



# Open Space Conservation Program

*Protecting Nature, Building Community*

October 19, 2023

Elected Officials Floodplain Seminar

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Transportation & Public Works Department



Purple Paintbrush at Broadcast Hill, City's first Open Space Conservation Program Acquisition in Summer 2020; Photo by Michelle Villafranca

# Today's Agenda

1. Program Development Background
2. Program Implementation
3. Community Rating System Scoring

# Program Development Background



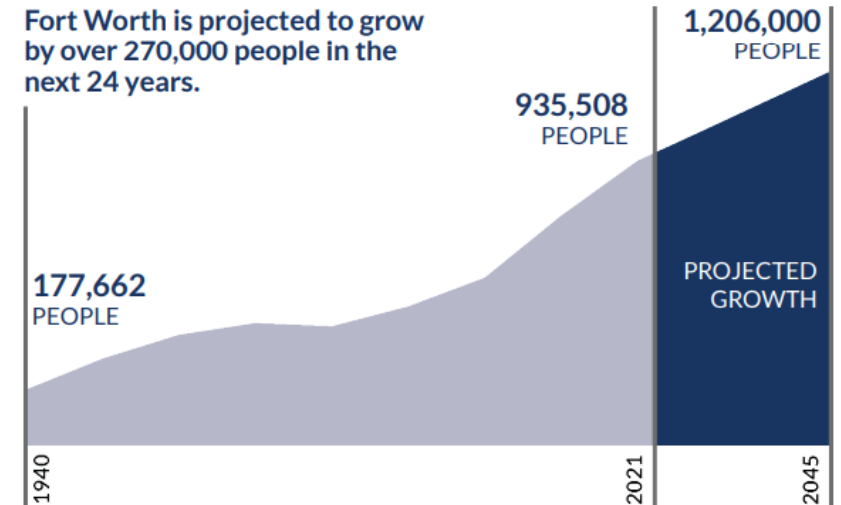
# Growth and Development

- Fort Worth is the 13<sup>th</sup> largest City in the US by population
  - At the current rate of population growth, FW is projected to be home to approximately 1M people by 2027
- Fort Worth is losing 50 acres/week of natural open space due to development

## FORT WORTH POPULATION, 1940 - 2045

Fort Worth has a larger population than cities including Columbus, Charlotte, Indianapolis, San Francisco, Seattle, Denver, Washington D.C., and Nashville.

Fort Worth is projected to grow by over 270,000 people in the next 24 years.



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2021 Population Estimates; NCTCOG 2045 Population Projection; and City of Fort Worth, Planning & Data Analytics Department, 2022.

359

Land Area  
in Square Miles

2,606

Population Density  
per Square Mile

194,302

Population Change  
2010-2021

# Fort Worth Vision & Strategic Goals

## Vision

“...be the most *livable* and best-managed city in the country.”

## Strategic Goals

- Make Fort Worth the nation’s *safest* city
- Improve *mobility* and *air quality*
- Create and maintain a *clean* and *attractive* city
- Strengthen the *economy*, develop the future *workforce* and create *quality job opportunities*
- Promote *orderly* and *sustainable* development



# Open Space Working Group

## City Departments

- City Attorney's Office
- Environmental Quality
- Communications & Public Engagement
- Development Services
- Diversity & Inclusion
- Economic Development
- Fort Worth Lab
- IT Solutions
- Neighborhood Services
- Park & Recreation
- Property Management
- TPW - Stormwater Management
- Water

## Partners

- North Central Texas Council of Governments
- Streams & Valleys
- Tarrant County
- Tarrant Regional Water District
- Trust for Public Land



# Open Space Conservation Program

**Mission:** Conserve **high-quality natural areas** as the city grows to provide environmental benefits and recreational opportunities that support economic development and enhance the livability and desirability of Fort Worth.



# Open Space vs. Park

Experience Nature



Experience Programmed Recreation



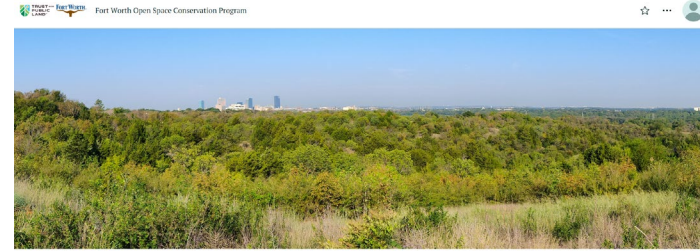


# Priority Goal Areas

- Ecosystem Preservation
- Stream, River, and Lake Health
- Community Health
- Recreation
- Flood Control
- Equitable Access to Natural Spaces
- Economic Development

Wildflowers at Stella Rowan Prairie; Photo by Michelle Villafranca

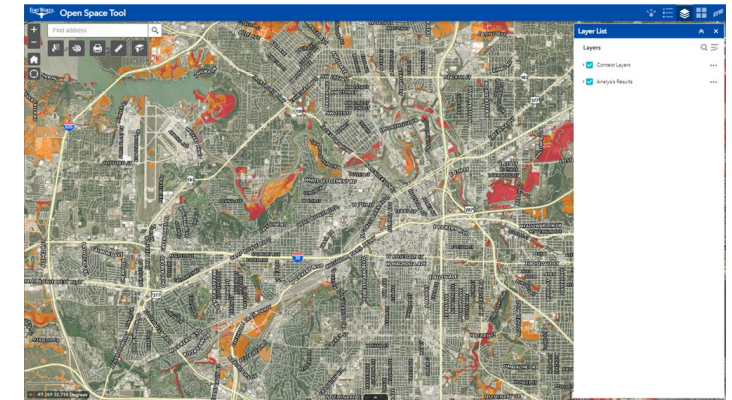




## Fort Worth Open Space Conservation Program

PROTECTING NATURE, BUILDING COMMUNITY

October 12, 2022



# Trust for Public Land Deliverables

- Prioritization Tool
- Strategy Report
- Story Map

# Public Engagement

- 4 stakeholder meetings
- 3 policy small group meetings
- 4 public meetings
- 3 virtual presentations on the public survey in English and Spanish
- 1,429 Public Survey responses received (English and Spanish)
  - Top responses for each question were consistent across demographics
- Strategy Report Public Comment Period



# Public Engagement – Key Takeaways

## Strong Public Support for the Open Space Conservation Program

- **96%** define conservation of natural areas as *“Very Important”*
- **99%** think the city should establish a *permanent program* to conserve natural areas
- **88%** strongly support *dedicating public funding* for land conservation
- **37%** willing to *volunteer*

## Top Priorities

- Ecosystem Preservation
- Stream, River, and Lake Health
- Community Health



Prairie around Benbrook Lake;  
Photo by Jason Flowers for The Trust for Public Land



Tandy Hills BioBlitz 2016 - participants with TPWD Urban Biologist Sam Kieschnick; Photo by Michelle Villafranca

# Public Engagement – Key Takeaways

## Programs and Activities

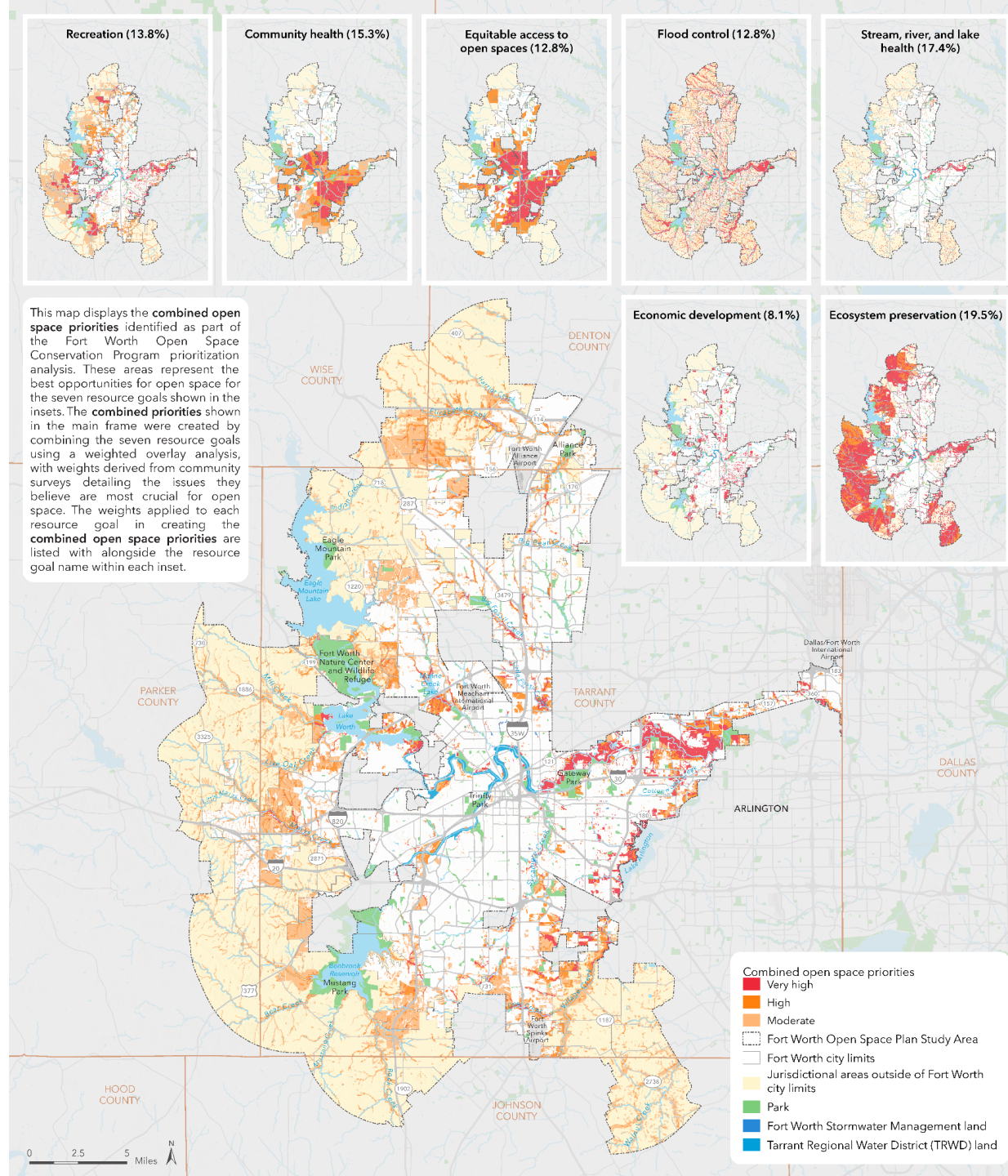
- Hiking/Walking
- Bird Watching & Wildlife Viewing
- Educational Programming & Outdoor Education

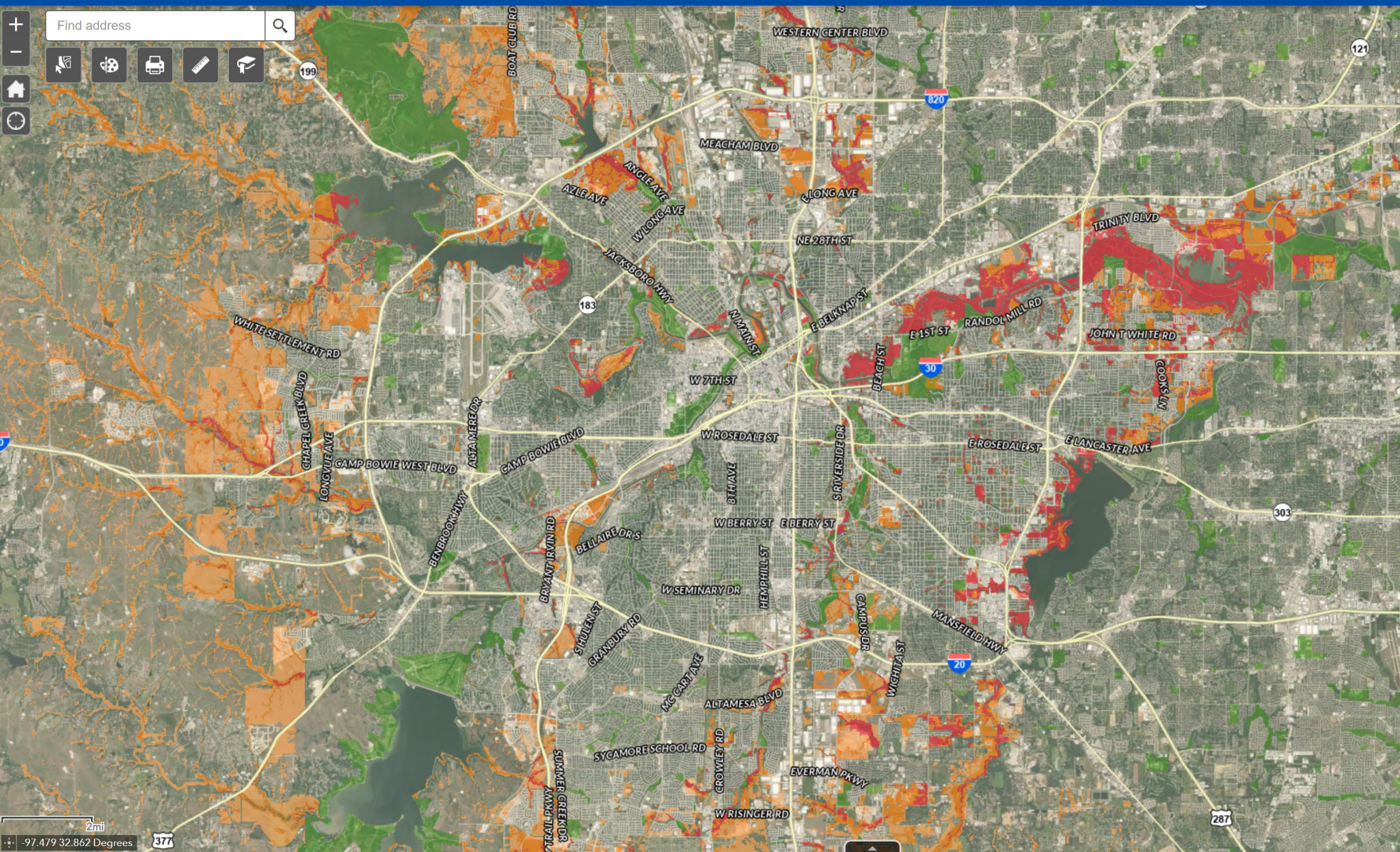
## Amenities

- Natural Paths & Trails
- Picnic Areas
- Educational Signage

# Combined Open Space Priorities

- Prioritized based on feedback from:
  - Public Survey and Meetings
  - Stakeholder Meetings
  - Open Space Working Group
- Available to the public using the online Open Space Tool
  - Overall Results
  - Goal Area Results
  - Individual Criteria





Layer List

- Context Layers
- Analysis Results



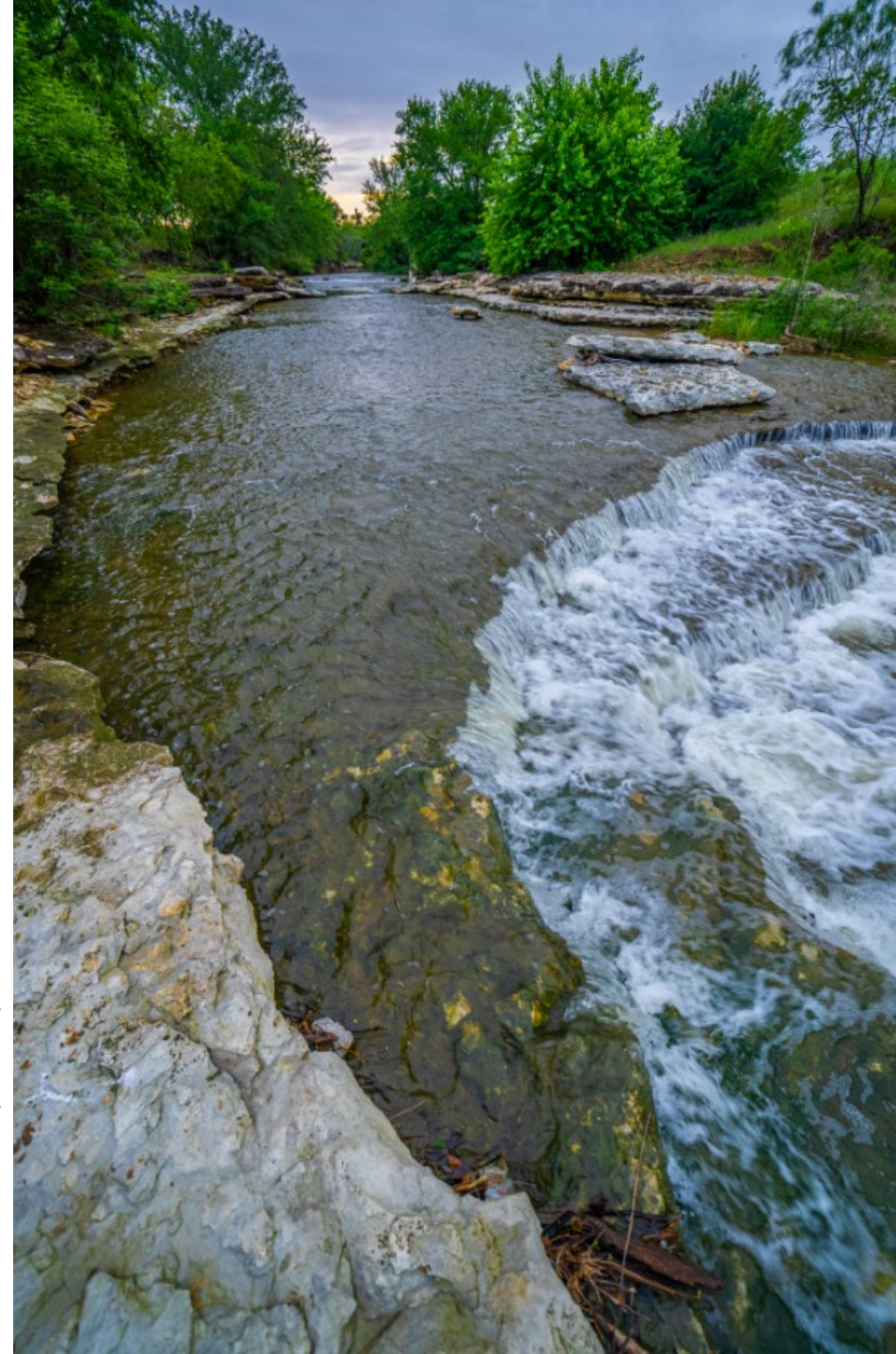
A QR code is displayed in the bottom right corner of the interface, with the Fort Worth logo and the text "FORT WORTH" overlaid on it.

[mapitwest.fortworthtexas.gov/OpenSpaceTool](http://mapitwest.fortworthtexas.gov/OpenSpaceTool)

# Fort Worth Open Space Strategy Report

- Guide for the future of the Open Space Conservation Program
- TPL Research & Benchmarking Study
- Data-Driven Approach with Detailed Analysis
- Incorporation of Public & Stakeholder Feedback
- Identifies Potential Funding Options
- Program Recommendations- Menu of Options
- Adopted by City Council in 2022

Little Fossil Creek; photo by Jason Flowers for The Trust for Public Land





# Key Program Recommendations

## Open Space Definition & Goals

- Develop concise but relatively broad **definition** of open space, and **embed in planning documents and city code**.
- Include seven goal areas in **master plans** and other guiding documents.

## External Partners & Initiatives

- Explore opportunities to work with **partners** to establish **regional open space system**.
- Work with partners to determine feasibility of developing a **land trust** (also called a **land conservancy**) in Fort Worth area and broader Dallas-Fort Worth region.

# Key Program Recommendations

## Land Acquisition & Conservation

- Identify individual **priority parcels** that are available for conservation.
- Identify **partners** that can support program and opportunities for conservation.
- Explore opportunities to **incentivize/require** open space conservation in the **development process**.

## Funding

- Undertake feasibility analysis of potential funding mechanisms and conduct **public opinion survey** to gauge voter support for funding sources and uses of funds.
- Determine **sustainable funding** sources for program and ensure annual city budget appropriations keep pace with maintenance demands.

# Key Program Recommendations

## Program Management

- Starting with Open Space Working Group, develop more **structured open space management team** with clearly defined roles to guide daily operations.
- Commit to **equitable and inclusive** open space management.
- Re-evaluate **placement of program** as it grows, considering both management and maintenance. Establish open space team, based on program needs.
- Consider establishing dedicated **open space division** that brings management and maintenance under one umbrella as open space demands increase.
- Evaluate the need for dedicated **rangers** that oversee enforcement of rules at heavily visited open spaces.

# Key Program Recommendations

## Maintenance & Stewardship

- Continue **maintaining** open space **through Park & Recreation** at this time.
- Develop **training program** for maintenance of open space.
- Develop **land management plans** for major parcels and track the impacts of stewardship.
- Develop **land management objectives** that align with overall program and types of land being acquired.
- Evaluate **passive recreation** opportunities in open space that meet the diverse needs of our growing city.

# Key Program Recommendations

## Continuous Public Feedback & Volunteers

- Establish a **public advisory board** or permanent **stakeholder group** to encourage community engagement and provide additional capacity for the program as it grows.
- Work with city's **volunteer** coordinator to identify opportunities to engage residents with different interests and physical abilities.



# Program Implementation

# Success Story

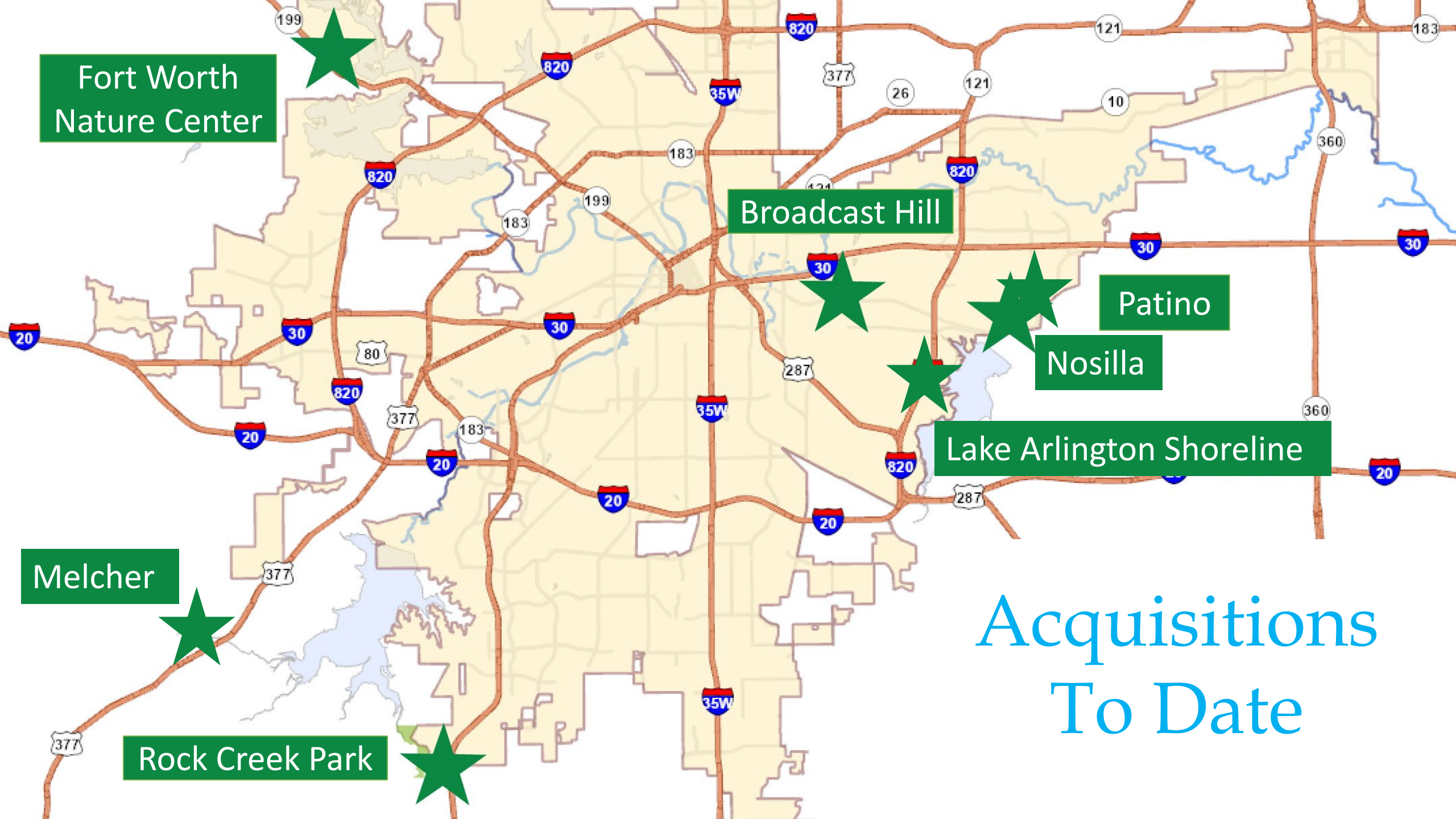
- **Interdepartmental** Open Space Working Group
- \$15M included in **2022 bond program** for open space
- Over **205 acres conserved** through acquisition
  - 191 acres currently in the works
- Received **\$150,000 grant** from the Conservation and Environment Fund at North Texas Community Foundation
- **Economic Incentive** for companies interested in preserving greenspace to offset building footprints
- Kicking off related Mayor's **Good Natured Greenspace Initiative**
  - Aimed at uniting public and private community partners to enhance greenspace investment
  - Targeting to preserve a minimum of 10,000 acres of open space over the next 5 years

NORTH TEXAS  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

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Conservation and  
Environment Fund





Fort Worth Nature Center

Broadcast Hill

Patino

Nosilla

Lake Arlington Shoreline

Melcher

Rock Creek Park

Acquisitions To Date



# Acquisition Highlights

## Broadcast Hill



- 50 acres of Native Prairie
- Identified by residents as an Iconic Place
- Friends of Tandy Hills raised more than \$60k for acquisition
- Recreation and environmental education opportunities

## Patino Rd



- 24 acres of Eastern Cross Timbers & Post Oak Savanna
- Significant development in area
- Recreation and environmental education opportunities

## Rock Creek Ranch



- Partnership with Park Dpt.- at least 40 acres of open space in a 270-acre park
- Significant Prairie ecosystem
- Connects to Corps of Engineers property on Lake Benbrook
- Historic homestead site

## Fort Worth Nature Center



- 30 acres of Prairie ecosystem
- Bison habitat protection at the entrance to the Nature Center
- Recreational opportunities
- Heavy development pressure in area

# Challenges

- No dedicated staff or operational funding
  - Competing for time from interdepartmental working group members
  - Limited ability to implement capital improvements
  - Not effectively engaging with external stakeholders
  - Minimal proactive public engagement
  - No maintenance staff that understand unique requirements of natural areas
  - Many potential volunteers, but no capacity to manage volunteer program
- Very close coordination with Parks Dpt. is critical since they maintain open space property
- New state restrictions reduce potential program funding options

# Community Rating System



# CRS Objectives for Open Space Preservation

- Prevent flood damage by keeping flood-prone lands free of development
- Protect and enhance the natural functions of floodplain

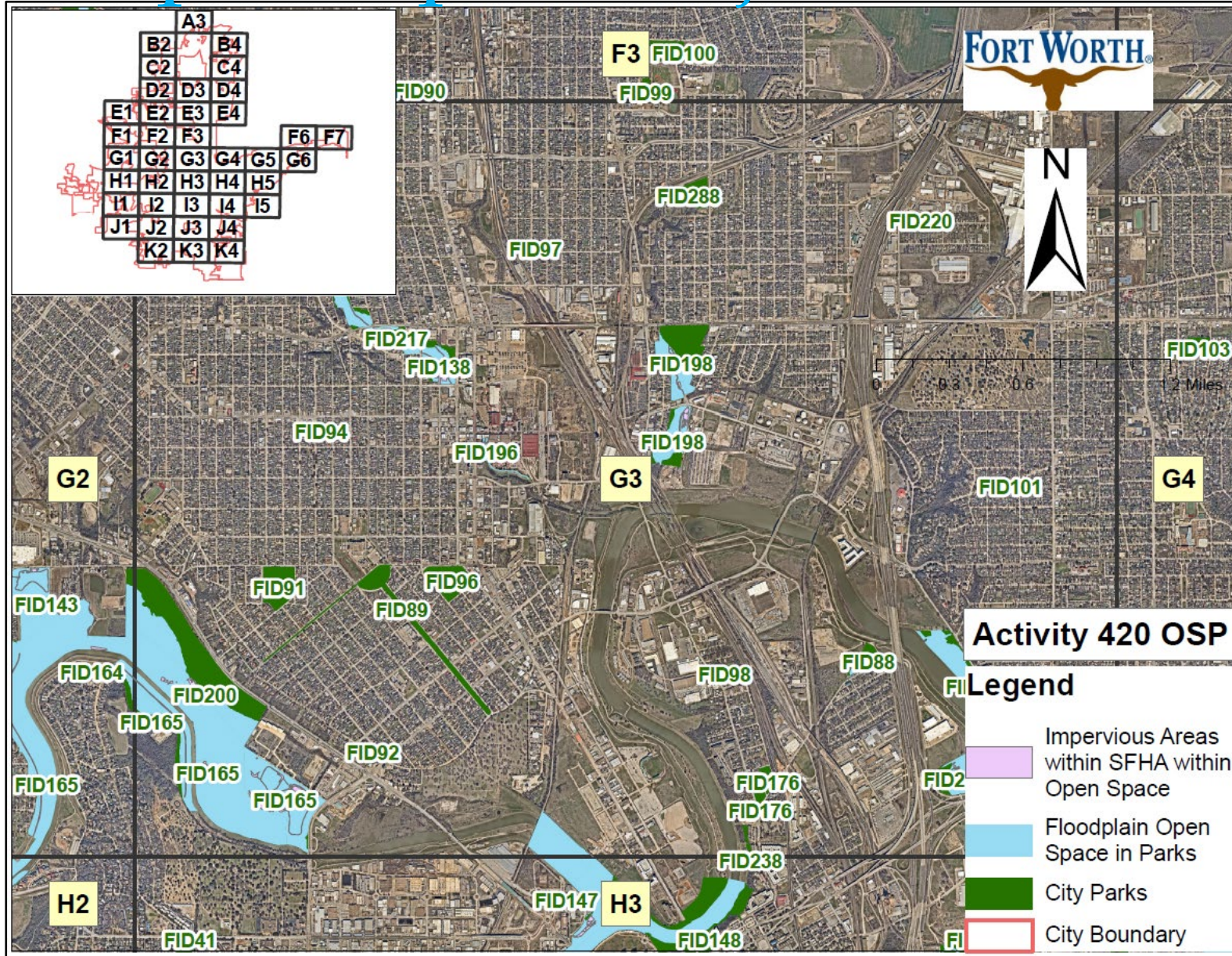


Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge

# Activity 420 – Max Credit 2,020 points

- Open Space Preservation – 246.5 of 1,450 points
- Deed Restrictions – 0 of 50
- Natural Functions Open Space – 13.3 out of 350
- Special Flood-related Hazard Open Space – 0 out of 150
- Coastal Erosion Open Space – 0 out of 750
- Open Space Incentives – 0 out of 250
- Low-density Zoning – 0 out of 600
- Natural Shoreline Protection – 0 out of 120

# Example Impact Adjustment Map



# Key Points and Lessons Learned

- Parcel must be in SFHA\*
  - No buildings, storage, filling, significant pavement\*
  - Must be “preserved” (e.g. public land, wildlife/nature preserves, land development regulations prohibit buildings)
  - Impact adjustment ratio (Fort Worth received 17% of points!)
  - City Parks were main source of points
  - Coordinate with other departments
- \*Read the fine print for exceptions

# Questions & Discussion

**Open Space Questions:** [OpenSpace@FortWorthTexas.gov](mailto:OpenSpace@FortWorthTexas.gov)

**CRS Questions:** [Benjamin.Thompson@FortWorthTexas.gov](mailto:Benjamin.Thompson@FortWorthTexas.gov)

