CARACARA TRAILS

Belden Trail, Brownsville, Texas| Photo byMark Lehmann

Bahia Grande, Texas | Photo by Frontera Media

Experience the Caracara Trails

In the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas, the Caracara Trails is a vision for a 428-mile trail network that will link the rich natural, cultural and historical resources the area is known for—creating a unified regional identity for outdoor tourism, promoting healthier lifestyles and generating a new sense of community pride for everyone who lives there.

The vision for the trail network is built upon a comprehensive plan—the Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Tourism Plan—that leverages the community's commitment to local economic development in a county with one of the highest poverty rates in the country—and is designed to tap into the rapidly expanding market for "active tourism" to support job creation and small business activity and encourage tourist spending that injects money into local economies.

WHAT WILL THE IMPACT BE ON THE VALLEY?

TRANSFORMING HEALTH AND WELLNESS

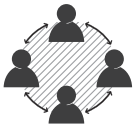
Health data for Cameron County—the regional footprint for the Caracara Trails—found that roughly half of residents get recommended levels of physical activity.[1] Cameron County also ranks among the bottom 10 percent of Texas counties for overall health factors, with nearly 80 percent obese or overweight, and 30 percent with diagnosed diabetes.[2] A recent study in Brownsville found that people who live near trails exercise 22 percent more than those who don't.[3] Building upon existing trail networks, the Caracara Trails will support physical activity and healthy lifestyles, and combat the prevalence of health issues related to inactivity. The projected yearly medical cost savings for the plan's catalyst projects alone could be as much as $12.3 million—but the overall impact will be far greater.[4]

REGIONAL TOURISM ON A WORLD SCALE

The Caracara Trails aim to promote the Valley as a worldwide magnet for active tourists, facilities and infrastructure. The region already boasts a thriving tourism economy, generating $463 million annually, with 23 percent of visitors[5] experiencing natural attractions such as South Padre Island, Laguna Madre and Laguna Atascosa. By leveraging its natural and social capital assets, the region will engage in a sustainable active transportation and tourism strategy that bolsters the economy and establishes the Valley as a world-class destination. When complete, the Caracara Trails will generate 3 million trail users each year and an additional $70 million in out-of-county visitor spending.[6]

FUELING A STRONG REGIONAL ECONOMY

The project will have a powerful economic impact in this highly impoverished but natural-resource-rich area—injecting critical small-business investment and generating new tourism revenues regionally. It is estimated that the construction phase of the Caracara Trails will generate 1,370+ jobs and an economic impact of more than $173 million. Upon completion, the trail network will support 950+ full-time jobs, generate an estimated $30 million in annual wages, and result in more than $100 million per year in total economic impact.[7]



PROMOTING SOCIAL EQUITY

In countywide surveys, nearly 50 percent of respondents indicate that a lack of sidewalk or trail connections currently keeps them from walking and biking more.[8] The Caracara Trails will connect existing and new trails throughout the region, creating new safe access to jobs, schools, grocery stores, health-care facilities, and outdoor and civic sites. These connections will deliver new walking and biking access to people throughout the county—in neighborhoods that currently have no safe places to recreate or be physically active.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION AND EDUCATION

In leveraging the Valley's world-renowned beaches, nature preserves, waterways and parks, the Caracara Trails will serve to promote the protection and maintenance of these resources for those coming to visit the region and those who live there. These assets are hidden gems, with many local residents having never learned of or visited them. In fact, when engaging the region's youth, the majority named parks as far away as San Antonio as those they were most familiar with. By connecting these natural resources by trail, tourists and locals will become more familiar with the area's incredible and unique wildlife—including the many threatened and endangered bird species. Visits to public lands will also increase thanks to improved access—effectively turning these assets into a regional outdoor classroom for science, ecology and the environment.

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[1] County Profile: Cameron County, Texas (2011 Data), Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2016
[2] RHP 5 Community Needs Assessment, February 2018, UT Health, School of Public Health Brownsville, available at: http://rtc.li/UTHealth_assessment18
[3] The LRGV Active Plan Economic Study: Technical Report, The Harbinger Consulting Group, June 2017
[4] Ibid.
[5] Economic Impact of Nature Tourism on the Rio Grande Valley: Considering Peak and Off-Peak Visitation for 2011, Texas A&M University, April 2012
[6] The LRGV Active Plan Economic Study: Technical Report, The Harbinger Consulting Group, June 2017
[7] Ibid.
[8] Lower Rio Grande Valley Active Transportation and Tourism Plan, November 2016, available at: http://rtc.li/LRGV_Active-Plan

COMPLETING THE VISION

The Caracara Trails are comprised of 428 miles of trails—including 230 miles of multiuse trails, 120 miles of U.S. Bicycle Routes and 78 miles of paddling trails that will showcase the vast, expansive beauty of the region's natural resources, cultural sites and geographic landmarks.

With a focus on spurring physical activity, tourism and economic development, the trail network will provide safe walking and biking connections countywide, improving mobility and establishing healthier lifestyles for residents with some of the highest percentages of obesity and chronic disease in Texas.

By creating a world-class regional nonmotorized transportation network, the Caracara Trails will also establish the Valley as an international magnet for outdoor tourism, while preserving its environmental treasures and inspiring a new sense of pride for the region.

PARTNERS

The Caracara Trails are being developed and implemented by a broad range of stakeholders, including businesses, foundations, municipalities, nonprofits, and state and federal partners. Rails-to-Trails Conservancy formally adopted the project as a TrailNation™ project in 2017 to help create safe, equitable walking and biking routes through the Valley.

Lead partners include: The Valley Baptist Legacy Foundation; the University of Texas School of Public Health; Methodist Health Ministries of South Texas; Rails-to-Trails Conservancy; the cities of Brownsville, Harlingen, Combes, Los Fresnos, Los Indios, Port Isabel, Rio Hondo, San Benito and South Padre Island; the towns of Laguna Vista and Rancho Viejo.

EXPLORE THE PROJECT FOOTPRINT

The Caracara Trails are kicking off with six "catalyst projects" comprising 57.5 miles of multiuse trails and on-road bicycle routes and 18 miles of paddling trails.

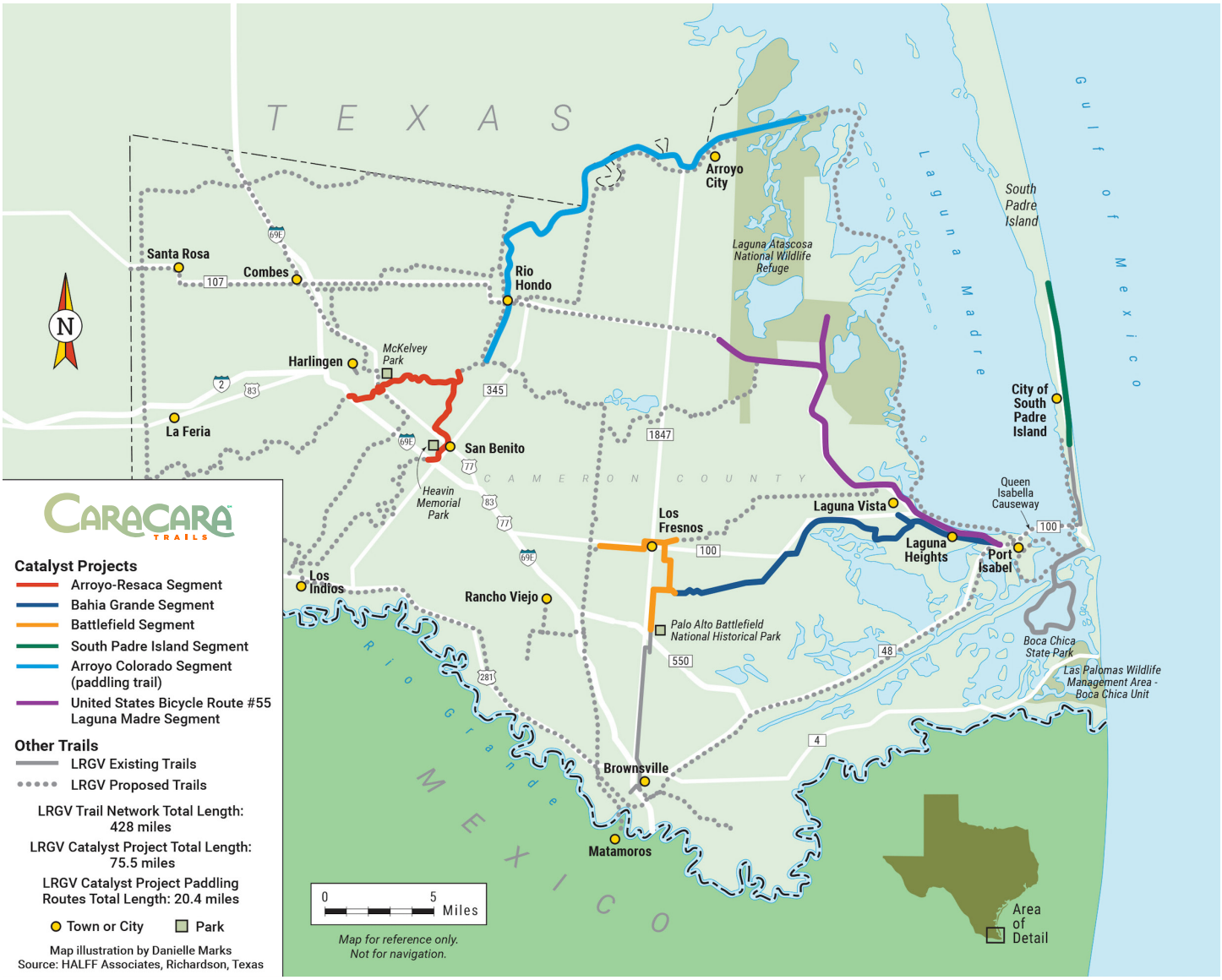
These high-priority projects have been chosen for their ability to connect existing trails and recreational resources throughout the area.

- Arroyo-Resaca Hike and Bike Segment
- Bahia Grande Trail Segment
- Battlefield Extension Trail Segment
- South Padre Island Trail Segment
- Arroyo Colorado Paddling Trail Segment
- Laguna Madre (U.S. Bicycle Route) Segment

McKelvey Park | Mark Lehmann

LEARN MORE: CARACARATRAILS.ORG

TRAIL NATION rails-to-trails conservancy



Historic Battlefield Trail in Palo Alto | Mark Lehmann

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Current as of August 6, 2019