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News Release

"We work together to build and maintain a community of the highest quality for present and future generations."

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Kirby Lake Nature Park

ABILENE, Texas - The City of Abilene and Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas are collaborating to create a nature play and educational area for visitors to Kirby Lake Park.

Workforce Solutions of West Central Texas recently presented \$200,000 to the City of Abilene to create a natural play and education facility in Abilene. The initial phase of the facility will focus on child development for ages 7 years and younger, however overall scope of the project will promote educational/recreational opportunities for all age groups.

The City of Abilene and Workforce Solutions first discussed the joint project in early June 2017 at which time Kirby Lake Park was selected as an ideal location for this endeavor. Key factors in the selection of this location were the growing interest in promoting natural outdoor activities such as hike and bike trails as well as bird watching venues.

Vista Planning & Design is currently drafting a master plan for a multi-phased project with the natural play area for young children being phase one. This phase will include natural features at the playscape site and a new accessible path through the adjacent woods with educational signage that leads to a lake inlet ideal for bird watching. The City of Abilene selected Vista Planning & Design, landscape architect and planner, due to their extensive involvement with similar projects.

Future phases of the project plan to include; a canopy walk that allows children to experience tree top ecosystems, sand pits where replica dinosaur bones may be discovered, bouldering hillsides, prairie and wildflower restoration, organic walls, and a bird blind for viewing wildlife habitats.

An essential component of the project will be the training of 100+ early childhood caregivers and educators using the nationally-recognized, Growing Up WILD early childhood education program. Growing Up WILD includes over 400 field-tested, science, art, math and literacy experiences that encourage connections to nature as well as hands-on learning to improve school readiness.

The City of Abilene and Workforce Solutions officials are hopeful the launching of this project will inspire involvement from other organizations and individuals interested in developing and

promoting a natural outdoor education, science, and recreational area. The beauty of such an exciting project is the multitude of experiences it has the potential to create for citizens and visitors, no matter the age, to learn, play and enjoy.

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