



BRAZOS BEND BUNCH BUGLE

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

On Sunday, February 26, 2012, State Representative Jessica Farrar wrote an article in the *Houston Chronicle* addressing funding for Texas State Parks. It is my hope that the majority of Texans are as much in agreement with State Representative Farrar's comments as I am. On February 28 there was a follow-up Editorial to State Representative Farrar's comments. The Editorial supported her comments and spoke for change in the way funds are diverted from the originally designated function.



Please take time to read this material and encourage your friends to do the same thing. Below are links to these two articles. If clicking on the link does not open it correctly, copy and past the link into your browser. Be sure to get the complete URL.

<http://www.chron.com/default/article/Stop-diverting-park-money-to-unrelated-state-3360026.php>

<http://www.chron.com/default/article/Editorial-Money-for-parks-ought-to-go-to-parks-3365215.php>

You have come together in a great way to work toward a new Environmental Education Center at Brazos Bend State Park. The groups that have been defined to make this happen are already actively working to plan their actions. We do not yet have permission from TPWD Austin to begin to look for funding, but we will be very ready when permission is given. If you have not joined a group, you are missing an opportunity to be a part of a long term project that will be a much needed addition to Brazos Bend State Park.

Once again our monthly meeting is on the second Saturday of the month at 5:30 PM. Please join us and help direct our activities and support of the Park.

Offie Walker

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BBEEC NEEDS YOU

by Anna Dell Williamson
Scribe

On January 14, we had a special meeting to introduce the membership to the plans for a new Nature Center, the Brazos Bend Environmental Education Center (BBEEC), for approval and implementation. Dave Armstrong and Mike Manley presented the program on how the center will be used and how we need to go about bringing this plan to completion. The organization unanimously approved the project and pledged support.

We are waiting for approval from TPWD before we begin any public promotion of the project, but in the meantime, we have several task forces and work groups that are working to have the plans as complete as possible, so we can get started as soon as we receive formal clearance.

At the meeting, members were given the opportunity to sign up for the various task forces. If you were unable to make the meeting, or just didn't know for sure what part you wanted to take in the project, here is your chance to sign up. Below is a listing of the task forces and the working groups within each one, and what they will be working on to prepare for our future campaign for the building. You are invited to contact the Task Force Champion if you are interested in working on one or more task forces. They will inform you of when the meetings are held and what the current needs are.

This is a great opportunity to be a part of something that will belong to BBSP for many years to come and that will impact visitors of all ages who visit the park for relaxation, recreation, nature adventures, and learning.

TASK FORCES AND WORK GROUPS

BBEEC Steering Committee

Champion: Dave Armstrong

The Steering Committee coordinates the activities of the three task forces and facilitates communication among them and with staff and the membership.

Brazos Bend Environmental Education Center Task Force:

Champion: Chuck Duplant.

The centerpiece of this plan is the construction and operation of a new BBSP Environmental Education Center. The volunteer organization's building committee has been leading this activity, and will continue its work under the new heading of the EEC Task force. The Task force will interface with all TPWD and outside resources on design and construction of the BBEEC. It will work with TPWD to establish requirements for design, sustainability, etc., and will oversee all aspects of building, equipping, opening and operating the center.

Program Development Task Force:

Champion: Hannah Meddaugh

This TF will determine user requirements for the BBEEC and develop expanded educational programs.

Visitor Experience Work Group: Define strategies, and develop programs to enhance visitor experience both in the short term, by enhancements to current activities, and in the long term through the new EEC.

Education Work Group: Define education objectives for key audiences, define strategies and develop programs in collaboration with other interested resources. Define resource requirements for the new BBEEC.

Conservation Work Group: The new EEC can serve as a catalyst for supporting TPWD's goal of enabling science-based stewardship of natural and cultural resources. The work group will define areas in which the BBSPVO can support and expand staff efforts, and will define strategies and develop programs to expand scientific research opportunities and provide access to research conducted on site.

Partnership Taskforce:

Champion: Nelda Gay

The Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization has committed itself to the goal of raising the funds necessary to build and operate the new BBEEC. In order to do so, it will undertake a variety of revenue raising activities, under the Partnership Task Force, which has three workgroups.

Private Donors Group: This group will focus on corporate and high net worth individual donors, on developing a community-based group of individual financial supporters, and on continuing park-centered programs to generate revenues

Foundations, Nature & Conservation Organizations, and Government Group: This group will focus on grant opportunities to support educational, conservation and research programs. It will also seek to develop local community and political support.

Marketing and Public Relations Group: The group will support the efforts of the other Partnership Task Force work groups, and the other task forces, by developing marketing and communications materials. We particularly need more people in this group to begin to review past and existing materials and develop new ones.

Join one or more of the task forces to help us build the best Environmental Education Center in the state. We need your help to accomplish this.

FEBRUARY MEETING NOTES

President Offie Walker called the meeting to order on February 11, 2012. There were 19 volunteers, 3 VITs and 2 staff members present. Offie thanked Nancy Lynn Jones, Cindy Peterson, and Carol Ramsayer for dinner. The minutes of the January meeting were approved as posted.

Financial Report: Treasurer **Bob Kowalewski** brought the financial report and presented the Budget for 2012. The budget was accepted as presented.

The following **purchase requests** were approved:

- ✓ Heat seal laminator request by Sharon Hanzik, from the General Fund.
- ✓ Soil sampling for the new nature center from the Building Fund. This is for planning the building foundation work.
- ✓ Wooden posts and mounting blocks for native bees (bee block), requested by Chuck Duplant. These will be installed near the Observatory path.
- ✓ Electric motor to repair the alligator skull exhibit, requested by David Heinicke.
- ✓ 5 ft animal catch pole for stray dogs, raccoons., etc., requested by David Heinicke.
- ✓ Request by Steve Killian for deisel fuel and pump rental to pump up Elm lake (24 inches) and 40-Acre lake (18 inches) to normal depths after the drought. This will benefit habitat and visitor experience. Funds will come from restricted "Equipment rental" fund. It will take approximately 60 days to pump up both lakes at the same time. If we get lots of rain, the cost will go down.

Committee Reports:

Gift Shop – Beth Debenport thanked the Tuesday/Thursday Maintenance Crew for help with the renovation of the display area and work room in the Gift Shop. The new cashier counter, with a granite top matching the Nature Center desk, will be donated and installed by Robert Aaron. We came out under budget by taking advantage of a Container Store sale. We will be adding a new chair and wall fan soon. Diane Carpenter headed the project and coordinated the installations.

Outreach - Judy Strauss reported that Brazoria Day is coming up March 3. We usually have nearly 1000 people attend this event. The Children’s Festival in Richmond will be March 24 at the Ft. Bend Museum, from noon to 5:00 PM. Signup will be on the special events calendar soon.

Building Committee - Chuck Duplant

We haven’t heard back from Gordon Baumfalk about a meeting with him in February. We sent him some proposed changes on the BBEEC in December.

Wildflower plantings - Chuck Duplant

We have completed seeding flower propagation fields on the access roads to the Observatory. The donated seeds were approved, or seeds from flowers in park were used. This area will hopefully become habitat for native bees and butterflies. We are going to make some bee boxes to attract Mason bees. We may put one near the Nature Center with a plexiglass covering to be able to observe the bees. The boxes will be just inside the tree line, so mowers won’t have to worry about them. The Mason bees don’t sting. We might be able to add this area to the Creekfield Hike or to have flower hikes. The seeds were donated by Tom Solomon, for prairie restorations around Houston, . Beth Debenport, Mike Manley the Jespersens, and Pam Tatge and her sons helped with the seeding. Future plans include the pocket prairie across from Pilant Slough. We are also getting willow cuttings to plant at 40-Acre and Elm Lakes. We have done this for three years, and some are taking roog around 40-Acre Lake and in some natural areas. More will be planted the end of March.

Woodyard - Chuck Duplant

Chuck reported that we have been splitting and bundling wood. There are nine cords in the wood yard. Sales are pretty good right now and picking up with the cooler weather.

Pete Hart - Maintenance

The Maintenance cress put in 183 hours las month. VITs are welcome Tuesday and Thursday from 8:00 to noon. They worked on the bridge on Pilant Slough and helped with the Gift Shop remodeling, among other things. The crew can use more help. There are usually four to five workers each time.

Cindy Peterson - Volunteer T-shirts

T-shirt orders will be going out soon. Forms are upstairs in the volunteer lounge. Leave cash or check in the order envelope and give it to staff, officers or Gift Shop chairs to put in the file cabinet.

Memorials

Steve Killian reported that we have a request for a Brian Nelson Memorial Platform and are waiting for official approval. It will be a 10x12 viewing platform at the Y intersection of Elm Lake and New Horseshoe Lake.

Anna Dell Williamson - New Volunteer Training

We have a great group of 15 VITs. Thanks for all the help from the organization.

The meeting was adjourned.

STAFF REPORTS

STEVE KILLIAN
PARK SUPERINTENDENT



Steve reported that this was the best January ever. Revenue and visitation were up over 40%.

TPWD Director Carter Smith has requested \$4 million to help parks bridge the funding gap. It was brought up that the license plate donation plan is not working. There is supposed to be a \$5 opt-in donation when renewing your license plates, but it is not on the forms, and tax offices are not aware of it. We might be able to make some changes in the procedure to generate more funds.

Park hosts Leo and Bob have completed the “Gator Shack” at Headquarters, which will allow us to open 2 lines for admission on busy days. This enclosed area has the necessary equipment for collecting and recording admissions. This should aid in getting visitors and volunteers through the line faster. The building was constructed from materials left over from last year.

Also at Headquarters, the gift shop is expanding its storage facilities, and the front desk is being remodeled to create stand-up stations all the way across. This will be finished soon.

All the John Deere Gators are now equipped with roll over bars and meet safety requirements. Be sure to wear seatbelts when using a Gator.

The Assistant Superintendent has been selected and hired. Jacob Dement, from Lake Texana SP, has accepted the position and should begin March 1. He is married and has one small child and one due in April. He is also a law enforcement officer and interpreter. We express our thanks to Ted Stevens for serving as Acting Assistant. He has helped the park immensely. His internship could last another year and a half.

The TPWD Commission Meeting on January 26 went very well. Offie presented the keys to the two new Gators to Steve. BBSP has had the opportunity to speak to the Commission twice in 15 months, and we will continue to speak to them. BBSP can maintain and grow only with volunteer help. Park Staff clocked 36,000 hours last fiscal year (with vacations they clocked 32,000). The Volunteer Organization clocked 21,000 hours and Park Hosts served 11,000 hours. The Organization provided needed funding, as well. By 2060, it is estimated that the Texas population will double, and TWPD is trying to secure new lands and is adding some new parks, such as Palo Pinto Mountain near Dallas, and Devil’s River. TPWD is trying to move forward. The population will double, but the land won’t.

Offie has spoken with TPWD Deputy Director Scott Boruff. Maybe we can start fundraising for the BBEEC in a year. Offie has invited Scott to visit us.

Thanks for all the volunteers do.



SHARON HANZIK
INTERPRETIVE RANGER, VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

We recently hosted a regional interpretive meeting, and Walt Bailey pointed out that our volunteers don’t just clean restrooms and mow grass. We are actually interpreters, lead hikes, and interface with the public.

The Fall VIT class has just about completed the training program. There were nine graduates, one early dropout, one later dropout, and one remaining.

Moody Gardens invited us to a Behind the Scenes tour of the Aquarium which was very nice. They

accommodated all of our group in the program. We have been swapping field trips with them for quite a while. Their Youth Volunteer summer program participants come to BBSP as a reward, and they then invite us to a field trip there.

The last day of current training is next Saturday. That is also an Outdoor Family Camping weekend.

School groups are scheduling for March. See the Special Events Calendar to sign up for school hikes in March. If you have a problem with the calendar, contact someone for help.

Spring Break is March 12-16. It is like 9 busy Saturdays in a row. There will be lots of volunteer opportunities weekends and weekdays.

David has gone to Big Bend to help with a mountain bike race and will be gone two weekends.

Doris Mager's programs are not filling up, but she is doing well. Programs were scheduled for Friday, Saturday and Sunday. (Photo by Jo Ann Davis.)



CONGRATULATIONS



MARCH BIRTHDAYS

Willie Anderson (Emeritus)
Rita Cooper (Emeritus)
Joan Jackson (Emeritus)
Herb Mann (Emeritus)
Jennifer Parent
Ted Stevens (Staff)

MARCH ANNIVERSARIES

Peter Guzman
Rosemary and Bobby Kennedy
Glen and Maureen Kilgore
Lara Malone
Dawn and Oscar Tejero

APRIL BIRTHDAYS

Leah Malone
Richard Taylor (Staff)
Ali Zvada (VIT)

APRIL ANNIVERSARIES

Virginia and Charlie Harrison
Jim and Jacqueline North
Robert (VIT) and Tammy Zurawski

Bald Eagle

Chuck Duplant
Feb. 12, 2012



NATURE CENTER REPORT FEBRUARY 2012

Below are the totals of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs for February 1-29, 2012. There was one Monday holiday, President's Day, February 20..

PROGRAMS	TOTALS
NATURE CENTER ATTENDANCE February, 2012 -4,468 February 2011 - 5,340 February 2010 - 4,320 February 2009 - 5,950 February 2008 - 4,827 February 2007 - 2,247	Saturdays (4) - 1,575 High,648 (2/25) Average: 394
	Sundays (4) – 1,566 High, 660 (2/19) Average: 392
	Weekdays (21) - 1,327 High,435 (2/20) Average: 63
CREEKFIELD HIKES (10)	130
SPECIAL - BIRDS OF PREY(3)	398
WILDLIFE VIEWING (3)	160
REPTILES	140
BEAK & FEET	53
POND LIFE	43
OUTREACH (2)	63
OTHER PROGRAMS (9): bird hike, photo, creatures of the night, crunch & munch, demonstration station	248
TOTAL VISITORS SERVED IN HIKES AND PROGRAMS	5461
VOLUNTEER HOURS	INTERPRETATION = 1234 MAINTENANCE = 729 TOTAL HOURS = 1963
PARK ATTENDANCE FEBRUARY 2012	Total 11,687 Day use 8,233 (70%) Overnight 3,454 (30%) NC Visitors 4,468 (38%)

FEBRUARY MAINTENANCE REPORT

The Tuesday/Thursday work crews clocked 197.5 hours on the following tasks.

Wood Yard:

Split, bundled and delivered wood to the kiosks
Picked up and rebundled wood rack that fell over

Mowing and Landscaping:

Trimmed viewing area at Hale Lake gazebo
Cleared Hale Lake viewing areas of underbrush

Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

Cleaned up limbs from overflow loop
Trimmed Creekfield Forest Trail

Equipment Maintenance:

Replaced leaky hose on splitter
Repaired flat on Gator
Repaired a pair of chain saw safety chaps that had lost a buckle

General Maintenance

Salvaged picnic bench that had been under water on a sand bar under the Hale Lake fishing pier

Special Projects:

Installed plexiglass in Gift Shop
Installed shelving in Gift Shop storeroom



COME SEE THE NEW GIFT SHOP

by Anna Dell Williamson

The BBSPVO Gift Shop in the Nature Center has been remodeled. Merchandise is displayed on new shelves and drawers, and the center display has been removed, allowing for a more spacious look and feel. The cashier's desk has been remodeled to include better storage and more space for the cashier. The storage area has also been rearranged. Come in and see the changes. Better yet, sign up to work in the GS.

The Gift Shop Committee, chaired by Beth Debenport, keeps the GS stocked with inventory and handles day to day business. Members are Leigh Allen, Diane Carpenter, Beth Debenport, Debbie and Kent Fewell, Nancy Lynn Jones, Judy Strauss, and Anna Dell Williamson. They are always ready to welcome new members to the committee.



Helping in the GS is one of the ways to fulfill your required quarterly hours. Volunteers are asked to sign up to be the cashier for two-hour shifts. Committee members provide backup to help the cashier with questions, find inventory, assist with any problems that arise, train new cashiers, stock merchandise, mark prices, help with opening and closing, etc. You might not see their name on the volunteer calendar schedule, but someone will be available on weekends and holidays.. If you do see one of their names on the schedule at a time you would like to work the GS, contact them and see if you can take that shift.

On weekdays, we need people to keep the GS open from 11 AM to 3 PM. Weekdays (except Spring Break, Thanksgiving week and Christmas break) are usually quieter than weekends, but there has been increased weekday visitation. We have fairly consistent workers on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, but we would like to see Tuesday and Thursday covered regularly as well. If two people select the same day, they can work out a schedule between them to keep the GS covered without having to commit to being at the park every week. Look on the calendar to see who usually is working on the day you would like to work, and contact them to see if they would like to work out a trade-off arrangement.



In the past, weekday cashiers have been asked to not use the computer for their shifts . If you want to use the computer on weekdays, contact a committee member to discuss computer training. For those not interested in using the computer, a daily report form may be used. Committee members will enter the sales later. Thank you for your support of the Gift Shop.

Thank you!

to **Nancy Lynn Jones, Cindy Peterson, and Carol Ramsayer** for dinner for the February meeting.

to **Tuesday/Thursday maintenance crew** for removing old shelving in the Gift Shop to get ready for new display items, for hauling off the unneeded items, and for installing new shelving in the work room.

to **Robert Aaron** for donating the labor and most of the materials for the new cashier counter in the Gift Shop.

to **Diane Carpenter** for coordinating all of the renovation of the Gift Shop. Diane spent hours measuring, planning, and contacting contractors to get the job done with a minimum of time the Gift Shop had to be closed.

to **Ted Stevens** for serving as Assistant Superintendent while we were looking for a replacement for Chris Bishop. You have helped the park immensely.

to **Judy Strauss, Woody Scott and Jim North** for working the Brazoria Heritage Day Outreach on March 3.

to **Dave Armstrong** for the outreach program for the Rosenberg Exchange Club.

to **Carrie Sample** for compiling the records of visitors who signed the guest register in the Nature Center.

to **Cindy Peterson** for ordering volunteer t-shirts for the group.

VISITORS TO OUR PARK, 2011

by Carrie Sample

We had visitors from 46 of the 50 states. Almost 2,000 from Texas visitors signed our guest register. You would think that our neighboring states would lead with the most visitors - but this was not so. Ohio had the most with 92 visitors, followed by California, Colorado, Washington, Utah, Wisconsin and Louisiana.

Visitors from 48 foreign countries signed in. Canada, England, Germany, Netherlands, France and Norway led with the most visitors.

ALLIGATOR STUDY AT BBSP

from David Heinicke

Cord Eversole has started his alligator study at the park. As part of his study, he is tagging alligators with colored and/or numbered tags. I have sent two photos of the tags so that you will know what to look for and how to respond to questions from visitors. One tag is a small colored tag on the back of the neck. The color of the tag will correspond to which lake or area the alligator was tagged in. The idea is to see how much these alligators move from lake to lake. As soon as each lake's color has been determined, I will let you know.



The other tag is a numbered tag on the tail and can be used to identify a specific alligator. The tags are not permanent but we don't know exactly how long they will last.

I'll keep you informed as more details develop. Thanks for your support,

SPRING BREAK MARSH MADNESS

Ed. Note: Below are items taken from a News Release sent to local newspapers by Sharon Hanzik. This information may be helpful to volunteers as you interface with the many visitors we expect during this week of nine Saturdays.

The park normally offers at least 3 free programs every Saturday and Sunday but during this very busy spring break week staff and volunteers will offer at least 3 free programs or hikes every day. Visitors can take advantage of this “marsh madness” for nine straight days from March 10 – 18, 2012.

Programs and hikes will cover various topics including snakes, owls, butterflies, story time, wetland birds and of course everyone’s favorite “marsh monster” the American alligator. Alligators will be ready to fatten up after a long period of inactivity and loss of appetite during the winter months. Visitors are sure to see plenty of basking alligators around Elm and 40-Acre Lakes. The forest will also be a treat for hikers who visit the Red Buckeye Trail. They may witness the beginning of the blooming season of this native under-story tree. This trail offers the best views of the Brazos River. Brazos Bend is also home to one of the few remaining remnants of tall grass prairies in the state. The prairie is one of the best areas to view and photograph wildflowers including the spectacular spider lily. Photo by Steve Killian.



Of particular note this year, is an “odd duck”. Photographer Chris Hirsch photographed a hybrid teal that is most likely a cross between both a green wing and blue wing teal. This is indeed a rarity. It was first photographed Saturday, March 3rd in Elm Lake but has since taken up residence in nearby Old Horseshoe Lake. Come see it while you can as it is a migratory species due to leave sometime this spring.”

The Nature Center will be open to the public each day from 9:00 am – 5:00 pm. The center interprets the park’s varied ecosystems and includes live reptile displays that include six-month old baby alligators as well as both venomous and non-venomous snake species. For detailed information about Marsh Madness programs and other park information, visit www.brazosbend.org.

LENDING A HAND TO DESERVING KIDS

(Ed. Note: Our own Outreach Coordinator Judy Strauss was featured in a newsletter item from her employer in January 2012. Judy works as a dental assistant in Sugar Land. We have already reported on this Outreach event, but we wanted to share Judy's recognition for her volunteer work. Here are some of the highlights of the article.)



Some of you may not know that our own Judy Strauss volunteers regularly at Brazos Bend State Park working in the alligator and reptile program. Over the holidays, Judy was invited to share a day working with kids and families from the Kids Unlimited Foundation. The Foundation is a non-profit organization formed to benefit children stricken with cancer. The event was held at the Kid's ranch on Fruge road near the Medical Center. You can find more information at www.kidsunlimited.org.

So what's the moral of the story? Simply put, it's this: Whether you're doing something good for kids in a troubled situation or taking care of patients, it's always true that the more you give, the more you receive. We're proud of Judy and the contribution she makes at Brazos Bend. We're proud that she had a part in such a great day for children and families suffering under the burden of cancer.

A big thanks to Judy, whose selfless giving of her time during the busy holiday season has brought this worthwhile cause to our attention. Stop in at Brazos Bend State Park on FM 762 in Needville, TX on a weekend some time. You may find that in addition to the many wonderful patients at the office, Judy also has a special way with alligators, 70 teeth and all!

In another recent outreach event, Judy, Woody Scott and Jim North hosted visitors to the BBSP booth on Saturday, March 3, at the Brazoria Heritage Day Celebration. The booth was open from 11-4, and over 1,000 visitors were expected.

ROSENBERG EXCHANGE CLUB OUTREACH

by Dave Armstrong

On February 9, 2012, I responded to an invitation to make an alligator talk to the Rosenberg Exchange Club. Thirty-eight people were present and we had a jolly good time learning about the uniqueness of the American Alligator. In spite of varying degrees of mental acuity, everyone enjoyed the discussion and the chance to get up close to a baby alligator. I was amazed at their attention span and willingness to answer questions. The prize went to a young man who was able connect sun, heat, and battery to explain what a solar battery was. He received a thunderous ovation from the group. It was a good day for all, and I resolved to build a new BBEEC so that we can increase our educational capabilities to a larger and expanded audience.



ORNITHOLOGY GROUP AT BBSP

by Carrie Sample



Volunteer Bill Godley hosted the Ornithology Group of Houston's Outdoor Nature Club at Brazos Bend on Jan. 21. It turned out to be a misty day, but that did not dampen the spirits of the 25 members of the club who turned out for this bird hike. The hike began at 40 Acre Lake and later went to Elm Lake. The Elm Lake's Viewing Platform was an instant hit, as the Summer Tanager and other small birds seemed to appear as if on cue.

STRESS RELIEVING TIPS FOR VITS

by Mike Sanderson

(Ed. note: This begins a series of three articles of advice to VITs, that will probably be helpful to all volunteers. Topics are "How to Tackle the Creekfield Hike", "Gotta' Have Gators", and "Other Musings for Procrastinators and Type A's". Thanks, Mike, for taking the time to try to ease the anxiety of hike leaders and program presenters.)

I was a VIT in the February 2011 class with a large group of folks. Most of us made it through and are full members of the BBSP Volunteer Organization. Some of us got through very quickly and others took a more measured approach. In talking with a number of my classmates and others whom I've mentored over the last year, two components of the VIT training seem to cause the most anxiety and dread: The Creekfield Hike and The Gotta Have Gators presentation. Some of the stress comes from people's fear of speaking in front of groups and from the appearance that all the other volunteers know so much more than a VIT might know first starting out. If you have even a little bit of Type A personality or any tinge of perfectionism, you can stress yourself out very quickly.

The first three training days of VIT class are packed with new information and new people. You get a huge manual with all sorts of brochures, documents, and guides. You have days of speakers with expert knowledge and years of experience at the park. If you're like I was on the last day of class, you're probably wondering "How will I ever get through it all and complete my Phase 1 and Phase 2 requirements?"

The Creekfield Hike - Or, What if Everyone on the Hike Knows More Than I Do?

I had a great mentor during my VIT training who is very knowledgeable and does an awesome and entertaining Creekfield Hike. That added an additional level of stress to doing my first hike because I didn't want to fail to meet his expectations, real or imagined – that perfectionist thing I mentioned. I did the Jig Saw Hike and didn't fall completely on my face and got the sense that it could indeed be done. I did my two follow-along hikes and tried to digest all the great info in the complete Creekfield Hike manual. As I rapidly completed all my other Phase 1 and 2 requirements, I still had no real confidence that I could pull together all the info possible and not have the Creekfield Hike take two hours, or worse, have the participants trail off in information overload. Then about a week before I was scheduled to lead my first hike on my own, I came across one of those multiple brochures in the VIT Training Manual that I hadn't looked at since the first day of class.

The "Self-Guided Creekfield Hike/Scavenger Hunt" was just sitting there, folded up in one of the page protectors. Intrigued, I opened it up. There, to my surprise, was an 8.5 x 11 page folded in half with concise interpretations of each of the key features of the Creekfield Trail. There were even questions I could ask hike participants to make the hike an interactive experience. A little note at the bottom said the author was Sharon Hanzik, so I knew this had to be a good thing. Could it really be this easy? There was even an answer sheet. My anxiety level dropped a little.

So, here's the way I decided to tackle the Creekfield Hike. I took a walk on my own one morning with the guide in hand. I practiced my introduction and rules at the Nature Center. I talked about the trees and the sundial and then moved on to the first set of animal tracks on the Creekfield Trail. From there I followed the guide as a script. I practiced giving a brief intro and interpretation from the guide at each station along the trail, and then asked the questions from the guide to the imaginary folks on my hike (those imaginary folks are with me everywhere by the way...). Already knowing the answers made me feel a lot more confident interpreting for my imaginary participants. When it came time to do my first hike, it went well. I found I didn't ramble on too long at one spot, and I was able to feel confident my real participants got a good and informative interpretive hike.

The "Self-Guided Creekfield Hike/Scavenger Hunt" will not cover everything you may encounter on any given day on a hike around Creekfield, but it is much more condensed and easier to get started with than with the larger Creekfield Hike guide. It will help you build confidence in a short time and help provide a consistent experience for the hike participants. As you grow more confident, you can use more and more information from the complete Creekfield Guide as you need it. Remember, each of us makes the Creekfield Hike their own and

a little different from others based on our knowledge and unique interests. After a very short while, you'll be able to change it up and ad lib on your own.

The Creekfield Hike is one of the most important things we do and we need more volunteers who are able to do hikes. There are times when we have large groups of visitors at the park, and there is a need for multiple hike leaders. Sharon will send out an email with a request, and sometimes there aren't enough volunteers who can help out because of personal schedules or other obligations. I find that if I need to lead a hike on short notice, and I haven't done one in a while, I can review the "Self-Guided Creekfield Hike/Scavenger Hunt" in about 10-15 minutes and be able to lead a fun and informative hike without a lot of stress. The "Self-Guided Creekfield Hike/Scavenger Hunt" can be found on the BBSP website at the following links:

Without answers (print out double-sided on 8.5 x 11 paper and fold in half)

<http://www.brazosbend.org/parkinfo/CreekfieldGuide.pdf>

Leader's Guide with answers (print out double-sided on 8.5 x 11 paper and fold in half)

<http://www.brazosbend.org/parkinfo/CreekfieldLeadersGuide.pdf>

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- March 30 Bird hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake restroom building
- March 31 BBEEC Conservation Group meeting, 2:00 PM (Hannah Meddaugh)

- April 6 Bird hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake restroom building, "Migration Madness" - BBSP and Quintana (optional, after lunch)
- April 7 Brazos River Pickers, 5:00 PM - 7:00 PM
- April 13 Bird hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake restroom building, "Migration Madness" - BBSP and Quintana (optional, after lunch)
- April 14 Budget and Executive Meetings, 3:00 PM
Regular Business Meeting, 5:30 PM (Supper, 5:00 PM)
- April 15 Bird hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake restroom building
- April 20 Bird hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake restroom building, "Migration Madness" - BBSP and Quintana (optional, after lunch)
- April 27 Bird hike, 8:00 AM, 40-Acre Lake restroom building, "Migration Madness" - BBSP and Quintana (optional, after lunch)



GATORMOBILE ON A ROLL

by Woody Scott

Granddaughter Kayla competed in the Awana Pinewood Derby in Needville recently. Check out her entry.

VULTURES AND ALLIGATORS

by Rick Dashnau

January 22, 2012-- While walking past the water station at Elm Lake, I noticed a large group of vultures on the ground between the trail and the lake. I thought this was strange, so I moved slowly towards them and observed what they were doing. As I got closer, I noticed that 3 or 4 alligators were watching the vultures, or whatever had caught the vultures' attention. The vultures nearest the water were watching the alligators. The alligators seemed to be paying attention to the vultures. Then, some of the vultures near the alligator started pulling at the grass and poking the ground with their beaks. Occasionally they seemed to be tossing grass or dirt towards the alligators. This "standoff" continued for some time, but was finally broken off when a park visitor rode a bicycle past the flock of vultures. The vultures flew off, but just to the nearest island on Elm Lake. When I examined the ground where the Vultures had been gathered, I couldn't see or smell anything dead.

A few hours later, I found out that an alligator or alligators had been chewing on the carcass of a feral hog for at least a few days. The alligators in the area of Elm Lake between pier 6 and pier 5 were moving around a lot--swimming back and forth between the islands and the banks near the trail. While looking down the line of islands, I noticed a large alligator standing on one of them, chewing on something large. I'd found the alligator with the carcass! I hurried over in time to see the alligator on one of the islands, alone, tossing the carcass, and then crushing it--as alligators do with large prey that has bones. A vulture landed on the island, near the alligator. Then another vulture. And another...and more, until a group of vultures surrounded the alligator. The vultures slowly moved closer to the alligator...starting to crowd around it. The alligator stood up with the carcass (actually just the head of the hog), and high-walked into the water. As the alligator swam away, the vultures began picking at the dirt and grass where the alligator had been holding and shaking the hog carcass. It seemed that fragments or even just droplets from the carcass caused the area to smell like dead hog--and the vultures (and alligators) were attracted to this.

Meanwhile, the other alligators tried to take the hog's head from the alligator that had it. However, that alligator was able to submerge and confuse the carcass thieves. It climbed up onto another island to try again to swallow the hog's head. Again, it chomped on the hog. And then the vultures landed on the island, and gathered around the alligator. One by one the vultures sidled closer to the alligator. While the alligator was resting after a bit of chewing, some of the vultures moved in and grabbed at the hog's head while it was still in the alligator's mouth! They actually pulled a piece off the head before the alligator moved into the water again where it was chased by the other alligators. Finally, the alligator moved around the end of one of the islands, and was able to almost close its jaws entirely around the remainder of the hog. The vultures stopped harassing it, and the other alligators couldn't see it.

The Black Vulture (*Coragyps atratus*) is called "New World" vulture, along with the Turkey Vulture (*Cathartis aura*). Recent studies have genetically and morphologically linked these vultures to the Storks, such as the Wood Stork. (One study can be found here: <http://www.pnas.org/content/91/11/5173.full.pdf>). Besides certain physiological similarities, the two types share some behaviors--such as "urohidrosis (or urohydrosis). This is the act of wetting the bare surfaces of the legs with liquid waste in order to allow the evaporation of the waste to cause cooling through the skin.

To see Rick's video of these events, go to www.rickubis.com/rick/vultures_01_22_12_1.wmv and www.rickubis.com/rick/vultures_01_22_12_2.wmv



MOUNTAIN BIKING IN TEXAS STATE PARKS PICKING UP STEAM

Mountain bikers throughout the state – from novices to experts — are increasingly pedaling the numerous trails found at more than 40 Texas state parks. From beach and woodland road rides to hair-curling downhill descents in mountain and Hill Country parks, state parks from El Paso to Mustang Island offer bikers of all skill levels a multitude of diverse mountain biking adventures.

“Many trails in Texas state parks provide great opportunities for all levels of mountain-bike riders to test and develop their biking skills, get a good workout, refresh their mind and spirits, spend family and friend time together and experience the great outdoors,” says avid mountain biker Dan Sholly, Deputy Director of Texas state parks. “Big Bend Ranch State Park, in particular, is developing into the mountain-biking Mecca of Texas.”

State park biking trails range in length from an easy, two-mile, multiuse trail at Mexia’s Fort Parker State Park Site to more than 200 miles of diverse trails snaking through desert mountains and canyons at 310,000-acre Big Bend Ranch State Park just outside of Presidio. Bring your own bike or rent one at the park’s Visitors Center.

Mountain bikers new to the sport might consider hitting the flat, sometimes paved bike trails at state parks as Brazos Bend, Fairfield Lake and South Llano River State Park. Bikers may want to seek out one of the rails-to-trails tracks at Caprock Canyons and Lake Mineral Wells, or scenic lakeside trails along the 10-mile Ray Roberts Lake Greenbelt Corridor, the 10-mile Fort Richardson Lost Creek Trailway, or the 13-mile Lake Somerville Trailway. The outstanding trail system at Cedar Hill State Park near Dallas draws legions of mountain bikers, too.

Pick up a copy of Bike Texas brochure on sale at a number of state parks or download a PDF version of the brochures at: http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_k0700_0715.pdf. You also can find a wealth of information about mountain biking destinations and resources by visiting the mountain biking pages on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department website.

And there are now close to 20 short videos showcasing mountain bike opportunities at different Texas state parks on TPWD’s YouTube Channel. These videos are grouped under the channel’s Biking in Texas State Parks playlist. Here is information on the BBSP video:

Mountain Biking at Brazos Bend State Park

Get your helmet and ride! Head out with park ranger David Heinicke at Brazos Bend State Park near Houston, a park with miles and miles of trails with something for any rider, including alligators. URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXKe0DQqkQ>.

VOLUNTEERS IN TRAINING

VIT’s took a cold prairie hike as part of their February training. Pictured are Art Olson, Robert Zurawski, Richard Bosart, Ali Zvada, Barbara Willy, Alejandro Davila, Helen Wright, Mike Fisher, Gracie Miller, Saerah Miller, Austin Hager, Diana Platzek, John Dikeman and Tess Knell. Art and Tess were unable to complete training, but will join us again in September. Not shown is Aaron Millhench.

Photo by Chuck Duplant. A larger version is posted in the Nature Center. Get to know our VITs.



Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife
21901 FM 762
Needville, TX 77461

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NEXT MEETING
SATURDAY, APRIL 14, 2012
5:30 PM, NATURE CENTER



FIRST CLASS MAIL

REGULAR VOLUNTEER EVENTS

Creekfield Hikes	Every Saturday and Sunday at 10:00 AM, led by volunteers
Photo Hikes	First Saturday of each month
Volunteer meeting	Second Saturday of each month at 5:30 PM, supper at 5:00 PM
Bird Hikes	See schedule in calendar

BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION OFFICERS

President:	Offie Walker
Vice-President:	Mary Lockwood
Secretary	Belinda DiMarcello
Treasurer:	Bob Kowalewski
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The **Brazos Bend Bunch Bugle** is the newsletter of the Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization, A.K.A. The Brazos Bend Bunch. It is distributed monthly to volunteers through the BBSPVO web site. For further information on this newsletter or the volunteer program, contact David Heinicke or Sharon Hanzik at Brazos Bend State Park, phone 979-553-5101.

Opinions expressed in this newsletter are the opinions of the author of the article and do not necessarily reflect the official position of Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization nor of BBSP administration. The deadline for newsletter contributions is the Saturday following the monthly meeting, and may be brought to the meeting or emailed. (Email address: <awilliamson4@comcast.net> or <newsletter@brazosbend.org>). Notify Anna Dell (281-485-2843) well in advance of any events you want announced in the newsletter.

**IN THE END, WE WILL CONSERVE ONLY WHAT WE
LOVE,**

**WE WILL LOVE ONLY WHAT WE UNDERSTAND,
WE WILL UNDERSTAND ONLY WHAT WE ARE TAUGHT.**

**BABA DIOUM, SENEGAL
AFRICAN CONSERVATIONIST**