State of the Parks®

March 2008

SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

A Resource Assessment

National Parks Conservation Association®
Protecting Our National Parks for Future Generations®

STATE ◆ OF THE ◆ PARKS®

Center for State of the Parks

More than a century ago, Congress established Yellowstone as the world's first national park. That single act was the beginning of a remarkable and ongoing effort to protect this nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage.

Today, Americans are learning that national park designation alone cannot provide full resource protection. Many parks are compromised by development of adjacent lands, air and water pollution, invasive plants and animals, and rapid increases in motorized recreation. Park officials often lack adequate information on the status of and trends in conditions of critical resources.

The National Parks Conservation Association initiated the State of the Parks® program in 2000 to assess the condition of natural and cultural resources in the parks, and determine how well equipped the National Park Service is to protect the parks—its stewardship capacity. The goal is to provide information that will help policy makers, the public, and the National Park Service improve conditions in national parks, celebrate successes as models for other parks, and ensure a lasting legacy for future generations.

For more information about the methodology and research used in preparing this report and to learn more about the Center for State of the Parks®, visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks or contact: NPCA, Center for State of the Parks®, P.O. Box 737, Fort Collins, CO 80522; Phone: 970.493.2545; E-mail: stateoftheparks@npca.org.

Since 1919, the National Parks Conservation Association has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System. NPCA, its members, and partners work together to protect the park system and preserve our nation's natural, historical, and cultural heritage for generations to come.

* More than 340,000 members
* 22 regional and field offices
* 35,000 activists

A special note of appreciation goes to those whose generous donations made this report possible: Dorothy Canter, Elizabeth M. Culhane, Ben and Ruth Hammett, Janet Pfeiffer, Alec Rhodes, and anonymous donors.

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COVER PHOTO: KELLY COURKAMP

INTRODUCTION

JIM NATIONS

Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísma Concepción de Acuña is one of four 18th-century Spanish missions protected within San Antonio Missions National Historical Park.

The San Antonio River in southern Texas has drawn people to its banks for thousands of years. Long before San Antonio was founded in 1718, myriad groups of tribal peoples hunted game; fished; gathered edible plants, berries, and nuts; and settled around the river. In the 16th century, the Spanish began exploring parts of what is now Texas and the American Southwest. These early emissaries of the Spanish crown are believed to be the first Europeans to make contact with the diverse groups of native peoples who lived in the region.

Spanish influence eventually changed the area. Catholic missionaries from the Franciscan order and a few soldiers followed the first explorers to the area and established an enduring system of missions and forts (*presidios*). Their goals were to secure areas for the Spanish empire, introduce Christianity to the native

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Mission San Juan was established on the east bank of the San Antonio River on March 5, 1731. The missionaries had planned to build a large church at the mission but ran into construction difficulties, abandoned these plans, and eventually converted the granary into a chapel.

peoples, spread Spanish culture, and recruit new citizens for the empire. The Spanish also built these missions and *presidios* to guard their claims against the French who occupied neighboring Louisiana.

The first Spanish mission in present-day Texas was Mission San Francisco de los Tejas. Built in 1690, in what is now eastern Texas, this mission was relocated near the San Antonio River and renamed Mission Espada in 1731. Mission San Antonio de Valero, better known as the Alamo, was founded in 1718 and was the first of several missions built along the San Antonio River. Accompanying these missions in the San Antonio River Valley are three other 18th-century missions: Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo, Mission San Juan Capistrano, and Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísma Concepción de Acuña. These missions were all strategically located near the Presidio de Béxar, which protected the borders of the Spanish empire and the inhabitants of the missions.

The missions were not simply churches; they were large, self-sustaining estates complete with their own agricultural operations and irrigation systems. They were also places where native people were compelled to become Spanish citizens. Produce and livestock were raised outside of the missions' walls and on nearby ranches. Dams gathered and controlled the flow of the San Antonio River, while *acequias* (irrigation ditches) used gravity to supply water to the fields. Native peoples who lived in the region provided the labor for these extensive farms. Pressure from other tribal groups, changes in climate that led to food shortages, and devastating communicable diseases brought by the Europeans combined to drive many native peoples to accept life within the mission walls. At the height of their production and reach, the missions generated surpluses that were sent to Mexico and exchanged for a variety of manufactured goods.

The missions that the Spanish established in Texas all had a similar layout, with the church

and related buildings in one quadrant, quarters for native peoples along the outer walls, and workshops in the interior of the compounds. Directly outside the missions' walls lay the irrigated fields, gardens, and orchards, and beyond these fields were the *ejidos* or common lands. The common lands were used for collecting firewood, gathering building materials, hunting small game, and grazing livestock. Together, these lands formed the *fundo legal*, the estate that was granted to a mission by the Spanish crown.

PRESERVING THE RICH HISTORY OF THE MISSIONS

The missions of Texas and the American Southwest lost power during the 19th century, but the churches and mission lands continued to play an important role in the community despite political upheaval and the physical deterioration of the missions' walls and buildings. Efforts to preserve the missions and their history began to gain momentum when the church tower of Mission San José collapsed on the morning of March 9, 1928. This event spurred local preservation groups to begin restoration efforts. They purchased nearby lands, raised funds to support restoration work, and lobbied on behalf of future preservation projects.

During the 1930s, preservation work began at several of the missions. The federal government funded some roof repair and replastering work on the church at Mission Concepción, while a consortium of government agencies, private groups, and the Catholic Church worked together to fund major restoration work on the structures at Mission San José.

Talk of establishing a national park to preserve the missions began as early as 1935, although serious consideration was still decades away. One major concern that slowed the establishment of a national park was the challenge of allowing the churches within the missions to remain active parishes while respecting the

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SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK AT A GLANCE

- San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, officially created in 1978, is located just south of downtown San Antonio, Texas. Each year more than 1.5 million people visit the park to tour its four 18th-century Franciscan missions.
- The park preserves seven resources listed in the National Register of Historic Places, including the four missions, one ranch, an aqueduct, and a series of archaeological sites. Mission Concepción, the oldest unrestored stone church in America, and the Espada aqueduct, the only functioning aqueduct from the Spanish colonial period in the United States, are also designated as National Historic Landmarks.
- Constructed between 1768 and 1782, Mission San José, the largest of the missions, was considered to be "The Queen of the Missions." A major social and cultural center during its prime, Mission San José is a model of Texas missions. The church, native peoples' quarters, mill, and granary were all fully restored in the 1930s, which allows today's visitors to take a step back in time to see how the missions looked more 250 years ago, when they were fully operational.
- The missionaries constructed *acequias* that transported water, collected behind a dam, to irrigate farmland for the missions. Today the *acequias* provide riparian habitat that supports a host of species, including many migratory and resident birds. Visitors can enjoy watching raptors, songbirds, and egrets as they travel between the missions.
- The Mission Hike and Bike Trail is a joint project involving the City of San Antonio, Texas Department of Transportation, San Antonio River Authority, and the National Park Service. When complete, it will connect the Alamo (Mission San Antonio de Valero) to the four missions of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park through a series of bike lanes along city streets and stand-alone hike and bike trails along the San Antonio River. The City of San Antonio provides maintenance for these trails. Los Compadres has co-sponsored a Centennial Initiative proposal, now approved by the Park Service Washington Office, which, if authorized by Congress, would provide funding for a new trail connecting Mission San Jose to the San Antonio River.

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Mission Concepción

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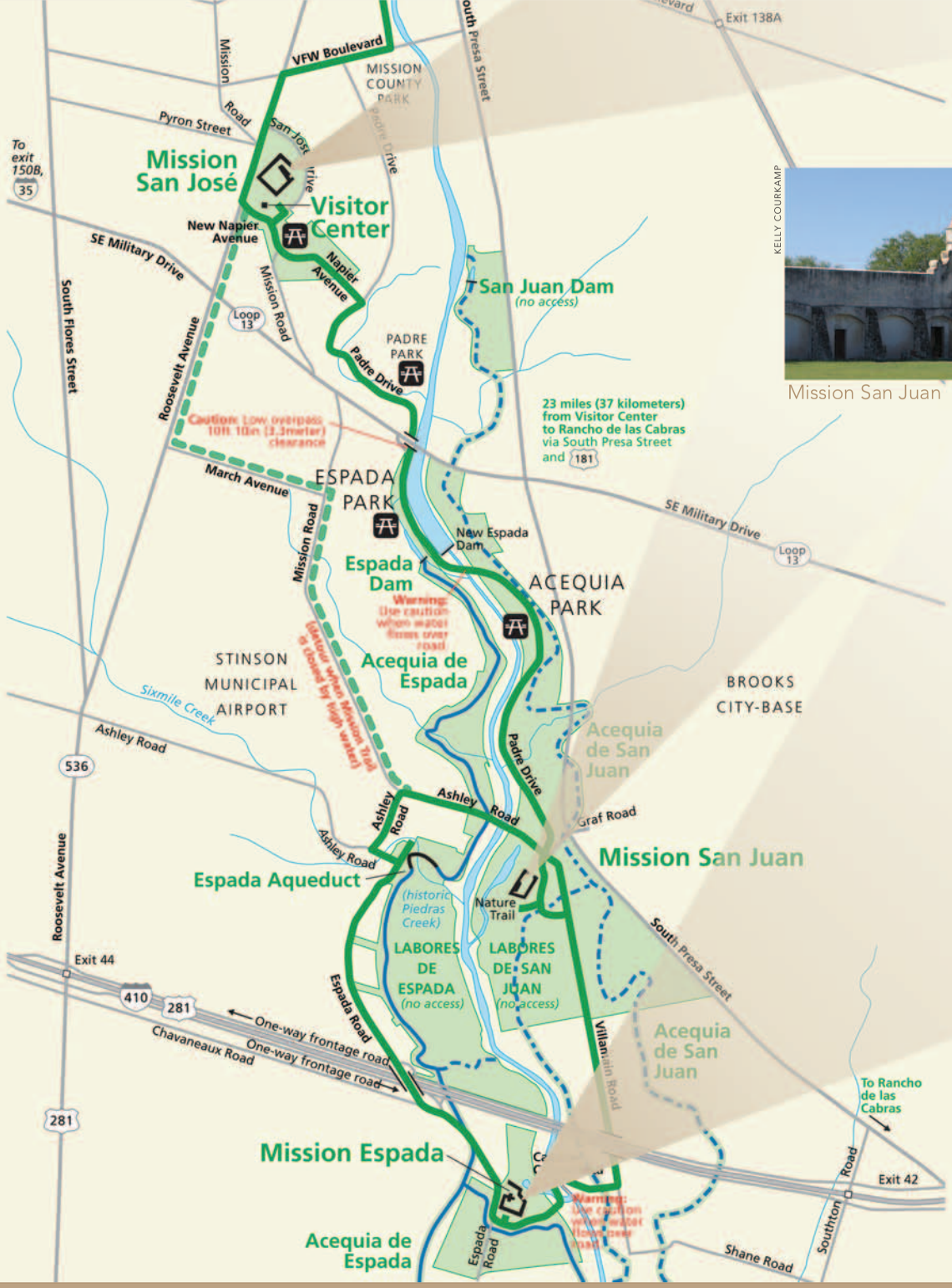
Mission San José



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Mission San Juan

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Mission Espada

Acequia (historic irrigation ditch within park boundary)

Used today for irrigation

Unwatered, no longer used for irrigation

Mission Trail driving tour (see map for detour when Mission Trail is closed by high water in river)

Picnic area

North

0 0.5 1 Kilometer

0 0.5 1 Mile

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separation of church and state required within the federal government. Over the next 40 years, the Archdiocese of San Antonio and the state of Texas managed the missions and funded site improvements.

After years of planning and cooperation among many partners, President Jimmy Carter signed the legislation that established San Antonio Missions National Historical Park in 1978, but the park would not officially open its doors for another five years. That time was spent developing the operating standards for the park that would allow for the continued use of religious facilities by the church, while the management and maintenance of the buildings' exteriors and grounds would be the sole domain of the Park Service.

Today, San Antonio Missions National Historical Park preserves the rich history of the complex system of missions established along the San Antonio River in the early 18th century. The 826-acre park includes historic landscapes and structures, as well as unexplored archaeological resources, at 12 individual sites across the city of San Antonio. Although the park is within an urban setting, it also provides habitat for a variety of wildlife.

Missions within the park include Mission San Francisco de la Espada (Mission Espada), Mission San José y San Miguel de Aguayo (Mission San José), Mission San Juan Capistrano (Mission San Juan), and Mission Nuestra Señora de la Purísma Concepción de Acuña (Mission Concepción). The Park Service does not own the churches associated with the missions; these are still active parishes owned by the Archdiocese of San Antonio. But the Park Service does care for all the buildings not associated with the active parishes, and it owns and manages other historic structures within the park. Along with these important historic structures, staff preserve and interpret the landscapes of the missions and the lives of the people who lived within their walls.

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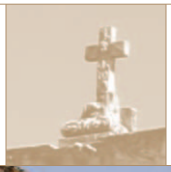
Conservation work on this portion of a ceiling fresco began in 1988. Prior to this work, the only symbols that were visible were one eye and several rays. The restoration work revealed a second eye, mustache and goatee. Once considered a religious symbol, historians now believe that this fresco is actually a Spanish medallion.



THE ASSESSMENT

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Recognizing San Antonio Missions National Historical Park's significance to our shared national heritage, NPCA's Center for State of the Parks endeavored to determine the conditions of the cultural resources protected within the park. Researchers gathered information and used an established, peer-reviewed methodology to assess and systematically rate conditions of cultural resources at San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. This methodology can be found online (www.npca.org/stateoftheparks).

Current overall conditions of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park's known cultural resources rated "fair" with a score of 71 out of 100. Both cultural landscapes and history scored highly, as both resource areas are well documented and well interpreted and have a dedicated staff specialist. But the park faces challenges establishing baseline archaeological

The convento at Mission San José is where the missionaries and their assistants lived.

Despite the fact that the missions were constructed to be temporary buildings, the missionaries still adorned the structures with ornate features like these highly decorative columns and façade.

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information, maintaining the missions, and addressing the museum collection backlog. Because the park's natural resources are limited, NPCA did not rate conditions of natural resources at this time. This report contains descriptions of the park's cultural resources and summaries of cultural resource conditions.

RESOURCE CATEGORY	CURRENT
CULTURAL RESOURCES	
Overall conditions	**71 FAIR**
History	83
Archaeology	72
Cultural Landscapes	83
Historic Structures	75
Museum Collection and Archives	50
Ethnography	N/A

The findings in this report do not necessarily reflect past or current park management. Many factors that affect resource conditions are a result of both human and natural influences over long periods of time, in many cases predating the park's creation. The intent of the Center for State of the Parks is to document the present status of park resources and determine what actions can be taken to protect them in the future.

KEY FINDINGS

- Completing an archaeological overview and assessment and surveying 100 percent of the lands within park boundaries are among the park's highest priorities. A cohesive assessment would identify and facilitate protection of archaeological resources and expand the interpretation of historic structures, ethnography, and traditional use. It could also contribute artifacts to the museum collection.
- At current funding levels, the park can only afford to complete cyclical repairs on historic structures. Major, fundamental repairs are left undone, which leaves the structures vulnerable to further damage. Funds are needed to support condition assessments and rehabilitation of historic structures, including work on more than 250,000 square feet of stone walls.
- Though the park is fortunate to have several resource specialists on staff, additional specialists would further enhance resource protection. An archivist and a curator are needed to catalog more than 700,000 artifacts and historic documents; a preservation specialist is needed to oversee assessments and preservation of historic structures; a preservation crew (masons, maintenance, and laborers) is needed to inspect, monitor, and repair historic structures; and law enforcement personnel are needed to ensure visitor safety and protect resources.
- Since 1995, the park has been awaiting funding to begin permanent operations at Rancho de las Cabras, the only remaining mission ranch. Plans include stabilizing and exposing the walls of the Rancho compound and constructing interpretive facilities. Opening Rancho de las Cabras would provide visitors with an opportunity to learn about the ranches and farmlands that supported the missions.

JIM NATIONS

Architectural details surrounding the doors of the church at Mission San José showcase some of the exquisite craftsmanship found within the park.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- San Antonio Missions National Historical Park was established in 1978 to preserve the largest and most complete assemblage of Spanish colonial resources in the United States. The park represents an extraordinary example of cooperative management where visitor services and resource protection coexist alongside active parishes. In recognition of its internationally significant resources, San Antonio Missions has been recommended for inclusion on the U.S. Tentative List for World Heritage status by the U.S. Commission to UNESCO.
- The park's friends association, Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions, supports the park in a number of ways. Los Compadres donated significant funds to help fully restore the historic grist mill at Mission San José, which opened to the public in 2001 and includes an interpretive display that demonstrates how wheat was ground into flour during the late 1700s. The group also provided funds to restore the San Juan *acequia* system, which was used to transport water collected behind a dam to each mission's agricultural area. Los Compadres also holds an annual fundraiser, the "Make It Your Mission" Gala, to benefit the park. This allows the friends group to provide about $150,000 per year in project funds as well as additional funding for larger initiatives. Over the past 25 years, Los Compadres has contributed more than $3.5 million to support park programs and operations.
- In an effort to preserve the park's cultural landscapes, staff are removing non-native, invasive plants such as chinaberry, glossy privet, giant reed, and several grasses. Staff collaborate with other agencies to secure joint funding and other resources to combat invasive species. Staff also meet with local landowners to educate them about the park's restoration efforts.
- Every year, the park hosts "Archaeology Day" at Mission San José. The event emphasizes the importance of preservation and stewardship through hands-on exhibits, activities, and lectures for all ages.

When Mission San José was occupied, wheat was ground into flour at this grist mill. Fully restored and opened to the public in 2001, visitors can now witness one of the necessary daily tasks that was required for survival.

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In 2007, park staff began excavations to expose the ruins at Rancho de las Cabras, the only remaining mission ranch. Staff would like to open the area to visitors, providing them with an opportunity to learn about the farmlands that supported the missions.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

HISTORY—HISTORICAL RESEARCH COMPLEMENTS PARK'S MISSION

Surrounded by the city of San Antonio, Texas, San Antonio Missions National Historical Park was established in 1978 to preserve, restore, and interpret the Spanish colonial missions. Four sites are still active community parishes, and many resources continue to be used today for education and worship, making the park's resources a living link from the past to the present.

The park employs 14 interpretive staff members, located at the visitor center and contact stations throughout the park. Interpretive themes for the park address the influence of Spanish rule in Texas and the resulting social structures that took root in the New World, including: the ways in which the Catholic Church and Spanish government worked to expand the Spanish empire by establishing missions to convert and acculturate native peoples; how the characteristics of the San Antonio River and the responsiveness of native peoples resulted in the establishment of missions as self-supporting outposts of the Spanish empire; and how the missions facili-

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Mission San José is the largest of the park's four missions and took 15 years to build. Extensive restoration efforts began in the 1930s by the Works Progress Administration, a federal agency created in 1935 to provide jobs during the Great Depression.

tated the adaptation and assimilation of cultures that resulted in a diverse community that continues to evolve today.

The park employs a full-time historian who currently spends the majority of her time translating Spanish colonial documents into English, including a translation of the 1772 Inventory of Concepción. The inventory was produced by a priest sent to the mission by its headquarter college (administrative overseers of the missions) in Mexico. The inventory was used to document material possessions of the church, and so it serves as a good indicator of the relative prosperity of the mission and of the items that were deemed important at that time. Other park research has included a history of Mission San Juan and an update to a historic resource study on the park's missions. An administrative history of San Antonio Missions is under way, which will tell the story of the park's management history.

Though the park's cultural resources are fairly well documented, individual histories for Missions Espada, Concepción, and San José would provide a more complete picture of life at the individual missions during the Spanish colonial period. The park plans to research the history of the entire mission complex, from the Spanish colonial period to the present, for all park sites. This work will encompass an overall history of Spanish rule in colonial America; a study of the relationship between the park and surrounding neighborhoods; additional oral histories from descendants of mission inhabitants and long-time local residents; and additional translations of Spanish colonial documents.

HISTORIC STRUCTURES—EXQUISITE 18TH-CENTURY MISSION STRUCTURES DRAW VISITORS

Those familiar with the 18th-century missions located throughout the American Southwest know that these historic sites feature weathered stone walls, graceful archways, religious frescos, and hand-carved wooden doors. These features and many more historically significant details can be found within the missions preserved as part of San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. The park's historic structures are its defining elements and were the driving force behind the park's creation as noted in its establishing legislation. The park encompasses 43 historic structures, which include the churches of Mission Espada, Mission San Juan, Mission San José, and Mission Concepción, as well as the walled compounds that served as the living quarters for priests, soldiers, and native peoples. The self-sufficient mission complexes also had more utilitarian structures for food storage and processing, animal husbandry, and for making the lime mortars used in constructing mission buildings.

Integral to the agricultural life of the missions, dams and ditches were built to collect and channel water for irrigation and for powering grist mills. The Espada dam, *acequia*, and aqueduct are still operating today and represent some of the oldest continuously operating water works in the United States. The Espada *acequia* is the oldest and perhaps only Spanish-built irrigation system still in operation in the United States. The Espada aqueduct is a National Historic Landmark and the oldest

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Interpreters in historic dress demonstrate how wheat was ground into flour at the restored grist mill at Mission San José.

aqueduct in the United States. The water rights associated with these ditches are the oldest in Texas and are managed by the National Park Service. The park has been working to repair the San Juan *acequia* to make it operational, but recent reductions in maintenance staff as a result of funding shortfalls have severely affected this program. Historic *acequias* are increasingly threatened by development in the urbanized mission corridor as people drive through them or dump trash in them, or as storm-water runoff courses through them when heavy rains hit the impermeable surfaces of the modern city.

The Park Service is responsible for the maintenance of each of the mission complexes, including walls, grounds, ruins, and interpretive features. The churches themselves are the responsibility of the Archdiocese of San Antonio. The Park Service began managing the missions in the early 1980s and inherited a collection of structures with an extensive backlog of maintenance needs that has been compounded by continued weathering and deterioration.

The majority of the park's historic structures are in good condition, but keeping them in good condition is an ongoing challenge. The mission structures, which are now more than 250 years old, were built for short-term use as sites for religious conversion and were never intended for structural permanence. Natural weathering and shifting soils can cause walls to crack and crumble, rising damp destroys original plaster walls, and vibrations from truck and train traffic shake the structures. The park's highest priority is to mitigate the natural and human-made forces that—if left unchecked—would reduce these structures to piles of rubble.

A dozen maintenance employees with specialized skills (e.g., masonry repair and historical carpentry) work hard to care for the park's historic structures and the surrounding grounds, while interpreters and park law enforcement personnel keep watch against vandalism. Large preservation projects, which may include major building rehabilitations or large-scale cyclic maintenance work, are funded through private grants or Park Service programs such as Vanishing Treasures and employ contractors to complete the work. The park's historical architect, landscape architect, archaeologist, and historian review and evaluate site conditions and plan preservation projects that use all of the funding sources available. Sufficient funds are not always available, however, and chronic federal funding shortfalls have prevented important work from being completed, contributing to a multi-million-dollar backlog of historic structures maintenance.

Originally established in 1690, Mission Espada was moved to its current location along the San Antonio River in 1731. This mission was supported by its own elaborate irrigation system that supplied water to large fields of beans, corn, and melons.

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The walkways that surround Mission San José have been upgraded and replaced to accommodate a wider spectrum of visitors and to comply with federal accessibility standards.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES—SURROUNDING DEVELOPMENT THREATENS RESOURCES AND VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Cultural landscapes demonstrate how people have shaped their surroundings by living on the land and using the resources around them. The Park Service has identified five cultural landscapes within San Antonio Missions National Historical Park—the four missions and Rancho de las Cabras. Of these sites, Mission Concepción, Mission San José, and Rancho de las Cabras have been researched and documented through cultural landscape inventories and cultural landscape reports. Updates to these studies identified signs of deterioration and recommended restorative work to prevent further, possibly irreparable damage.

The park continues to implement improvements to its cultural landscapes in keeping with the recommendations of the inventories and reports. For example, new procedures for tree maintenance have been implemented that include pruning and replacement schedules. The walkways at Mission San José have been replaced to meet accessibility standards set forth by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The grist mill has been restored, and plans to restore the *convento* gardens have been completed. At Mission Concepción, the courtyard patio is almost complete, and at Rancho de las Cabras excavations to determine how best to re-expose the ruins began in 2007.

ANCIENT ACEQUIAS PROVIDE HABITAT FOR MIGRATORY AND RESIDENT SPECIES

To survive and thrive in what is now the state of Texas, 18th-century Spanish missions had to be as self-sufficient as possible. This included being able to produce as much of their own food as they could, in an area where water was a vital and sometimes scarce resource. The inhabitants of the missions grew their food just outside of the mission walls and herded cattle, goats, and sheep on ranches that were located farther away from the missions. To provide a stable supply of water to these fields, the missionaries constructed an elaborate irrigation system, complete with seven dams to trap water, and a system of irrigation ditches called *acequias* to deliver water from the San Antonio River to the fields. The system traversed more than 15 miles and irrigated about 3,500 acres of land.

Some of these *acequias* exist today. The Espada *acequia* continues to provide water to irrigate fields as it has for more than 250 years. The San Juan *acequia* is also intact; water pumped from the new San Antonio River channel will provide water to fill this *acequia* and irrigate the future Spanish colonial demonstration farm.

The *acequias* enhance the rich riparian floodplain of the San Antonio River. Migrating and resident bird species in particular take advantage of these riparian areas, and birdwatchers flock to see myriad species that are drawn to the river valley. Resident species include herons, egrets, wood ducks, owls, and woodpeckers, while warblers and flycatchers can be seen during their semiannual migrations.

Runoff, fertilizers, and pesticides affect the water quality in the San Antonio River and the *acequias*, but water quality appears to be improving. To teach junior high school students about the history of water in the park and the importance of water quality stewardship, park staff have developed a curriculum in partnership with the San Antonio Water System. As part of the program, students participate in hands-on activities such as water quality testing.

Cultural landscape inventories and reports for Mission Espada and Mission San Juan would provide information on their location, historical development, period(s) of significance, character-defining features, and management. These reports are needed to form the basis of future resource-protection efforts. Funds have been requested to complete a cultural landscape inventory and report for both Mission Espada and Mission San Juan.

Invasive plants are a big concern to the park because they alter historic landscapes, compete with native species, and threaten to take over entire areas. The park has a non-native species removal program that employs a variety of control methods and mitigation measures such as erosion control and native plant restoration. Staff have been focusing on four particularly aggressive species: chinaberry (*Melia azedarach*), glossy privet (*Ligustrum lucidum*), giant reed (*Arundo donax*), and Johnsongrass (*Sorghum halepense*). Park staff also engage the public through an education campaign to increase awareness of invasive species and the danger they pose to native flora. The park has controlled about 400 acres threatened by invasive species, but an additional 210 acres require initial treatment.

San Antonio Missions National Historical Park is located within a major metropolitan area, and the National Park Service owns a little more than half of the acreage within park boundaries. The Archdiocese of San Antonio, the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, San Antonio River Authority, and private citizens own the rest of the land. These factors combined mean that the park is vulnerable to adjacent development that could potentially alter cultural landscapes. For example, at Mission Concepción, the relationship between the natural environment and cultural resources has been altered because of its urban context. Reconfigured by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (and soon to be reconfigured yet again by this agency), the San Antonio River—

Park staff treat invasive non-native species and have controlled them on about 400 acres. Treatments are needed on an additional 210 acres.

now obscured from view by vegetation and urban development—is notably absent from the mission landscape. Although the site does retain character-defining features and some of its initial integrity, much of the existing site vegetation is neither historically significant nor indigenous to the area.

Additional funds are needed to restore and further protect and interpret the cultural landscapes within San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. Purchasing inholdings within the park's boundaries is an important strategy to protect these areas from development; the park has requested funding and plans to work with partners to do so. The park would also like to implement a proposal for a Spanish colonial demonstration farm near Mission San Juan that would illustrate agricultural methods taught to native peoples at the missions and help visitors understand their living conditions.

ARCHAEOLOGY—ADDITIONAL RESEARCH, INVESTIGATION, AND INTERPRETATION NEEDED

San Antonio Missions National Historical Park encompasses a variety of archaeological sites that range from the Early Archaic to the Spanish colonial and post-colonial historic periods. The park is defined by its most significant cultural and archaeological features, including the four missions, the *acequia* systems of San Juan and Espada, portions of the San José *acequia* system,

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The Espada aqueduct is part of an extensive irrigation system that delivered water to the agricultural fields of Mission Espada. This system is still operational and includes the only functioning aqueduct from the Spanish colonial period in the United States.

and the Espada aqueduct. In total, the park has 18 archaeological sites listed in the Archaeological Sites Management Information System (ASMIS), a park system-wide database of archaeological information. Of these 18 sites, eight are in good condition, four are in fair condition, and six are in poor condition. While the poaching of illegal artifacts has not been a problem at the park, environmental degradation due to wind, rain, and drainage; high visitation numbers; and external development activities threaten archaeological sites.

Although some archaeological research has been performed at the park, there has been no comprehensive survey within park boundaries. A complete archaeological survey and a comprehensive archaeological overview and assessment are still needed. During a complete survey, the park would re-evaluate and update previously identified sites; record new sites; update the park nominations for the National Register of Historic Places as necessary; and add all sites to the park's geographic information systems (GIS) base map, which shows locations of all known cultural resources.

Completing a survey and an overview and assessment becomes more urgent as development surrounding the park continues, with the possibility that crucial archaeological resources could be lost. Information gained through an assessment would allow staff to more adequately document, understand, evaluate,

and protect archaeological resources; expand the interpretation of ethnography and historic structures; better understand the cultural landscape; and prioritize preservation work. This data would also help staff prioritize land acquisition within the current park boundaries. Those parcels with more vulnerable resources would have a higher priority for purchase as funds became available.

MUSEUM COLLECTION AND ARCHIVES—STAFF NEEDED TO CATALOG ITEMS AND UPDATE DOCUMENTATION

San Antonio Missions preserves an extensive and diverse collection of artifacts, with pieces spanning the Archaic Period (8000-1000 B.C.) to the mid-20th century. The museum collection includes antique books about the missions, Spanish colonial objects used at the missions, paintings, and photographs. A collection of natural resources objects, including floral and faunal specimens, accompanies the historical artifacts. Overall, the collection is in good condition, although serious concerns include the need to properly store nitrate photographic negatives and address the large backlog of items that have not yet been cataloged. The collection and archives total an estimated 731,000 items; about 356,000—mainly archaeological and archival items—have not yet been cataloged.

While the storage facilities at San Antonio Missions are equipped with the proper humidity and temperature controls, they lack adequate space to accommodate the entire collection. Therefore, only some of the park's archaeological collections are stored on site, while the balance is housed at the Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Texas at San Antonio. More than 400 original nitrate photographic negatives that depict historic images of the missions are currently in permanent storage at the Western Archaeological and Conservation Center in Tucson, Arizona. They were transferred there

RIVER RESTORATION WILL PROVIDE ADDITIONAL VISITOR OPPORTUNITIES

The San Antonio River is prone to flooding, a natural phenomenon that prompted missionaries to move the Mission San Antonio de Valero (The Alamo) to a more secure location after a flood in 1724. In response to damaging floods in 1946, Bexar County, the San Antonio River Authority, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers partnered to improve flood control along 31 miles of the San Antonio River. The river was widened, straightened, and redirected into engineered channels in an effort to redirect floodwater away from the city. The project successfully mitigated flood damage, but it created unsightly engineered channels and disrupted historically important cultural landscapes.

The San Antonio River Improvement Project will correct some of the natural resource damage caused by previous river "improvements." Returning the river to a more natural, meandering flow will provide better habitat for native plants and wildlife, improve the aesthetic appeal of the river, further improve flood control, and create recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. A consortium of interests such as the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and the San Antonio River Foundation have partnered to make this project a reality. Once the project is complete, visitors will be able to travel more easily between San Antonio Missions National Historical Park and river recreational opportunities such as trails. The park is planning a trail along the San Juan *acequia* that will connect river features with those of the park.

As a result of the river improvement project, two multi-component archaeological sites that are listed in the National Register of Historic Places will be removed. Through a cooperative agreement with the Texas Historical Commission and the National Park Service, USACE will mitigate these sites by excavating portions of them to retrieve and record data before they are destroyed. In addition, the Park Service will participate in a land exchange: The park will lose 49 acres of Spanish colonial farmland that are currently within the park and will gain 50 other acres of Spanish colonial farmland that are currently unprotected.

after copies of the negatives and prints were made, which now reside at the park. Natural resource collections are housed at the University of Texas, Austin, and Texas A&M University.

To remedy several important shortcomings, the park would like to hire a curator and an archivist. The substantial cataloging backlog and outdated management documents, including a scope of collections statement and a comprehensive management plan that were last updated in 1985, need attention that a dedicated staff person could provide. Currently, the park's archaeologist manages the museum collection, in addition to juggling other duties.

ETHNOGRAPHY (PEOPLES AND CULTURES)—MORE RESEARCH NEEDED

The ethnography program at San Antonio Missions National Historical Park has no staff and little research has been completed. As a result, NPCA did not score this section of the park resource assessment. San Antonio Missions National Historical Park does not have a park-wide ethnographic overview and assessment, but a lineal descent study and a historical study have been completed for Mission San Juan. Funding has been requested for lineal descent and cultural affiliation studies at Mission San José, Mission Espada, and Mission Concepción, but none has been received to date. These projects would provide San Antonio Missions with complete and accurate information on the connections between park resources and contemporary tribes, as required by federal legislation.

San Antonio Missions National Historical Park has a rich and complex history, embodying many distinct cultural groups. This diverse heritage is evident today in the people of the local community. The major ethnic groups directly influenced by and influencing the missions are American Indian and Hispanic. Though there are no federally recognized American Indian tribes in south Texas, several groups claim to be descendants of the mission Indians, and the park works with them and other neighborhood and community groups. The park also regularly consults with the Archdiocese of San Antonio and the local parishes that are still active at each of the missions.

In general, little is known about the native peoples who were so instrumental in the success of the missions. The park can build upon ethnographic research already completed to trace descendants to their native ancestors. The park's plans to open Rancho de las Cabras for regular public visitation and develop the Spanish colonial demonstration farm at Mission San Juan will also contribute to interpretation of the lives of the people whose labor sustained the missions.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- **Participate in park planning efforts:** The public is invited to provide input on all park plans and studies. To learn about any plans under way at San Antonio Missions National Historical Park, visit www.nps.gov/saan.
- **Support or become a member of groups helping to protect the parks:** Los Compadres de San Antonio Missions 210.922.3218 or loscompadres@sbcglobal.net.
- **Volunteer in the parks.** Many parks are looking for dedicated people who can lend a helping hand. To learn about volunteer opportunities, contact the park at 210.534.8875.
- **Become an NPCA member and activist** and learn about legislative initiatives and protection projects affecting parks. When you join our activist network, you will receive *Park Lines*, a monthly electronic newsletter with the latest park news and ways you can help. To join NPCA or become an activist, visit www.npca.org.

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Please visit www.npca.org/stateoftheparks/ to view these reports and to learn more about the Center for State of the Parks®.

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