



## Boundary Study Newsletter #1, April 2010

### To All Interested Parties:

The National Park Service (NPS), San Antonio Missions National Historical Park (Park) is conducting a Boundary Study and developing a Land Protection Plan (LPP) for areas outside the Park's current boundary. This newsletter outlines the NPS study process and how it relates to other planning efforts and projects being carried out by NPS partner agencies and organizations within our study area. The NPS process, preliminary timeline, and opportunities for continued public involvement are outlined below. Your participation is a key component of this process. Information on how to submit comments and track our progress is provided at the end of this newsletter. I invite you to share your ideas and comments with the Park throughout the study process.

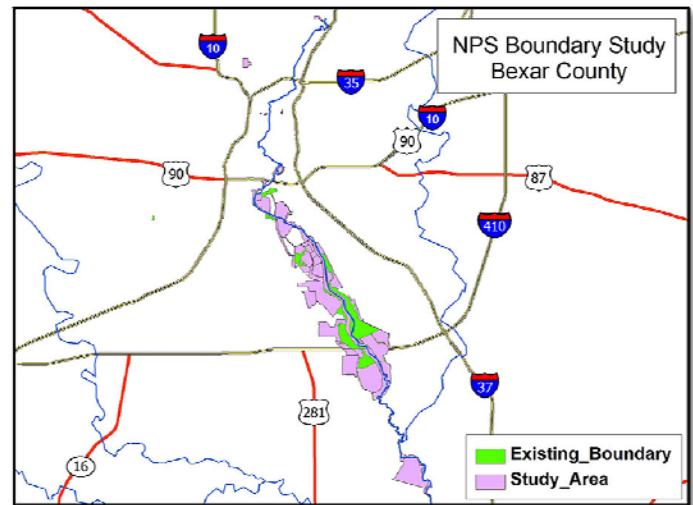
Sincerely,

Scott J. Bentley, Superintendent  
San Antonio Missions National Historical Park

### Introduction

The Park includes four 1730's vintage Spanish missions, *acequias*, *labores*, a *rancho*, and other lands historically associated with the missions. The Park exists to preserve, protect, restore, and interpret the Missions along with their historically associated areas, features and values for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Park preserves the largest collection of Spanish colonial resources in the country. Bexar County and the City of San Antonio requested this study to examine the potential to partner with NPS to help protect the community's investment in revitalization and river improvement projects that are expected to be completed in 2013. Multiple stakeholders, including State and local agencies, helped the NPS define study objectives and boundaries. The study and plan will be part of an ongoing, multi-agency, joint planning effort designed to protect Spanish colonial resources outside the existing Park boundary, restore natural habitat, link the Park to the San Antonio River, improve socioeconomic conditions and improve recreational opportunities in the vicinity of the missions. The study and plan will examine ways to improve opportunities for contiguous access to related Spanish colonial resources such as the Park's existing missions and ranch as well as *acequias* (irrigation ditches) and *labores* (farm fields).

The majority of lands under consideration are already public lands under the jurisdiction of Park partners, and



therefore any boundary expansion would be, for the most part, extensions of existing partnerships. If analysis conducted in the study should find that the best protection alternative for any land area is a federal purchase or land exchange, those lands would only be acquired from willing sellers or partners. Under no circumstances will this study include the consideration of the use of eminent domain to exercise a "take" of any private lands.

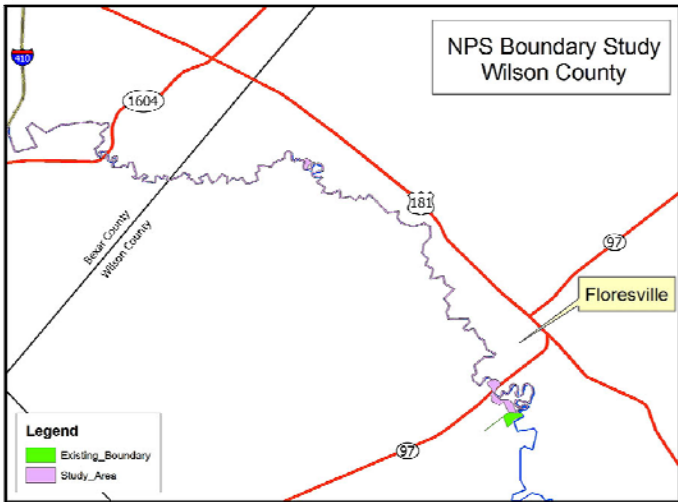


Mission Concepción

### Study Background

The need to preserve the missions and their associated lands was recognized by local, State, and Federal agencies, the Archdiocese of San Antonio, and the San Antonio Conservation Society as early as the 1920s. Several plans and proposals for protecting the missions and associated lands were developed over the years. In 1975, the NPS conducted a study to determine the suitability and feasibility of creating a new NPS unit. The 1975 study covered a contiguous area encompassing the four missions and the San Antonio River. In 1978, P.L.

95-629 directed the Secretary of the Interior to create an NPS unit “to provide for the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of the Spanish missions of San Antonio, Texas...together with areas and features historically associated therewith...” The initial Park was comprised of four noncontiguous parcels representing a fraction of the 1975 study area.



Additional mission lands have been protected and added to the Park through cooperative agreements, easements, land acquisition, donations, and congressionally authorized boundary expansions. Still the Park remains noncontiguous, and throughout the study area certain types of development threaten the integrity of mission lands and impede recreational and educational enjoyment of the missions' cultural landscape. The Park and its partners have long recognized the need for the present study. Restoring the historical connection between the missions and the San Antonio River that served as the lifeblood of the Spanish colonial landscape would fulfill a vision for the Park that many have proposed for decades. Because so many partners are investing in the revitalization of the area, the time is right for the NPS to revisit the Park's LPP and study areas not currently within the boundary. NPS interest in these lands may be obtained through fee simple title, easement, and/or cooperative agreement. The NPS study will provide data for decision makers to determine the level of involvement the NPS should have in multi-agency efforts to revitalize the San Antonio River and surrounding neighborhoods and promote development that is sympathetic to the Spanish colonial history and cultural heritage that is the heart of San Antonio.

### Historical Significance

The area that is now San Antonio was first settled by the Spanish in 1718 when a village and presidio (fort) were founded at San Pedro Springs. A mission soon followed. The village, presidio, and mission were later relocated to present-day downtown and ultimately became the Villa de San Fernando, Presidio de Bexar, and Mission San Antonio de Valero (later known as “the Alamo”).

In 1720, a second mission was founded south of present-day downtown San Antonio, named Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo. In 1731, three other missions, relocated from East Texas, were also founded in south San Antonio. They were Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísima Concepción de Acuña, Mission San Juan Capistrano, and Mission San Francisco de la Espada. Today these four missions have active parish churches managed by the archdiocese of San Antonio, and the NPS manages the mission grounds and secular historic buildings, structures, and ruins as well as some of the mission lands surrounding them.



Front Facade, Mission San José

Throughout the 1700s, the missions grew to encompass *labores* or farm lands, fed by irrigation features known as *acequias*. Many of these Spanish colonial *acequias* are still intact in some areas – one still irrigates former mission lands and another is now capable of carrying water once again to irrigate former mission farm lands. Intact remnants of other *acequias* survive at various locations throughout the city of San Antonio. *Acequia* networks and their remnants span from the headwaters of the San Antonio River to south of the southernmost of the San Antonio missions, Mission Espada.

The ranching industry and the image of the American cowboy, for which Texas is so well known, began with the first *vaqueros* – mission Indians who managed the livestock of the missions' vast ranches. The lands of the missions of the San Antonio area, together with the mission grounds, *labores*, and ranches, spanned at least half of present-day Bexar County, most of Wilson and



Karnes counties, and a significant portion of Medina and Atascosa counties. The NPS owns one ranch site, the headquarters of Rancho de las Cabras, located in Wilson County, which dates to approximately the 1750s. The site of Rancho de las Cabras includes masonry structures with a church and defensive walls, and the NPS interprets it during ranger-led tours given once a month.

### **The Purpose of the Boundary Study**

The Boundary Study will evaluate several areas to determine their historic significance and association with the Spanish colonial missions of San Antonio and the potential for including them within the Park's boundary. Portions of the San Antonio River outside of downtown San Antonio will also be investigated for possible inclusion into the Park. The San Antonio River is the fundamental reason for the establishment of the missions and is vital to the preservation, public enjoyment, and interpretation of existing Park resources such as the *acequias*.

Each study area will be evaluated according to criteria set forth in the *National Park Service Management Policies, 2006*, which states that boundary adjustments may be recommended to:

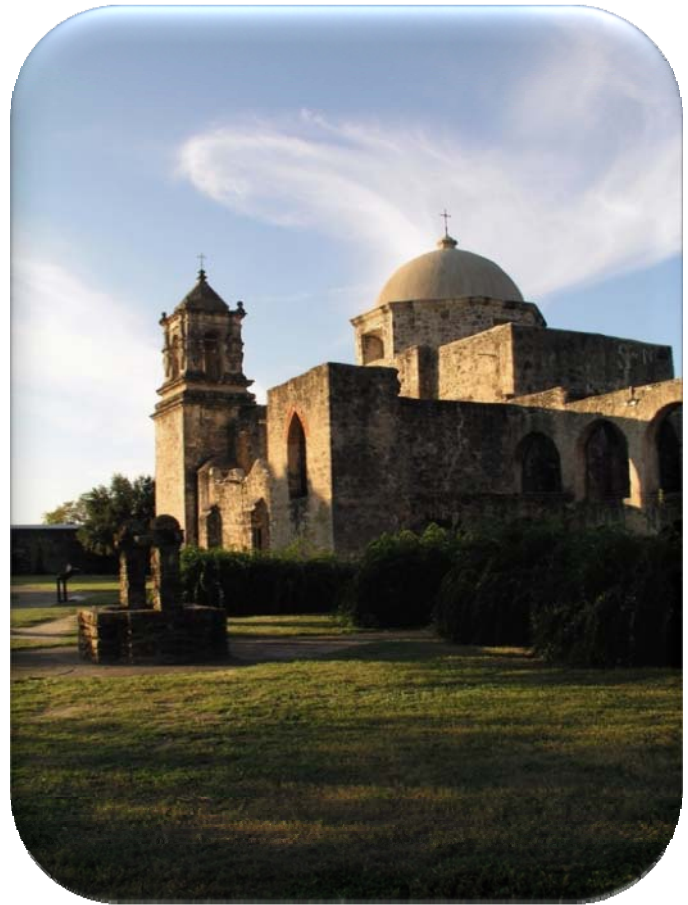
- Protect significant resources and values, or to enhance opportunities for public enjoyment related to Park purposes;
- Address operational and management issues, such as the need for access or the need for boundaries to correspond to logical boundary delineations such as topographic or other natural features or roads; or
- Otherwise protect Park resources that are critical to fulfilling Park purposes.

### **Developing a Range of Management Alternatives**

For all study areas that meet the criteria for inclusion within the Park boundary, the study team will outline a range of reasonable management alternatives. Alternatives will include distinctly different concepts for how the resources could be protected and who would have primary responsibility for management. As general concepts, resource protection and access will be considered; however, site-specific decisions would be made in future, more detailed plans and environmental documents. The alternatives will identify potential new partners, identify different ways to avoid land use conflicts, and include cost estimates for the different management alternatives. One alternative will be the continuation of the joint management of existing Park lands without any change in the Park boundary or management. This alternative provides a baseline for comparison with other management alternatives.

### **Analyze Impacts of Each Management Alternative**

The study team will analyze the effects of each alternative on natural and cultural resources, local communities, and visitor use. The impact analysis will



**Mission San José**

focus on those resources and values that would be affected by each alternative.

### **Prepare and Publish Study Report**

Once the NPS has determined which study areas meet the criteria for inclusion within the Park's boundary, potential management alternatives will be considered and evaluated. The Park's LPP will be updated in coordination with Park partners to include those land areas determined to meet the above boundary criteria. The Boundary Study and LPP, coupled with an Environmental Assessment will be developed.

The combined document will include a range of management alternatives and analysis of potential environmental impacts – both adverse and beneficial, and a cost analysis. The document will be distributed for a 30-day public review period. The NPS will analyze and summarize public comments and incorporate them into a preliminary recommendation and preferred alternative. An information package with the final study, recommendation, and summary of public comments will be transmitted to the NPS Washington D.C. Office. Based on the findings in the final document, the NPS Director may make a recommendation for the inclusion of new Park lands into the Park. Upon review of the report and recommendation, Congress has the option to pursue legislation to authorize a boundary expansion.

## Boundary Study Timeline

This Boundary Study is expected to take six to seven months to complete. The key milestones in the effort are outlined below, as are opportunities for your continued involvement. Shaded areas represent the steps currently in progress. The study is nearing completion of its first phase. The goal of this phase is to initiate public outreach and gather information on the resources and the socioeconomic environment. The study team has also moved into the second phase of the effort, a determination of significance for study areas. The NPS team is working with multiple partners who are actively involved in this process.

	Planning Activity	Dates	Public Involvement Opportunities
1	<b>Initiate Study:</b> Identify scope and issues. Seek public input.	Spring 2010	Respond to this newsletter. Attend meetings (please see enclosure)
2	<b>Determine Which Study Areas Meet Boundary Criteria:</b> The study team will consult with the community and subject-matter experts to determine the significance of each study area and options for protection.	Spring 2010	Respond to this newsletter.
3	<b>Develop Future Management Alternatives:</b> The planning team will explore a range of management alternatives for the study areas. A second newsletter will be prepared and distributed to the public for their input.	Late Spring/ Early Summer 2010	Respond to future newsletter. Attend meetings (to be announced)
4	<b>Publish Study Document and Distribute for Public Review:</b> The study of land protection options and impacts of each alternative is published with an Environmental Assessment, which will be distributed for public and agency review.	Fall 2010	Review study report, and submit your comments.
5	<b>Transmit Study Report and Recommendation to Congress:</b> The study document, summary of public comments, and NPS recommendation will be transmitted to Congress.	Fall 2010	

## What We've Heard So Far

Several meetings with donors, agencies, and other partners have been held with the NPS study team to collect background information, share ideas, and identify issues and concerns about this study of a Park boundary expansion. The process of scoping with existing Park partners is ongoing, and more partners will be consulted throughout the scoping period. Several Park partners have been working with the NPS, and each has encouraged NPS to pursue this Boundary Study. The following partners have provided letters and/or resolutions supporting the Boundary Study:

- Bexar County Commissioners Court
- City of San Antonio
- City of Floresville
- Archdiocese of San Antonio
- San Antonio Conservation Society
- San Antonio River Authority
- Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions
- San Antonio Area Tourism Council
- South San Antonio Chamber of Commerce
- Floresville Economic Development Corporation
- Mission Trails Oversight Committee
- National Parks and Conservation Association
- Alamo Area Council of Governments

The ideas and suggestions presented by partners are very encouraging, exciting, and thoughtful, and will be very useful to the study team as they proceed.



Mission San Juan

## Community Support

Almost half of all lands in the Park are owned by partners and stakeholders such as the Archdiocese of



San Antonio, the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, the San Antonio River Authority, and the San Antonio Conservation Society. These lands are managed in partnership with the NPS through cooperative agreements.

Support for the development of recreational, educational, and environmental restoration in and around the Park has been previously evaluated in city, county, State and Federal agency planning processes and documents including the Army Corp of Engineer's *"San Antonio Channel Improvement Project Environmental Assessment."* In May 2008, Bexar County voters approved a venue tax proposition for \$125 million to go towards funding the San Antonio River Improvement Project, including the nine-mile long "Mission Reach" habitat restoration, which is currently being undertaken. Some of the funds being allocated through this bond are specifically intended to serve as matching funds for Park programs.



**Mission Espada**

### Partnerships

This Boundary Study is part of long-term visioning and partnering between multiple agencies and organizations within the community. Many see the expansion of the

Park boundary as a way of helping to ensure enduring protection for areas undergoing multi-million-dollar revitalization and restoration efforts, which are designed to redevelop and enhance the neighborhoods and business districts that surround the mission lands. These efforts will connect south San Antonio with the recreational and economic development opportunities and other attractions already enjoyed in the downtown area and other areas along the San Antonio River corridor, where improvement projects are already complete.

The Boundary Study will also look at ways to extend the Park's existing partnerships with local school and youth groups to ensure educational opportunities throughout the community. The Boundary Study will examine ways to partner with new agencies and organizations and expand existing relationships to enhance education and enjoyment of the community's irreplaceable Spanish colonial resources and rich cultural heritage, which currently draw 1.7 million visitors per year to the visitor contact stations at San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.

### We Want To Hear from You!

To follow the Park's progress through this study and to share ideas and comments, please go to the Boundary Study website <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/saan>. Click on the project title, then click on "document list" to learn more about the study and view detailed maps of the study area, then click on "open for public comment" and let us know what you think.



**Excavations at Rancho de las Cabras, Wilson County**

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