

***For Immediate Release***

**Students Work to Enhance Habitat along Comanche Creek**

(November 17th, 2017) – On Tuesday, November 7th, students from Mason High School spent the day along Comanche Creek at Fort Mason City Park. As part of the School District’s Blue-Ribbon Service Day, these five students learned about the importance of creek-side (riparian) systems, and the negative impacts of non-native, invasive plants such as Chinaberry trees.

“When riparian areas have a diversity of native grasses, shrubs and trees, they provide people with a variety of values,” said Daniel Oppenheimer, at the Hill Country Alliance. “Healthy riparian areas limit or mitigate the effects of flooding, they improve water quality by filtering pollutants from storm water runoff, they provide a higher quality habitat that creates better hunting and fishing opportunities, and they strengthen our creek and river banks so that they’re less prone to erosion.”

One substantial threat to the health of Comanche Creek is an infestation of Chinaberry trees along the banks. When this non-native tree invades river bottoms, it can degrade the quality of wildlife habitat and decrease livestock forage. With greater resistance to native insects and pathogens, Chinaberry trees can outcompete native vegetation and raise soil pH through chemical compounds in their leaf litter and root systems, making it even harder for some native plants to thrive.

Working with Hill Country Alliance, Texas Master Naturalists, and the Parks Department, students helped improve riparian habitat along Comanche Creek. Service work started with control of Chinaberry trees; using a girdling method, students controlled more than 30 of these invasive trees.

After controlling Chinaberry trees, students planted more than 45 containerized native grasses and sedges provided by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and broadcast several bags of a native grass seed mix.

In the coming months, volunteers will build off the students’ work to control the remaining infestation of Chinaberry trees and broadcast additional native seed along the creek.

*The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support around the need to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. Visit us at [www.hillcountryalliance.org](http://www.hillcountryalliance.org).*

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