



Cameron County Parks & Recreation

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Re: CAMERON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION STATEMENT CONCERNING CLAIMS ABOUT TRASH ACCUMULATION MADE BY RICHARD HITCHCOX

Mr. Richard Hitchcox with RGV Fishing Area and Waterway Cleanups has been sharing stories, photos and comments on social media suggesting that the Cameron County Parks & Recreation crew is neglecting the responsibility of collecting trash from receptacles recently installed by his group along Highway 48 that are not part of the Cameron County Parks system. Mr. Hitchcox, like any other individual, is entitled to express his opinions and views but is not entitled to promote inaccurate and untrue versions of the facts.

In our previous meetings and discussions with Mr. Hitchcox, the Cameron County Parks & Recreation department has been very clear that the County's responsibility extends only to maintaining the Jaime J. Zapata Memorial Boat Ramp facility on the south side of Highway 48 and a limited number of trash receptacles in a small parking area on the northwest side, which the Texas Department of Transportation (TXDOT) owns. Beyond these areas, the County does not maintain other spaces or trash receptacles at the Gayman Bridge or San Martin Lake located on the northside of Hwy 48. Cameron County acknowledges the serious littering issues at this location, however as the County is not the property owner, we cannot assume responsibility simply due to the site's rural Cameron County location. Cameron County is a local government entity of limited authorities prescribed by Texas law and cannot confer a benefit to private property or individuals. While we prioritize cleanliness at Cameron County-owned facilities, assuming responsibility for cleaning up at properties owned by other private individuals or entities like these locations exceeds our authority.

One key issue is the trash receptacles Mr. Hitchcox's organization RGV Fishing Area and Waterway Cleanups has installed, within the TXDOT right of way and without a servicing plan, has unintentionally creating a dumping ground, further exacerbating the problem rather than facilitating a solution. Additionally, these receptacles are in an area with unsafe ingress and egress, which could pose a hazard for existing and emerging traffic.

The other part of this issue is the social and behavioral actions of the area's visitors. The principal problem is that many individuals do not respect the environment and refuse to be responsible citizens. The best way to improve the situation is going to be by way of information and education.

Cameron County Parks and Recreation Director Joe E. Vega has previously suggested to Mr. Hitchcox and RGV Fishing Area and Waterway Cleanups, that they identify the property owner and engage them for potential collaboration in resolving this issue. Given the sizable social media following of the RGV Fishing Area and Waterway Cleanups organization, there is a strong opportunity to mobilize a coalition of supporters to champion this initiative. A collaborative approach will be essential to finding a lasting solution.

Lastly, Cameron County Parks wants to address the spread of misinformation surrounding the County's role and obligations. As stated, the County has no responsibility for these areas beyond what is specified. Promoting incorrect information and assumptions detracts from constructive solutions. It would benefit all parties to keep our focus on resolving the core issue.

While the County does not have the authority to maintain these areas, in an effort to have the trash receptacles serviced by the rightful property owner, Cameron County has engaged with TXDOT, the entity whose right-of-way the receptacles are installed on, to see if they would collect the trash accumulated in and around the receptacles installed by your organization.

Cameron County Parks and Recreation would like to thank any individual or group who voluntarily seeks to have a positive impact on our environment by collecting trash left behind by irresponsible individuals. Cameron County wishes to collaborate in a positive manner to make Cameron County a better, and cleaner place for residents and visitors alike. For more information regarding beach cleanups hosted by the Texas General Land Office and Cameron County, please contact Cameron County Parks and Recreation Director Joe E. Vega directly at jevega@co.cameron.tx.us.