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Egery Flats Restoration Will Soon Be Underway

The much anticipated Egery Flats Restoration Project will soon be underway! A favorite among roadside fishermen, crabbers, and birders, Egery Flats sits along the western edge of Copano Bay, near the mouth of the Aransas River. Though seemingly productive to the recreational user, the ecosystem has suffered greatly since the placement of Farm to Market Road 136 in 1945. The Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP) received a grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund for the project that will restore hydrology and reduce salinity to enhance over 600 acres of emergent marsh, submerged aquatic vegetation, and tidal flats at Egery Flats.

View of FM 136 and Egery Flats (right) showing reduced emergent vegetation. Click play to view video.



FM 136 was placed across the marsh with only two water exchange points, and while it connected communities and provided public access to the flats, it also limited water flow. Over time the culverts at the water exchange points became clogged and the water flow was restricted enough to impact water quality and habitats, which has resulted in the conversion of over 100 acres of estuarine marsh and vital habitat to open water since the 1950s.

The project involves replacing the culverts at the water exchange points along the roadway. Two 30" pipe culverts will be replaced and upgraded with three 3' x 6' box culverts at each location. "The upgraded culverts will increase water exchange and reduce salinities in Egery Flats" said Rae Mooney, CBBEP Project Manager. "It will take time, but those reduced salinities should be the stimulus needed to jumpstart the hydrologic restoration."



In addition to the culvert upgrade, and thanks to additional support from CCA Texas Habitat Today for Fish Tomorrow and CCA's Building Conservation Trust, approximately 8 acres of emergent marsh will be planted to enhance re-vegetation of the flats.

In preparation for the construction phase of the project, CBBEP has also been working with the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve (MANERR) at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to collect valuable preconstruction data, including porewater salinity and vegetation monitoring. The monitoring will continue post construction and will help determine the effectiveness of the culvert replacement and success of the restoration project.



The replacement and upgrade of the culverts is anticipated to begin in early 2018. “We received the NFWF award for this project in 2014 and have been working hard with our partners to get to this point,” Mooney said. “We are excited for this next step, the replacement of the culverts is when we will begin to see a positive change in the ecosystem.”

The marshes in Egery Flats and the Coastal Bend are essential habitat for living marine resources and provide feeding grounds for waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds. Many of the birds that use Egery Flats also rely on the nearby Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The proximity of Egery Flats as a healthy feeding ground and marine nursery will enhance the overall ecological productivity and value of the Aransas Bay complex. Great things are on the horizon for Egery Flats, stay tuned!

For more information about the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, contact Kathryn Tunnell at (361)336-0304 or ktunnell@cbbep.org.

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