

# **Committee on Resources,**

## **Subcommittee on National Parks, Recreation, & Public Lands**

[parks](#) - - Rep. Joel Hefley, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6207 - - (202) 226-7736

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### **Witness Statement**

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**STATEMENT OF STEPHEN FOX, RICE UNIVERSITY LECTURER (HOUSTON, TEXAS),  
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL  
PARKS, RECREATION AND PUBLIC LANDS, CONCERNING H.R. 1776, AUTHORIZING THE  
SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO STUDY THE SUITABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF  
ESTABLISHING THE BUFFALO BAYOU NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA IN HOUSTON, TEXAS**

**JULY 17, 2001**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee: thank you for inviting me to testify. I am Stephen Fox, an architectural historian, and a lecturer at the University of Houston and Rice University.

Buffalo Bayou merits study to determine the suitability of designating it a National Heritage Area.

Buffalo Bayou derives national historical significance from its role as a transportation artery. In the 1820s, when U.S. immigration to Texas began, it was recognized as providing the most reliable route for navigation into what was considered the "interior" of Texas. Buffalo Bayou is nationally significant in the area of Maritime History for the transformation of its lower sixteen miles between 1902 and 1914 into the Houston Ship Channel, which permits ocean-going ships to travel fifty miles inland from the Gulf of Mexico. The Houston Ship Channel is nationally significant in the area of Industry as the site of the largest concentration of petroleum refining and petrochemical production facilities in the United States. The Ship Channel portion of Buffalo Bayou is nationally significant in the area of Invention as the place where artificial rubber was first produced from butadiene during World War II.

Buffalo Bayou is nationally significant in the area of Military History because it is where the Battle of San Jacinto was fought on April 21, 1836. The Battle of San Jacinto, in which the army of the Anglo-Texan general Sam Houston, surprised and defeated the superior force of General Antonio López de Santa Ana, resulted in the independence of Texas from Mexico. Independence precipitated a sequence of historical events leading to the annexation of Texas by the United States in 1845, the U.S.-Mexican War, and the expansion of the United States into the northern half of Mexico in 1848.

Buffalo Bayou is nationally significant in the area of Exploration/Settlement because its importance as an artery of transportation and commerce led to the founding of the town of Houston in 1836, four months after the Battle of San Jacinto. It is significant in the area of Politics/Government because the Texas Legislature designated Houston provisional capital of the Republic in 1836.

Buffalo Bayou is nationally significant in the area of Community Planning and Development because it is what led the brothers A. C. and J. K. Allen to found the city of Houston at what they declared to be the head of navigation on the bayou. The bayou is significant for the cultural landscapes it traverses between South Shepherd Drive and the Turning Basin of the Ship Channel. These include the neighborhood of River

Oaks, a nationally significant example of the early twentieth-century planned garden suburb; and Buffalo Bayou Park, a linear park and parkway planned in the 1920s to connect River Oaks to the Civic Center in downtown Houston. Buffalo Bayou Park is bordered by landscapes and working class neighborhoods that preserve older settings: Glenwood Cemetery of 1871, the oldest professionally-designed landscape in Houston; the Sixth Ward Historic District, Houston's oldest intact neighborhood; the San Felipe Courts Historic District, a New Deal-era planned public housing community; and the Freedmen's Town Historic District in Fourth Ward, Houston's oldest African-American neighborhood.

In downtown Houston, Buffalo Bayou traverses the Main Street-Market Square Historic District, encompassing much of the original townsite; and warehouse districts that contain some of the oldest railroad alignments in Texas. Downstream from downtown Houston, Buffalo Bayou flows between the Second and Fifth Wards, which preserve sites relating to the cotton trade, wholesale trade, and oil tool manufacturing. Second Ward and Magnolia Park, just upstream from the Turning Basin, were neighborhoods in which Mexican immigrants first settled in Houston in the 1910s and 1920s.

Buffalo Bayou demonstrates its historic centrality to the independence of Texas, the founding and development of Houston and its port, and Houston's commercial, industrial, and demographic evolution. I commend Buffalo Bayou to you as worthy of study for designation as a National Heritage Area.

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