



**SOUTH TEXAS
BOTANICAL
GARDENS
& NATURE CENTER**

May 25, 2023

Dear Type B Board Members:

The South Texas Botanical Gardens & Nature Center is requesting an extension of the grant through March 31, 2024. The trail grant you provided is a match for a Texas Parks & Wildlife Recreational Trails Grant in the amount of \$200,000. We originally submitted the grant to them in January 2020 and were notified on May 27, 2020 that we had received the award but that it may take 9-12 months for their legal department to provide the final contract. It took 22 months due to delays on their end associated with COVID with their contract coming on April 6, 2022. It also required an archaeological survey before any work can be done. Their grant also states that matching funds cannot be used until this survey is completed and approved by TPWD.

We submitted RFPs to 6 firms on the list they provided and only received one proposal, and TPWD wanted three proposals. The one bid we received was just over \$50,000, double what we have been told it should be by local historians that are familiar with the process. That bid would use 25% of their grant funds. We were told that slow business start-ups after the pandemic provided more job opportunities for these companies than they could handle as people started a regular work schedule again.

We explored other options suggested by our U.S. Fish and Wildlife field biologist that also works on similar trails projects that proposed entombment, only adding materials to the top of the existing soil level. That prevented some extension of our boardwalk and wayfinding signs that require posts to be installed.

We recently resent RFPs electronically to all nineteen qualified firms on the TPWD list with a June 18, 2023 deadline. Review and approval will be completed by June 30. We believe this round of RFPs will provide additional and more affordable options for the required survey that we specified being completed by September 30.

Contractors for the actual trail work said it will go quickly once they can begin, only taking a couple of weeks for the trail portion which your grant covers. We feel that a March 31, 2024 extension should provide plenty of additional time to complete the work that was unexpectedly delayed.

This trail addition will transform the Nature Center portion of the Botanical Gardens and help with nature tourism endeavors such as our Birdiest Festival in America.

Thank you for your consideration on this extension.

Sincerely,

Michael Womack, Ed.D.
Executive Director