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NEWS RELEASE

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Local and Federal Officials Get Lured Back to Live Oak City Park for Fish Release and Dam Rehabilitation Celebration

San Antonio – Local and federal officials were lured back to Live Oak City Park to commemorate the completion of a rehabilitation project on the park’s 40-year-old floodwater retarding structure, known as Martinez Dam No. 5. Federal funding was crucial to completion of the project. Chairman of the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, U.S. Congressman Henry Bonilla, secured the required federal funding for the project.

Representatives from the San Antonio River Authority (SARA) were joined by U.S. Congressman Henry Cuellar, Commissioner Tommy Adkisson, and Steven Bednarz, Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resources -Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) for the afternoon ceremony.

Martinez Dam No. 5 was constructed in 1964, in partnership between the NRCS, SARA, Bexar County, and the Alamo Soil & Water Conservation District. In the early 1980s, the U.S. Congress commissioned a review of dam engineering criteria and required an inspection of all dams nationwide. Six of the floodwater retention dams in the Martinez Creek Watershed, a sub-watershed to the Cibolo Creek, did not meet current performance standards due to increased commercial and residential development. Downstream development, combined with changed hydrology and hydraulics associated with upstream development, has resulted in a different hazard classification related to dam safety. NRCS prioritized three floodwater retarding structures in northeast Bexar County in need of rehabilitation—Martinez 4, 5 and 6A. The local sponsors for the rehabilitation projects are the Alamo Soil & Water Conservation District, SARA and Bexar County.

“The surrounding landscape of the dam was agricultural and has now changed to a significantly developed suburban community,” noted San Antonio River Authority Board Member Louis Rowe. The changed setting, combined with more stringent design criteria, made rehabilitation of this floodwater retarding structure a high priority.

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According to Steven Bednarz, Martinez Dam No. 5 is the fourth dam to be rehabilitated in Texas. Two other dams are eligible for rehabilitation assistance in the Martinez Watershed. Martinez Dam No. 4, located in Converse has been approved for funding and construction is scheduled to begin in 2006. Martinez Dam No. 6A located in Universal City is currently in the pre-design phase. Bednarz indicated that “Martinez Dam No. 5 has performed well in recent heavy rain events in the area and has reduced flooding downstream, protecting about 550 people who live and work below the dam as well as the motorists who travel along Kitty Hawk Road everyday.” The rehabilitation has significantly diminished the threat of breach benefiting 99 residences, three businesses, and four public entities, Bednarz added.

“Bexar County was pleased to provide the local match to help our sponsors and communities meet current standards for this dam,” stated Adkisson. Total estimated cost for the project is \$1,833,000; Bexar County’s local match was \$641,472. Bexar County is also the local funding partner for Martinez 4 and 6A. Combined, Bexar County has committed over \$1.9 million in county flood tax dollars to the three Martinez Rehabilitation Projects and the total federal investment is over \$4 million. “The county is committed to providing flood control protection,” emphasized Adkisson. “We, along with the San Antonio River Authority, the City of San Antonio, the cities of Converse, Live Oak, and Universal City and others have partnered in the Bexar Regional Watershed Management Program to address flood concerns throughout the county. Governments working together can always accomplish more than one can accomplish alone.”

The Bexar Regional Watershed Program is a partnership between the three major entities in Bexar County—Bexar County, City of San Antonio, and SARA with roles and responsibilities for flood control and storm water management. The partnership was created for implementing a consistent, unified, equitable flood control, drainage, and storm water program for the citizens of Bexar County. These entities are also working with 18 suburban cities within Bexar County to include these jurisdictions’ needs in the program.

Guest speaker Congressman Henry Cuellar applauded the partnership on completing the project. “Martinez Dam No. 5 rehabilitation project serves as good example of efficient partnerships working toward a common goal – flood safety for the protection of our citizens,” he said. Cuellar stressed how important it is, in the wake of hurricane season, to maintain and improve flood control infrastructure. “What NRCS and local sponsors have done with this

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project is a perfect example of how consistent investment in infrastructure projects can alleviate future devastation and loss of life.”

The project also included an environmental protection component that improved fish habitat and added public access points along the lake. During construction, SARA worked with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) to relocate game fish prior to draining the lake, which was required to facilitate construction below the water level.

The permanent lake level will be 10 inches higher than prior to construction improving habitat in the lake for wildlife. TPWD will restock the lake with game fish of various sizes to promote the development of a healthier, sustainable fishery. Live Oak Mayor Henry O. Edwards Jr. expressed gratitude to the project partners for improving flood control for the community and the added bonus to align park improvements with the construction project.

“The rehabilitation of Martinez Dam No. 5 provided our city the opportunity to build a better lake,” Edwards said.

Fifteen thousand people visit Live Oak City Park every year. Mayor Edwards announced the lake was replenished earlier this month with new populations of game fish; approximately 482 sub-adult redear sunfish and bluegills. The City of Live Oak is working with the TPWD Freshwater Fish Stocking Program to coordinate other fish releases.

Before concluding the afternoon event, local and federal officials were presented with fishing jackets in appreciation of their support and participation. Then, to commemorate the opening of the lake officials released 17,500 bluegill fingerlings into the lake. The city expects to release 17,500 golden shiners and 4,000 large-mouth bass fingerlings next year.

Citizens who have questions regarding this project can contact Jim Blair, Flood Control Infrastructure Manager at SARA, (210) 227-1373.

SARA was created by the 45th Texas Legislature on May 5, 1937, and reorganized in 1961, to plan, manage, and implement water-related programs and projects within the San Antonio River Basin. The State of Texas empowered SARA to preserve, protect, and manage the resources and the ecology of the San Antonio River and its tributaries.

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