Thank you for joining us today. Ever since I was a young boy growing up in the farms and fields of West Texas, I have had a love for the outdoors and a deep desire to preserve the quality of our air, water and ecological habitats. Texas has several river systems that are a precious resource to this state, including the Trinity River, which stretches over 500 river miles and is the main water supply for Dallas, Fort Worth and Houston. Nearly nine million Texans live within close proximity of the Trinity River, and it meets the water needs of about 40 percent of the state’s population. Further, the Trinity River provides over 70% of Houston’s treated municipal water and 150 million gallons per day of untreated water to Ship Channel industries.

Much has been done in the last half of the 20th Century to restore the Trinity River to its natural grandeur as it existed in 1690 when it was discovered by Spanish explorers. Much more, however, remains to be done. That’s why today I am proud to announce a major initiative involving federal, state and local involvement that will build on many ongoing projects to improve the vitality and water quality of the Trinity River. The city of Houston, Harris county and surrounding counties have several major projects underway, and I know that water quality improvement and ecological restoration are a major focus of Mayor White and leaders in Harris County. Our objective is to work closely with the cities, private landowners, federal, and state agencies to build on the successful efforts of cities all along this great river.

Starting today, the State of Texas is pursuing a new environmental restoration initiative for the Trinity River by leveraging federal dollars for projects that improve water quality, hydrology, wetland restoration, hardwood reforestation, wildlife habitat, and voluntary landowner stewardship. As part of that effort, the state is dedicating more than $500,000 to kick off the initiative. Half of this money will be leveraged for projects in the urban regions of the basin including projects relating to storm water control, irrigation programs, and education. The remaining funds will be used to leverage federal dollars for Capacity Building Grants for the rural areas of the basin. This funding will help the Trinity Basin Conservation Foundation achieve its mission, which is, I quote, “to improve the quality of life, economic sustainability and ecological integrity areas associated with the Trinity River Basin through a coalition of local communities, NGO’s and stewards of private and public lands.” The
Foundation was a creation of local landowners, conservationists, and parks and wildlife advocates that had a vision for the Trinity River. They believe that through their collaborative cooperation, they could better care for the river to the benefit of everyone.

Through a strong collective voice, and the support of my office and congressional leaders, the Trinity River Basin Environmental Restoration project could leverage $20 – 30 million dollars in the next 3 to 5 years to develop a comprehensive water flow model with the Army Corps of Engineers, improve water quality, enhance wildlife habitat, and expand ecotourism opportunities. I want to stress that landowner participation will be voluntary. At the same time, there will be incentives in place that also make it attractive. Here is why: if Texans all along the Trinity River band together to fully protect its water quality and restore the river to its more pristine past, it will have a dramatic impact on birds and wildlife, ecotourism, and water quality.

I am pleased to announce that one of our finer institutions, Texas A&M University, will lead this effort and serve as the coordination arm of this effort. Dr. Allan Jones, the Director of the Texas Water Resources Institute at Texas A&M, is here to briefly discuss the scope of our initiative and the exciting prospects of the Trinity River. Before turning to Dr. Jones for his comments, let me recognize several of the people we expect to work with us in this endeavor. Mayor White, we are delighted you are helping us revive this great river. Kanand Brooks with the USDA State Conservationist’s Office in Bryan is here as well. Let me recognize Chairman Rod Pittman from the Texas Water Development Board, as well as Jack Hunt.

We have worked behind the scenes on this project for more than a year, putting together a strong coalition of agencies and foundations that have a vital role in making the Trinity River Basin a thriving ecosystem. Taking a lead role, as I mentioned earlier, is Dr. Allan Jones with Texas A&M University. I would like to ask Dr. Jones to share some comments.

Next I would like to introduce Ted Eubanks, who is with an organization called FERMATA, which promotes ecotourism.

I am glad to have with us today David Langford, a private landowner with the Texas Wildlife Association. David, please share some thoughts.

I would also like to give the opportunity to Mayor White to share any thoughts he may have.