

Civil Works top brass visit District projects in San Antonio

**By Edward Rivera
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John Paul Woodley, Jr., Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) and Maj. Gen. Don T. Riley, Director of Civil Works, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, were in San Antonio, Texas Sept. 7 for an unveiling ceremony of a portion of the San Antonio River Improvements Project and to tour Fort Worth District projects on Fort Sam Houston.

The San Antonio River Improvements Project is a \$198 million on-going investment by the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, the Corps of Engineers and the San Antonio River Foundation in flood damage reduction, amenity, ecosystem restoration and recreational improvements along 13 miles of the San Antonio River.

“Restoration of the San Antonio River is a project that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been anticipating for a while and is eager to get construction underway,” said Woodley. “Through the use of improved, more environmentally acceptable engineering practices, this project will maintain the flood protection provided today by the river, while recreating a sustainable river ecosystem.”

From a viewing area overlooking the San Pedro Creek and San Antonio River confluence, Woodley and local project sponsors talked about design progress, benefits and developments of the Mission Reach Ecosystem, Restoration and Recreation project, a federal project supported by the Corps.

Mission Reach improvements will focus on ecosystem restoration using a technique known as fluvial geomorphology. This technique will transform the straightened river to a more natural replication of the original river flow enhancing flood damage reduction, reducing erosion, reintroducing native vegetation and creating an environment more suitable for recreation and wildlife.

“Today, the Corps of Engineers does in fact have a growing environmental mission and has embarked on a number of environmental restoration projects throughout the nation,” said Woodley. “This San Antonio River Improvements Project, in fact, is seen as a model for restoration of a river and its ecosystem in an urbanized setting.”

According to Woodley, due to development along the river and the need to preserve the flood protection for a growing city, full restoration of the river is impractical.

“The Corps’ flood control engineers, biologists, environmental scientists and historians are working together to design a project that will transform the river from the drainage channel you see today into a healthy, sustainable ecosystem teeming with fish and wildlife that will once again be enjoyed and appreciated by the residents of San Antonio and that will continue to serve a vital flood control function for this growing city,” he said prior to unveiling conceptual drawings of the future look of the channel.

Also participating in the unveiling with Woodley and Riley were Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff, Bexar County Commissioner Sergio (Chico) Rodriguez, Jim Johnson, Board of Directors, San Antonio River Authority, and Lila Cockrell, San Antonio River Oversight Committee Co-chair.

After the media event, Riley went on to Fort Sam Houston for an overview of the upcoming medical projects relative to the Base Realignment and Closure Act of 2005.

Col. Christopher W. Martin, commander, Fort Worth District, said the briefing was primarily for situational awareness and to outline some of the intricacies involved with the projects.

“Because we are dealing with a number of customers, we are going to encounter some complexities. Although Maj. Gen Riley is the Corps deputy commander for civil works, we felt it appropriate to update him on the military construction projects as well as civil,” said Martin.



John Paul Woodley, Jr., Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) and Maj. Gen. Don T. Riley, Director of Civil Works, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers unveil artist renditions of a portion the San Antonio River Improvements Project in San Antonio, Texas Sept. 7 during a media event.



John Paul Woodley, Jr., Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) is interviewed by a San Antonio news crew after unveiling artist renditions of a portion the San Antonio River Improvements Project in San Antonio, Texas Sept. 7.



Maj. Gen. Don T. Riley, Director of Civil Works, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is interviewed by a San Antonio news crew before a media event for a portion the San Antonio River Improvements Project in San Antonio, Texas Sept. 7.