

Improvements planned for Zube Park

Environmental impact study to start soon

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Zube Park in Hockley is known for its scale model trains, one-eighth the size of real cars and locomotives.

Now Harris County Precinct 3 officials want to make the park more accessible to the estimated 2,000 people who come once a month to see and ride the steamer trains, built and maintained by the Houston Area Live Steamers organization.

Bob Kendrick, Commissioner Steve Radack's administrative superintendent, said the precinct recently received a \$100,000 federal grant to pay for an environmental impact study, with the idea of adding improvements to the park.

"We've also submitted an application requesting \$470,000 to improve perimeter fencing, add several new gazebos and expand the parking lot," Kendrick said. "First, we want some advice that if we put any improvements on the grounds, we want to make sure they won't affect any natural or protected habitat, restrict the flow of Little Cypress Creek or create any other problems."

Kendrick said the environmental impact study will begin shortly, and they hope to have an answer on the second grant application within a couple months.

He said if the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development does not grant the \$470,000 request, the precinct intends to go ahead with Zube Park improvements anyway.

"But we worry about our budget, just like anyone else," Kendrick said. "In order to do these improvements any time soon, we need some help from the federal government. There are federal funds out there designed just for things like this."

Kendrick said the grant also could help pave the way for future development.

"We're hopeful we'll get the grant because we have something really unique and special in Zube Park, which is the railroad," Kendrick said. "There's nothing like it in this region, but it's used by people all over the world. Let's expand access to this wonderful resource."

RESOURCES

WANT TO GO?

- **What:** Steam engines and cars, one-eighth the size of a real railroad car, on a mile and a half of track winding through Zube Park.
- **When:** Free rides are offered the third Saturday of each month., 10 a.m.-4 p.m, March through November, with the new season beginning March 19.
- **Where:** Zube Park, 17400 Roberts Road, just off U.S. 290.
- **Details:** Call 281-391-1967 or go to www.hals.org/ or www.pct3.hctx.net/PZube/

The railroad was created 12 years ago by the Houston Area Live Steamers, a group of railroad buffs.

Train rides begin in March

The trains are big enough to carry passengers and group members offer free train rides to the public the third Saturday of each month, March until November, with the new season beginning March 19.

"The track started out as a simple circle on the ground," said Doug Blodgett, president.

"We've gone from about 1,500 feet to about a mile and a half of track. We have several paths we can take passengers on.

"Our average last year was 1,200 riders a day."

Blodgett said last year, they completed a three-year project that added 2,500-feet of track.

Classification yard

"This year, we're going to put in a classification yard, which is a storage yard for freight operations," Blodgett said.

"At a big train yard, you see trains lined up in different areas, where the cars are sorted out, where the trains are built, to get them ready to go out on the main line."