

For Immediate Release

Volunteers improve creek-side habitat at Fort Mason City Park

(July 31st, 2017) – If you have walked along the nature trail at Fort Mason City Park recently, you may have noticed something new. Something pink. Last week, volunteers from the Texas Master Naturalist Program joined staff from Fort Mason City Park and the Hill Country Alliance to discuss the adverse impacts of non-native, invasive plants to the local ecology, economy, and public safety.

Following this discussion, volunteers set out along the nature trail to inventory the Chinaberry tree, an invasive tree that is taking over the river bottom. Using pink flagging and spray-paint, volunteers walked the riparian, or creek-side, habitat and marked 270 Chinaberry trees so that the invasive trees may be readily identified and controlled this coming fall season.

As Tyson Broad, board member of the Llano River Watershed Alliance notes, “Protecting and restoring riparian areas is a critical to preserving the water quality of the Llano.” When invasive species like the Chinaberry take over riparian systems, they can displace native grasses, shrubs, and trees. Without a diversity of native plant species, riparian systems no longer provide key functions such as high-quality fish and wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, and improvement of water quality.

“Community members in Mason have been talking with park officials about controlling Chinaberry trees for a year or so,” said Daniel Oppenheimer with the Hill Country Alliance. “With a grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and assistance from the Llano River Watershed Alliance, HCA is excited to support this community-driven effort to improve riparian habitat.”

Chinaberry trees, native to Asia, were introduced as an ornamental plant and have spread throughout the Llano River Basin. Sometimes mistaken for the native Western Soapberry, the Chinaberry has leaflets with toothed edges and round, yellow berries that are toxic to humans, pets, and goats.

Be careful before treating Chinaberry on your own property. Simply cutting down a Chinaberry tree may result in vigorous re-growth from the stump. Several effective methods exist that incorporate physical manipulation and a small use of herbicide.

To learn more about upcoming volunteer events, check out Hill Country Alliance’s webpage at <http://www.hillcountryalliance.org/upcomingevents/>.

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.

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Photographs provided by Hill Country Alliance