

# Dallas park project aims to beautify ponds near Trinity River

KERA | By [Pablo Arauz Peña](#)

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On a recent sunny, windy afternoon, Melanie Ferguson and David Marquis stand on top of Southside on Lamar in the Cedars district of South Dallas.

On one side, there's the dazzling downtown skyline. On the other, the sprawling green Trinity River basin.

Marquis is known around Dallas for his environmental work. He helped found the Oak Cliff Nature Preserve. Ferguson is the director of the [Dallas Water Commons](#), a new urban wetland" that's being planned in a public-private partnership with he city.

Ferguson points out two ponds — or, as the city calls them, “sumps” — just outside the Trinity River levees that span to a forest. That's where the Dallas Water Commons will be.

“One of the reasons is it's called the Dallas Water Commons, just that it's between that extraordinary built environment of downtown Dallas with all the glistening buildings,” Ferguson said. “This canopy of trees that not only is gorgeous that people don't know about, but also is part of our Uood control system in Dallas, Texas. It's a sponge.” Like a sponge, it'll be a Uood control site for the Trinity River. It'll also be a park full of plants and wildlife – and an education center.



*Courtesy/Dallas Water Commons*

A map shows the the primary features of the water commons that include recreation, water Filtration and education.

Marquis said it's important to care of the planet's freshwater sources.

“Seventy percent [of the planet] is covered in water but only three percent is fresh,” he said. “We've got some serious thinking to do about water and how we access that water and how we clean that water and how we're responsible to the water that's here.”

In 2017, Dallas voters approved a bond that included more than \$7 million dollars to develop the park. The overall cost of the project is upwards of \$50 million dollars.

Artist renderings of the park show ponds surrounded by blooming wildflowers lined by winding trails with families overlooking the water and the Dallas skyline in the backdrop.

“We'll have workhorse plants, we'll be filtering water, and also plants will beautify the area,” Marquis said.

Those native plants will be able to withstand drought, torrential rains and everything in between, he added.

What's there right now are the two sumps just south of the Cedars on Riverside Boulevard. The road is partially undergoing renovations.

The land there folds into the water that's currently blocked off by road barriers. Nearby are some small businesses — a salon and a glass store, a fast food spot.



*Courtesy/Dallas Wetlands Foundation*

The future North pond for the Dallas Water Commons is currently a "sump" near Riverside Drive close to the Cedars in South Dallas.

The Dallas Water Commons is a partnership between the Dallas Wetlands Foundation, the city and Matthews Southwest, which contributed the land and vision.

"Really the overall intent is to improve an area that really isn't all that accessible to the public now," said Ryan O'Conner, director of the city's parks and recreation department, "by kind of beautifying the area."

He added that the commons' two sumps are going to make room for plenty of wildlife to thrive.

"You know, there's tons of birds that come through the area," he said. "Once those sump areas are improved, it's going to be a really cool and unique space."

Currently, the city is undergoing the process of approving the final design, so the Dallas Water Commons won't be ready for at least another couple of years.

Marquis says when it's finished, the Commons is going to bring more nature back to Dallas.

"Taking part in restoration of this one ecosystem, this one small piece of it, reminds all of us around the planet this is what we have to do," he said. "Think globally, act locally."

The end result will be an urban park that links the city's core to the great Trinity forest – which advocates say is one of Dallas' best kept secrets.

*This story was updated to correct the name of Southside on Lamar, not Southside Ballroom and Melanie Ferguson's title as director of the Dallas Water Commons.*

Got a tip? Email Pablo Arauz Peña at [parauzpena@kera.org](mailto:parauzpena@kera.org)

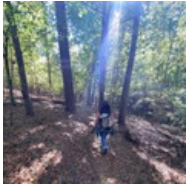
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## **Pablo Arauz Peña**

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## Conserving Earth

# Conserving Earth - January, 2024 - water management

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On this month's edition of *Conserving Earth*, host Janice Bezanson, Senior Policy Director for Texas Conservation Alliance, welcomes Melanie Ferguson, Director of the Dallas Water Commons, and actor-author-activist David Marquis, who has written and performed one-man plays about nature and is producing a trilogy of books on how water flows into our lives.

Melanie and David discuss an innovative public-private partnership that is turning a site that was formerly a flood management problem into an exceptional public park and outdoor classroom that manages stormwater, at the same time educating Dallasites and their visitors and providing a beautiful outdoor space right near downtown Dallas. It's called the Dallas Water Commons. When finished this exceptional destination will use specially planted wetlands to filter pollutants from stormwater before the water enters the Trinity River. The Dallas Independent School District and others plan to use the project as a classroom for biology, ecology, math, engineering, hydrology, dance and other arts.

