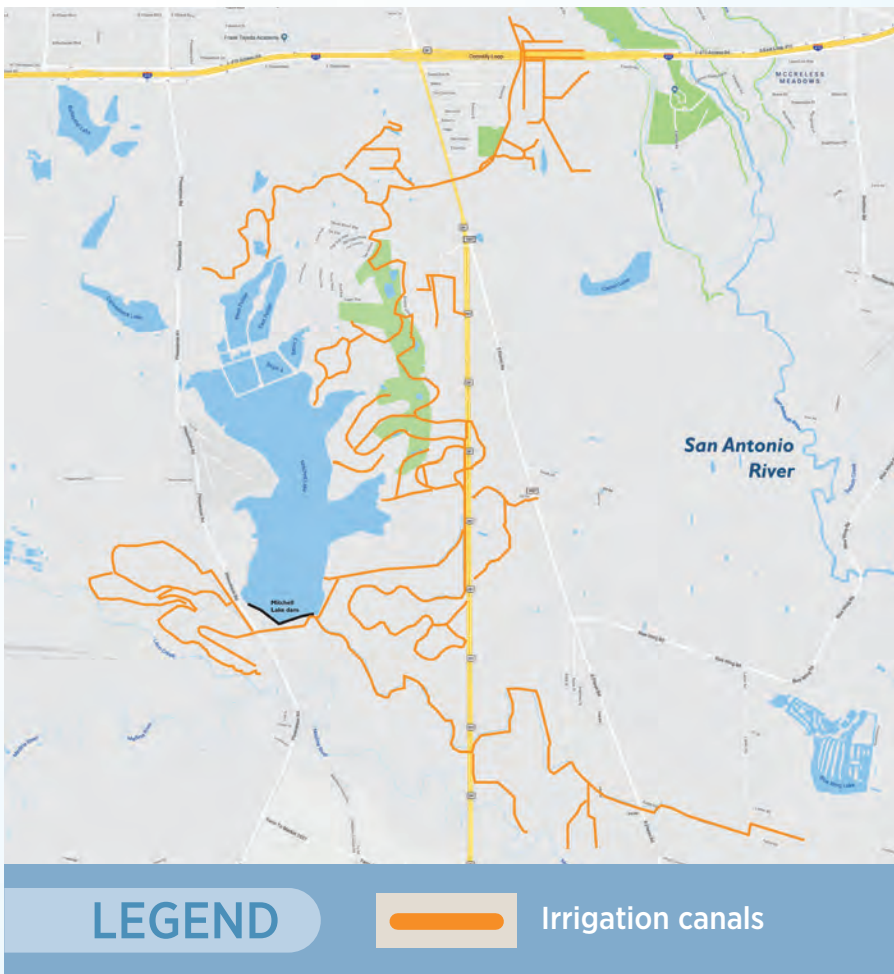
# A CENTURY-OLD LEGACY OF RECYCLING

It's only "wastewater" if you don't use it. Built in 1901 on the site of a small natural wetlands, Mitchell Lake's manmade features are a legacy remnant of San Antonio's early efforts to beneficially use the rich organic materials in wastewater. Until the late 1970s, it was a holding pond where sewage was collected for irrigation of about 4,500 acres surrounding the lake.

Mitchell Lake is also a unique and important place for migratory birds. More than 330 species of local and migratory birds stop here to rest and feed, making the lake an essential stop on the Central Flyway between Canada and Mexico.

In 1973, San Antonio formally designated the site as a Refuge for Shore Birds and Waterfowl, and in 2004 San Antonio Water System partnered with Audubon to create the first Audubon Nature Center in Texas. Audubon operates Mitchell Lake as part of its national network of community-based nature centers and chapters. Audubon hosts more than 100 birding tours, public events, community science, and education programs.

Today, four sites at Mitchell Lake that were part of the irrigation network are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. Here, history buffs can learn about the lake's importance to San Antonio's earliest water recycling efforts.







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