

A million Texans live in floodplains along the Trinity River. Here's how planners are addressing risks

KERA | By **Pablo Arauz Peña**

Published August 26, 2025 at 5:04 AM CDT



LISTEN • 3:52



Yfat Yossifor / KERA

The Trinity River as seen from the Trinity River Audubon Center.

Running south from Gainesville all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico, the Trinity River is the most distinctive body of water in North Texas. It's been a relatively mild year for flooding in the region, but on a heavy rainy day, the water can get as high as 30 or 40 feet.

"The number one hazard that Dallas faces is flooding," said Travis Houston, the city's

KERA
Hidden Brain

Last month's deadly floods in Central Texas have raised questions about similar risks along the Trinity in other parts of the state.

Dallas saw some of the worst flooding in recent memory just a few years ago, in 2022, when some areas got 14 to 16 inches of rain. It cost the city billions of dollars in damages.

"An event like that is going to flood people's homes," Travis said. "It will cause problems in places where on a year like this year, they never see it, you know, any sort of flooding issues."

Maintaining the river

The levees surrounding the river in Dallas keep it from overflowing into most neighborhoods in the city's core. For decades they've been developed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, but parts of the system still haven't been built.

Officials say the city has been working on acquiring the land to complete the Lamar and Cadillac Heights levees near South Dallas. Those projects are expected to be completed within the next decade.

Sarah Standifer, director of Dallas Water Utilities, told KERA the city does year-round flood prevention maintenance in its roughly 39,000 acres of public land.

"The city has a two-fold approach, so we have proactive and preventative maintenance activities that we do within the drainage system," Standifer said.

That preventive maintenance includes cleaning out the city's pipes, creeks and inlets and conducting regular inspections in flood prone areas.

About a million people live in the floodplain along the Trinity, according to state planners. That includes neighborhoods in Dallas, Tarrant, Collin and Denton counties, along with rural communities where the river runs towards the gulf.



Pablo Arauz Peña / KERA

Levees along the Trinity River in Dallas keep it from flooding into most parts of the city's core.

Planning for the next major flood

Texas released its [first statewide flood plan in 2024](#), outlining [billions of dollars in needed flood mitigation projects](#). Two proposed projects along the Trinity are top ranked out of hundreds statewide based on factors like the number of people and structures at risk.

"It's really a comprehensive way of understanding what are the flood risks that the state faces, and then using a bottoms-up approach to find the best solutions to the flood risk that we identify," said Glenn Clingenpeel with the Trinity River Authority.

The authority is sponsoring a \$2 million project in partnership with the National Weather Service that would use data to forecast flooding along the Trinity basin. Clingenpeel said that will help figure out where rainfall is going to happen, how long it could rain and how intense it could be.

"We need to develop some of the infrastructure," he said. "And I don't mean hard infrastructure, I mean the technological infrastructure, the information infrastructure, to make this possible."

Another proposed project, sponsored by the Texas Nature Conservancy, would use

KERA
Hidden Brain

about \$750,000.

“These are like big holes in the ground that we mow once a week,” said Justin Kozak with the Texas Nature Conservancy. “They’ll fill up with water and then they empty. Instead of that, you can use that as a constructed wetland, still holds the same amount of water.”

He added the project could solve more than one problem — providing green space for recreation and storage for future water supply in case of drought.

Kozak said the region along the upper Trinity River basin in North Texas is one of the most critical of any river system in the state when it comes to flood preparation because of the growing population and vital infrastructure.

“We want to avoid the pain and suffering before it happens,” he said, “so that we can maintain these benefits there.”

Pablo Arauz Peña is KERA’s growth and infrastructure reporter. Got a tip? Email Pablo at parauzpena@kera.org.

KERA News is made possible through the generosity of our members. If you find this reporting valuable, consider [making a tax-deductible gift today](#). Thank you.

Tags

- News
- KERA News
- Trinity River
- flooding
- Central Texas Flooding
- Trinity River Authority
- Trinity River Levees
- infrastructure



Pablo Arauz Peña

Pablo Arauz Peña is the Growth and Infrastructure Reporter for KERA News.

[See stories by Pablo Arauz Peña](#)