



PRESS RELEASE

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EMBARGOED UNTIL 8/14/2015

AUSTIN'S NEWEST HIKE AND BIKE TRAIL OPENS FIRST SEGMENT WITH RIBBON CUTTING CEREMONY AUGUST 14

After more than 15 years of strategic land acquisition and planning, the first six miles of the Violet Crown Trail will open to the public Friday, August 14, 2015. This momentous occasion is being recognized with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 10:00am at the initial Violet Crown Trailhead at Highway 290 featuring speeches from Mayor Rose Cardona of Sunset Valley, District 8 Council Member Ellen Troxclair, and George Cofer, Executive Director of Hill Country Conservancy.

The Violet Crown Trail began as a vision in 1999 to create the first regional trail system in Central Texas. Since then, Hill Country Conservancy (HCC) has spearheaded the trail-building effort, utilizing both public and private partnerships and working with multiple municipalities to turn their vision into a reality. Once complete, the Violet Crown Trail will be the longest trail of its kind in Central Texas, stretching 30-miles from a gateway trailhead in Zilker Park into publicly-owned Water Quality Protection Lands in Hays County, which the trail will grant public access to for the first time.

"We realized that to successfully foster a culture of environmentalism and love for the Texas Hill Country we needed to find a way to provide access to these beautiful publicly-owned but inaccessible lands," explains George Cofer.

The opening of the first six-mile segment of the trail marks a milestone for the Violet Crown Trail's partners. Stretching along the Barton Creek Greenbelt and Gaines Creek, this segment includes new trail mileage and existing trails, which have been restored and improved through HCC's partnership with American YouthWork's Texas Conservation Corps. HCC is already planning for the future of the trail by establishing a \$1.7 million stewardship fund, and the organization is working actively with the Austin Ridge Riders to ensure the Barton Springs Greenbelt is well maintained.

The second seven-mile segment of the trail is scheduled for completion by the end of 2016, and HCC is asking the community for help to make this happen. In 2014, HCC quietly embarked upon a \$13,125,000 capital campaign. To date, \$9 million has been raised towards that goal. As the capital campaign enters its public phase, there are many ways to get involved, including trail memberships and corporate sponsorships. Additional information can be found at hillcountryconservancy.org.

One of the easiest ways to support the trail, is to go online and vote for the trail. The Violet Crown Trail was selected to be one of ten trails highlighted in REI's "Every Trail Connects" campaign which launches August 14. REI will invest a total of \$500,000 in ten trails nationwide during the campaign, and online voters determine which trails get the funding. Each time Violet Crown Trail gets a vote, REI will donate \$5 to help complete the trail. Visitors can vote once a day at VOTEVCT.com.

Hill Country Conservancy and its partners are excited about this new partnership with REI and the potential to bring national awareness to what they see as the "crown jewel of Central Texas."

Violet Crown Trail Partners: Austin Parks Foundation, Austin Ridge Riders, City of Austin, City of Sunset Valley, Hill Country Conservancy, Save Barton Creek Association, Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, The Real Estate Council of Austin, Texas Conservation Corps, Texas Parks & Wildlife, Texas Department of Transportation, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

What: Violet Crown Trail Ribbon Cutting Ceremony

When: Friday, August 14, 2015 at 10:00am

Where: 290 Trailhead, at the intersection of Hwy 290 & Brodie Ln. *Media parking available at Enviroplan (4942 W Hwy 290). The event will be outside. Comfortable shoes are recommended.*

Video/Audio Ops:

- Ceremonial Ribbon Cutting
- Cairn Stacking (*Cairns are manmade rock piles used to mark trails and landmarks. The VCT partners will join this ancient tradition by creating a large cairn at the trailhead.*)
- Guests are requested to wear purple in honor of the Violet Crown Trail.
- Ceremony will be outside at the trailhead. Guests are will be encouraged to walk the trail.
- Hill Country Conservancy staff members will be available in the morning and afternoon for TV/radio interviews upon request.

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