



BRAZOS BEND BUNCH BUGLE

VOLUME 19, NUMBER 1

JANUARY 2007

DECEMBER MEETING NOTES

reported by Nicole Olson

President Bruce Williamson called the meeting to order. There were eight volunteers and three staff members present. The minutes of the November meeting were approved as posted.

Steve Killian and **David Heinicke** brought their reports.

Treasurer's Report:

Chuck Duplant brought the budget report. Copies of the report are in the volunteer lounge. There were three requests for funds and all were approved.

- **Brian Leach** submitted a purchase request to transfer funds from Cash Available to the Kubota Maintenance Fund in order to fund **repairs to the front drive shaft of one of the Kubota utility vehicles**. The budgeted funds in this category have been exhausted.
- **David Heinicke** submitted a request to purchase a **digital camera** to document maintenance, research programs, and the photo site on the web.
- **The Mud Buddy** purchase has already been approved. The budget committee proposed that funds come from the Glen Kilgore Exxon-Mobil grant, the Carol Ramsayer Exxon-Mobil grant, a donation, and the Creekfield Well fund.

TABLE OF CONTENT

November meeting notes, p. 1-2
President's Corner, p. 2
Staff Reports, p. 3-4
Congratulations, p. 4
Nature Center Report, p. 5
January Meeting, Guest, p. 5
Lapel/Hat Pins, p. 5

School Field Trip Training, p. 6
Volunteer Interpretive Hike, p. 6
Quarterly Reminder, p. 6
Outreach Opportunity, p. 6
December Maintenance, p. 7
Prairie View, p.7-8
Thanks, p. 8

Trail Trimming Opportunity, p. 8
New Volunteer Training, p. 9-10
Sandhill Cranes, p. 10-11
A Visit with an Old Friend,
p. 11-13
Calendar of Events, p. 13

Gift Shop Report:

Beth Debenport reported that the inventory took place on Tuesday, December 5, 2006. Much appreciation to **Anna Dell Williamson** and **Carol Ramsayer** for helping with the inventory.

Maintenance Report:

Bryan Leach reported that **Judy Strauss, John Bradford,** and **Chuck Duplant** demolished the prairie platform. It was a safety hazard. A report will be issued either January or February 2007 on the cost to rebuild the platform.

New Business:

We have received the **Memorandum of Agreement** from Austin (Texas Parks and Wildlife). It was approved with some minor changes:

One change of wording from “park designee” to “department designee”

One change regarding “expiration on signing of new agreement”

The Executive Committee earlier approved the changes.

Announcements:

Still need help with dinners for January and February 2007. **Judy Strauss** is now heading that committee.

James Blankenship was appointed as the new **Interpretation Education Coordinator** and will serve as the Budget Committee Representative.

Meeting was adjourned.

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

When I was in high school physics class, I was taught that the molecules of air in a room are constantly bouncing off each other and the walls and everything in the room. The lesson included the very remote possibility that all the air molecules could bounce into one corner of the room, momentarily, leaving the rest of the room without air, for a very short time. Well, if it ever happens, I don't notice the occurrence.



Somehow, the things we do as volunteers remind me of that lesson. If we all decided we wanted to do the same thing at the park, as much as it needed doing, it would leave a lot of other things not done. My point is that individual differences and interests are good for our organization. We get a lot of things done because one person says “I will do that,” or “I will coordinate that.” Just like the air molecules, we don't all decide to go to one place and leave everything else alone.

Bruce Williamson



STAFF REPORTS

STEVE KILLIAN

Superintendent Steve Killian expressed how much he appreciates the **Mud Buddy**. It will be in the water sometime next week (12/11/06).

The **Creekfield well** is very close to being operational. One more switch needs to be installed.

There were 62 deer killed or 10 % of the population taken. Five feral hogs were killed. There are approximately 500 deer in the park. The **deer hunt** will be conducted differently next year. The hunt will lose one week (from three weeks to two weeks). Approximately 70 deer will need to be removed next year.

The **road work** performed by the contractors is progressing at a snail's pace! They may be finished by next year. This has been a bad weather month. There is still a lot of cleanup to be done.

Jerry Hopkins, TPWD Regional director, has resigned. At this point we are not sure who will be the acting director.

There have been no more plumbing problems from the sewer line. There were two separate problems during Thanksgiving which were repaired.



DAVID HEINICKE

David Heinicke reported that the **Christmas Bird Count** is next Saturday, December 16, 2006.

We have received \$2,000 from HEB for **Earth Day**, and David is applying to Houston Exploration Company to get another \$2,000.

Kevin Good, volunteer coordinator of Texas Parks and Wildlife will be attending the next volunteer meeting to discuss department policies regarding volunteer groups.

The **Nature Center** will close Christmas Eve at 3 PM and will be closed on Christmas Day. On New Year's Eve, Sharon Hanzik will not be at the Center, but David Heinicke will be there until 5 PM. The Nature Center will be open on New Year's Day.

On January 25, 2007, there will be **training for school group leaders** on how to lead hikes to meet the requirements of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). See David if you are interested in attending.

On January 27, 2007, there will be a **fly fishing class**. It's a 4- to 5-hour class to be held in the banquet hall.

We are planning to spend **Richard Board's** memorial money on a display for the alligator and crocodile skulls. A plaque will be added in dedication to Richard Board.



SHARON HANZIK

Sharon Hanzik reported that out of 16 applicants for the new volunteer training, she has so far interviewed 5 applicants. The **new volunteer training** begins February 10 with Orientation and get-acquainted lunch. Training sessions will be held Feb. 17 and 24.



CONGRATULATIONS

Jim North has finished his training requirements and received his cap. Congratulations to our newest volunteer. Be sure to welcome him to the organization and get to know him if you don't already.



BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES



JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Joe Carmichael
Sharon Hanzik
Jim Hiett
Warren Jackson
Jane Minard
Ron Morrison
Jim North (VIT)
Laszlo Perlaky
Marilyn Vossler
Bruce Williamson

FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Jerry Carpenter
Noel Duncan
Peggy Farley
Bill Godley
Johnny Hite
Mandy Hite (VIT)
Sid Jones
Judy Strauss

JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

Fletcher Morgan

FEBRUARY ANNIVERSARIES

Linda (VIT) and Rod Hite

NATURE CENTER REPORT DECEMBER, 2006

by Anna Dell Williamson

Here is a breakdown of the attendance recorded for the Nature Center, and hikes, and programs for December 1-30. This month included one week of hunt (park closed) and Christmas/New Year's vacation period. There were a lot of rainy days. Numbers come from the calendar in the Nature Center and may not reflect all activities. Be sure to report program attendance for all programs and hikes and be sure it gets on the calendar behind the desk.

	2006	DECEMBER
NATURE CENTER Total for December, 4286	SATURDAYS (5)	1449 High, 402, 12/2
	SUNDAYS (5)	673 High, 352, 12/31 (New Year's Eve)
	WEEKDAYS (15)	809 High, 230, 12/28
	CREEKFIELD HIKES (9)	63 High, 21, 12/30
	ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS(2)	39
	BIRD PROGRAMS, HIKES (7) includes hikes, owl and birds of prey programs	88
	SNAKE/REPTILE PROGRAMS (4)	93
	CHILDREN'S STORY TIME (2)	28
	OTHER PROGRAMS (3) includes vol hike 12/15	22

SPECIAL GUEST AT JANUARY MEETING

Kevin Good, Volunteer Coordinator of Texas Parks and Wildlife, will be attending the volunteer meeting on January 9 to visit with us about suggested policies regarding volunteer activities. Please make an extra effort to attend and show how we make a difference.

LAPEL/HAT PINS

We have volunteer lapel/hat pins for all volunteers. If you did not receive one at the picnic you may get one from Sharon or David.

SCHOOL FIELD TRIP TRAINING

A reminder for current and potential leaders of school field trips: A special planning session will be held **Thursday, January 25, 2007, 9:30 AM to 3:30 PM.** The training will cover educational techniques, grade level curriculums, tips for dealing with large groups of children, trail interpretation techniques and general park information and rules. It will also include specific information on implementing new "TEKS" based school field trips modeled on the Texas Education Agency's mandated Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for each grade level.

Please dress appropriately for the weather and bring a sack lunch. The class is open only to those who intend to assist with school field trips at Brazos Bend State Park. If you are going to attend this free training please contact David Heinicke or Sharon Hanzik.

INTERPRETIVE HIKE FOR VOLUNTEERS

by David Heinicke

After the success of the recent interpretive hike, we are going to plan another one. The next one will be Friday, January 19 at 8:30 am. Meet at Hale Lake restrooms.

We will hike the Red Buckeye Trail and discuss whatever we can find back there. The hike will only be about 3 miles, and we should be done well before lunch. Since this hike is much shorter, we'll have more time to stop, look, listen and talk. This hike will be open to the public and listed with the regular weekend programs. Texas Master Naturalists are welcome to attend. Bring binoculars, field guides, water, snack or whatever you might want. I hope to see you here.

QUARTERLY HOURS REMINDER

January is the first month of the first quarter for the year 2007. Don't wait: Get your required hours in early and often. Remember that you must have a total of 48 hours by the end of the year, and that 6 of them each quarter must be in the "required" areas: Nature Center, Gift Shop, Creekfield Hike, Wood Yard or Water Station. Be sure to report all of your hours, including meetings and travel time, in the volunteer logbook in the lounge before the end of each month.



OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY

The Buffalo Bayou Partnership will be sponsoring a summer Anything That Floats Parade and Family Day on Buffalo Bayou, on June 9, 2007. They are planning this event as an interactive, educational event focusing on our bayou environments. They have invited our volunteer organization to host a booth at the event, and perhaps to bring one of our "wonderful spokes-animal juvenile alligators." If you are interested in assisting with this outreach event, contact Sharon Hanzik by March 10 so she can give you the contact information. The final deadline for responding is March 15.

DECEMBER MAINTENANCE REPORT

By Bryan Leach

Wood Yard:

Tied wood
Split $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cord of wood
Delivered tied wood to the wood racks in both camping loops
Unloaded 4 cords of purchased wood

Trail Trimming and Trail Maintenance:

Removed an overhanging limb on the Creekfield Forrest ADA Trail
Cut up a downed tree on the Red Buckeye Trail
Cut down an overhanging tree off the Red Buckeye Trail
Removed a downed tree off the 40 Acre Lake Trail

Equipment Maintenance:

Changed the engine oil and filter on the John Deere Tractor

General Maintenance:

Put new tops on 7 picnic tables and delivered them to the ADA sites in the camping loops
Anchored 7 picnic tables to the pads at the ADA sites in the camping loops
Installed rope lights in the stair well at the Nature Center
Built a fence enclosure at the new Creekfield water well (see pictures)
Put crushed blacktop in and around the fence area at the water well



Construction of well enclosure



Completed well enclosure

PRAIRIE VIEW DECEMBER, 2006

by Al Childs

Hello prairie enthusiasts and volunteers. Well, it has really been a busy first year for Prairie Project '06. Between our data collection surveys and PP'06 sponsored activities, approximately 400 volunteer hours were logged. Vegetation and soil moisture data was collected 180 times representing 45 different locations on three prairies. Sponsored activities include two Grass ID classes, Earth Day Seedball Project, and a Seed Collection Workshop. Not only have we collected a years worth of prairie data but also gained a great deal of knowledge through lessons learned. As an example, I installed metal T-bar posts at each of the survey locations over the Holidays. These metal poles replaced the wood stakes we used last year. This one activity will cut project volunteer time and miles driven by 50% and reduce maintenance cost to

almost zero. The prairie survey forms have even been streamlined for ease of use, and I have written detail survey instructions for training new volunteers. At our first Prairie Project '06 Christmas Party, Dennis Jones gave us a very informative night hike, and it was really exciting to hear coyote, bobcat and bard owl sounds. It was a really great way to end the year.

This year is still in the planning stages so I don't have a lot of details yet. However, I do intend to expand our project to include gathering additional data, do more seed ball outreach programs, and provide more opportunities for project volunteers to grow and learn.

If you are interested in participating, we meet every third Sunday at 9:00 AM to do our surveys. I will be having a one hour Orientation class for new volunteers at 11:00 AM on the same day. Let me know if you are interested in either, so we can make sure we don't get started without you. You are welcome to participate in our surveys, but I strongly recommend taking the Orientation class first. It covers everything we do in our actual surveys and allows one-on-one training that we are unable to provide during our regular survey activity. Until next month, take care my friends, and I hope to see you in the prairies.

Thanks

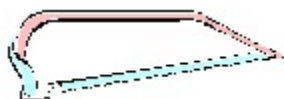
- ☺ to **Judy Strauss** for the December dinner and for agreeing to coordinate meeting night suppers
- ☺ to **Ken and Beth Debenport, Carol Ramsayer and Anna Dell Williamson** for completing the Gift Shop inventory
- ☺ to **Dennis Jones, Sharon Hanzik and Rachelle Olson** for feature articles for the newsletter.
- ☺ to **Bryan Leach** for pictures of the Creekfield well enclosure.

TRAIL TRIMMING OPPORTUNITY

by Ron Morrison

A trail trimming group is forming that meets on Fridays to trim trails at BBSP. There are 35 miles of hiking, biking and horseback trails at the park and some desperately need your help.

The group is led by Ron Morrison who has volunteered at national, state, and county parks. Ron learned trail trimming at Saguaro National park and teaches a class in trail trimming at BBSP. Please contact him at <rcmorri@alltel.net> to be included in the trail trimming group and receive e-mails of upcoming trail trimming events.



VOLUNTEER TRAINING

by Anna Dell Williamson

New volunteer training is just around the corner, **February 10, 17 and 24**. We anticipate a class of 9 trainees, and I am asking for help once again. Below are the areas in which I need people to step up and assist the new trainees. **Sign-up sheets** are posted in the lounge hallway for the various opportunities, or contact me personally by phone or e-mail. Please let me know how you can serve by **January 15**, so I can plan and include information in the VIT training manual.

All volunteers: All volunteers are invited to attend the **sandwich lunch during orientation** on **Saturday, February 10**, at 11:45 AM. Please bring sandwich trimmings, bread or rolls, chips, relish dish or dessert for lunch. Meat and cheese will be provided. This is your opportunity to visit with the new trainees. You will also be able to take one or two trainees on an informal, individual tour of the Nature Center after lunch. **Speakers** are needed to **share your volunteer experiences**. You will be asked to speak for 5 minutes or less, to introduce yourself and tell what is special about your volunteer experiences with the VIT's. New volunteers from the last class (September 2006) are welcome to share experiences, also. I will schedule these talks throughout each day of training between other activities. You will be notified of the time you will speak based on your availability. When you volunteer, please give me your preferred date and time.

Mentors: Every VIT is assigned a mentor whose main job is to make the VIT feel welcome and help him/her get acquainted. Mentors are invited to attend orientation on Saturday, February 10, 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. (You are not required to attend orientation in order to be a mentor.) You will be asked to contact your trainee and welcome him or her prior to orientation, help your trainee meet other volunteers, and keep up with his or her progress on finishing the Phase 1 and Phase 2 training hours. The more involved you can be, the better, but just maintaining phone or e-mail contact will be helpful.

Drivers for road tour: This will be held on **Saturday, February 10**, after lunch and speeches, approximately 1:00 to 2:00 PM. You will be given written instructions, and you will take one, two or three trainees, depending on the size of your vehicle and number of drivers, around the park roads for them to become acquainted with the park. This is a time for the VIT to get acquainted with a volunteer as well as with the park.

Resource people: Resource people are on a list in the VIT manual for the VIT's to contact in order to get help with a specific area of the hands-on training. Categories are Maintenance, Interpretive Programs or Hikes, Gift Shop Operation, and Nature Center Help Desk Operation. If you want to be included on any of these lists, to tell me which list(s) you want to be on and give me your contact information - name, phone number, and e-mail address. My deadline in order to get the information in the VIT manual is **January 15**. If you are **currently on the list** and I don't hear from you by January 15, your name will remain on the list.

Trail Interpretation: VIT's need some to accompany them on a one- or two-hour trail interpretation training, hike or bike (not ATV), on a weekend or holiday. The VIT will contact you and determine a satisfactory time for both of you. You will model talking with the public and other aspects of trail interpretation

ATV Trail Tour: A VIT will contact you for a one-on-one Gator tour of the trail system, lasting two hours. You will be given an itinerary to follow for the first part of the tour, and if there is time remaining you may go to some of the more remote trails. This is not trail interpretation or trail trimming. Your job is to familiarize the VIT with the trail system.

Hands-on training in the required areas: Any time you are working in the Nature Center, Gift Shop, wood yard, Creekfield Hike, or water station, you may have a VIT sign up for training. Please welcome them and give them the best information you can about the job they are learning. Remember to sign their

form in the VIT book in the lounge for the time they worked with you. There is a notebook with information sheets in the lounge to help you know what to cover with the VIT.

A copy of the training schedule will be posted in the lounge. You are welcome to attend any session of training that you are interested in to refresh your information and/or skills.

Please let me know by **January 15** what role you are able to take in the training. Sign up in the lounge or contact me by e-mail <awilliamson4@houston.rr.com> or phone 281-485-2843 or 713-817-1393. Please be specific as to what you are willing to do, which list you want to be on or not on, and give me your contact information.

Thank you in advance for your help with the training program. We need to give the VIT's all the support we can so that we can have consistent growth in the organization. We cannot have an outstanding training program without your involvement. It has been said that it takes a village to grow a child. Well, it takes everyone in the organization to grow a volunteer.

SANDHILL CRANES

by Sharon Hanzik



I was inspired to write this article on my way to work recently. I travel mostly country roads and I never know what wildlife encounters I may have on any given day. This particular morning, 12/29/06, I found a sky full of small flocks of sandhill cranes. So what better time to write about them for the newsletter? The following information was taken from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wildlife Biologue Series MB-1-80. It's not everything you ever wanted to know about them, but I hope it sparks an interest.

Sandhill cranes stand up to 4 feet tall, have 7-foot wing spans and weigh 6 to 12 pounds. Their plumage is slate-gray to brownish gray and is often rust-stained by ferric oxide in the waters of their breeding range. Cranes have ostrich-like ruffs over their rumps, and adults flaunt dark red bald patches atop their heads. The subspecies, of which there are five, are practically indistinguishable (Mississippi Sandhill Crane, *Grus canadensis pulla* -endangered; Florida Sandhill Crane, *G. c. pratensis*; Greater Sandhill Crane, *G. c. tabida*; Canadian Sandhill Crane, *G. c. rowani*; and the Lesser Sandhill Crane, *G. c. canadensis*).

The endangered Mississippi subspecies and the Florida sandhill crane are non-migratory. The greater sandhill crane includes two populations west of the Rocky Mountains which have fairly restricted ranges - the Rocky Mountain population which ranges from Idaho and Montana to New Mexico, and the eastern population which ranges from Manitoba and Ontario to Texas and Florida. The Canadian and lesser sandhill cranes range extensively from Arctic Siberia, Alaska, and Canada to wintering areas in Mexico and the southwestern U.S. The migration route and wintering area of some sandhill cranes are also used by their endangered relative, the whooping crane. (We have had one special occasion when a "lost" whooping crane migrated with a flock of sandhill cranes and wintered in a plowed cotton field just outside the park.)

The sandhill uses its beak as a spade for digging out roots and as clippers to cut up tender green browse. A seed, berry, insect, grub, or spider is picked up in the points of the beak, tossed in the air, recaptured between gaping mandibles and swallowed. A larger portion such as a mouse, bird, or crayfish is pierced or clasped by the beak and beaten against the ground until it is reduced to bite-sized bits.

Courtship dances are spectacular and often comical. With wings extended, a crane will frequently honor another crane --or even his own shadow if no other cranes are handy--with awkward bows, or a series of stiff-legged hops, or giant, slow-motion leaps into the air. Though most of the dancing occurs in the spring,

a change in the weather, arrival of new cranes, or almost any disturbance will set off a display at any time of year. Once a pair is mated, however, it remains together until one or the other dies.

An isolated marsh is preferred for nesting. The nest is usually no more than dead vegetation heaped up above the water line. Two mottled green and brown eggs are incubated by both parents for about 4 weeks. The young develop rapidly and can fly by August.

The southward migration commences in early August although the young probably do not migrate until late August. The migration flights often are spectacular with the flocks lined out in a neat "V" or diagonal line formations. Their raucous calls attract attention to these flights which may be as high as 8,000 feet above the ground!

Greater sandhills begin their northward migration in February and arrive at the nesting site in April. Lesser sandhills leave their wintering grounds in late March and arrive in May. A surviving member of the previous year's hatch frequently accompanies its parents back to the nesting ground. At least another year must pass before it will mature and seek its own mate.

(Ed. note: **The photograph above was taken by David A. Rintoul, Associate Professor and Associate Director, Division of Biology, Kansas State University. His research interests include lipid metabolism in migratory birds. The Brazos Bend Bunch Bugle obtained the photograph from the web page: Gough, G.A., Sauer, J.R., Iliff, M. Patuxent Bird Identification Infocenter. 1998. Version 97.1. Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, MD.**

<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlist/infocenter.html>

Permission to use the photograph has been requested from Dr. Rintoul.

A VISIT WITH AN OLD FRIEND

by Rachelle Olsen

(Ed. Note: Rachelle is a former BBSP Ranger. This article will be submitted to the National Park Service where certifiers will determine if the piece demonstrates NPS interpretive writing standards. Since BBSP remains close to her heart, she wanted to share the article with us and park visitors.)

Glaring, hurried red lights thin and disappear as I escape the Houston morning traffic. The predawn sky is painted a purplish blue as it expands in front of me. I turn a corner entering a long winding road littered with recently harvested cotton fields. The fields are brown, save for the occasional white of cotton fortunate enough to have dodged the hungry mouth of the combine. Ten more miles, one last turn, and I will have reached my destination - Brazos Bend State Park's Nature Center. There the companionship of stately old live oak trees awaits me. I anticipate gazing at the unusual beauty of these aged friends and sitting beneath their sheltering arms to reflect on life both past and present.

I reach the Nature Center and head for the most welcoming of the several oaks standing ahead of me- the one with inviting hand-made benches encircling its trunk. I say "hello" to my towering friend as I settle in under its umbrella-like canopy. Birds break the silence of the morning with their noisy chatter as the sun rises in the sky. While I sit, I think about live oaks in general, and why they fascinate me. Their wood is as strong as steel. You'll never see woodpeckers attempt to peck holes in these trees. Such a feat would likely crumple their sharp beaks. Besides their strength, I value the trees for their beauty. If you have ever experienced a south Texas winter, you know it can look brown and dreary. Live oaks hold on to their green leaves during winter, adding welcome color to the otherwise dull landscape.

Quick movements in the oak grab my attention. A sudden clank, clanking racket echoes around me. I look for the perpetrator of this annoying noise. Ha! I find it - a grey squirrel scurrying through the oak's highway of limbs. With every leap, the outer branches bow downward, slamming acorns against the Nature Center's metallic roof. Apparently, this small, furry visitor is unwilling to share the oak's company. Just to make sure that I understand the message, the squirrel snaps its tail back and forth and barks disapproval at my presence. I laugh at its antics, but stand my ground, and it leaps to another tree.

Relaxing, I turn my thoughts to the oak's unusual beauty. It grows stout and sturdy. Large, knobby roots protrude from the ground, some resembling enormous talons grasping the clay-like soil with the same tenacity as a red-tailed hawk gripping a rabbit. The girth of the trunk would take at least three adults linked hand-in-hand to embrace its circumference. Deep furrows crease the tree's bark. Some people think water carves these crevices, but to me it is just time etching itself into the tree's skin. Brown shriveled-up resurrection fern, like a costume of death, enshrouds the tree's gigantic arms. But this is only a façade; the plant is fully alive, contentedly awaiting the downpour of rain, when it will once again emerge, refreshed and green. As the wind blows strands of Spanish moss back and forth, I sink deeper into my thoughts.

Suddenly, a gusty wind replaces the gentle breeze. Branches flex and creak, surrendering to the strength of a forceful gale. A cluster of waxy green leaves falls at my feet. Did this giant drop them intentionally? Does it have something to say? As I lean forward to pick up the clump of leaves, I have the sensation that the tree also leans toward me and whispers: *"You have come to admire my unusual beauty and sit beneath my branches reflecting on life's continuum. And I am grateful for your company. But have you ever stopped to wonder how I could enrich your life by telling you stories of mine?"* Wait a minute. Surely my imagination is playing tricks – a talking tree? Then I realize this oak has stood here and witnessed centuries of events. The wind rustles the tree's branches again, and a tiny voice inside urges me to listen to the story it wants to tell...

"In 1794 I dropped to the ground as an acorn, and sprouted roots that dug into Spanish soil. I heard early explorers describe this land as endless seas of grass, rolling like the waves of the ocean. During my early years, Karankawa Indians provided companionship as they passed through, following the seasons in search of food. Sometimes even massive herds of buffalo tromped across my path. Their numbers ranged from a few hundred to a few hundred thousand. And during a stampede, these herds charged forward with the fury of a raging flood. As a young tree, I felt fortunate to escape being trampled by their anvil-like hooves.

"By 1821 I stood tall and flexible, bending with the wind as I watched my world change. Mexico had won its independence from Spain, and I became a Mexican citizen. One day, as two men rode by me on horses, I overheard their conversation. According to them, the areas surrounding me would soon teem with strangers. It appeared that the Mexican government had given a man named Stephen F. Austin empresario rights. He planned to settle 300 colonists along the banks of my close neighbor, the Brazos River. And in 1827, Austin granted my land to Abner Harris and William Barrett. As more settlers moved in, the population exploded. Commerce and agriculture quickly took root, but the growth that ensued was not without consequence.

"In the years that followed, I watched as the peace around me turned into chaos. The new settlers and the Karankawa Indians clashed repeatedly. Even though the Mexican government tried to create peace between the two cultures, their attempts failed. It wasn't long before continued conflicts with the colonists and exposure to epidemic diseases, like small pox and the measles, decimated the population of my earlier companions. Unfortunately, the buffalo suffered a similar fate. Needless slaughter by Indian tribes and the settlers robbed me of the sight of this majestic animal by the 1870s."

Suddenly, another acorn bangs against the metallic roof forcing my focus back to the present. The squirrel announces its return. I pause for moment and think: "I knew the tree's huge stature hinted at its ancient age, but until now I never connected it with any historical significance to life in this area." Another gust of wind blows. Leaves swirl around my feet drawing my attention back to the story...

"Once again change loomed on the horizon. In 1836, bullets of celebration whizzed through my branches as Texans proclaimed their independence from Mexico. I shared a bond with these people who were once strangers – we were Texas citizens. The agricultural industry of the area thrived, and my old neighbor, the Brazos River, emerged as a principal route for exporting goods. This led my owners to sell a portion of my home to cotton brokers. Soon my roots trembled as beast, plow, and slave furrowed nearby ground readying it for cotton seed. At harvest time, the ground was mixed with sweat and blood from enslaved

laborers as they plucked cotton bales from thorny stems, leaving their hands calloused and raw. The shackles and chains that bound these hands fell to the ground twenty years later as Union soldiers read the Emancipation Proclamation. Another era came to a close, and I was making peace with change.

“As the nineteenth century faded into the twentieth century, the Hale family purchased my abode. Cowboys, horses, and cattle became a familiar site as they roamed my woods and fields. With each passing fall, I watched the brown-shelled fruits of pecan trees drop to the ground. November came to represent pecan harvesting time. No doubt some of those pecans added a delicious flavor to decades of Thanksgiving dinners. Seasons came and went, and the twentieth century grew older. Eventually, the Hale family decided it was time for a change, and they sold the property. My future remained uncertain until Texas Parks and Wildlife purchased my land. Soon, 5000 acres were set aside for the site of Brazos Bend State Park. The gates opened in 1984, and at last I felt truly at home.

Now, 212 years have passed since I fell to the ground as an acorn. My constant companion is the Nature Center, once the Hale family’s hunting lodge. Caring volunteers have built benches to encircle my trunk. And now I stand to welcome friends like you who seek refuge under my branches and rest on my benches. I invite all who pass my way to sit and explore the wonders of my world with me.”

Another clatter from a falling acorn jolts me out of my meditative state. This time the noise’s instigator remains anonymous. Maybe it came from the...no, never mind. But as I glance again at this stately live oak, I feel an added sense of admiration; not only does it possess unique beauty, but also it holds the treasure of 212 years worth of this land’s history.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 13	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM - Guest: Kevin Good , TPWD Volunteer Coordinator
January 25	Training for School Group Leaders, 9:30 AM - 3:30 PM
January 27	Fly-fishing Class, Banquet Hall
February 3	Photo-walk, Birds #1, 5:00 PM
February 10	New Volunteer Orientation and lunch, 10:00 AM - 2:00 PM
	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
February 17	New Volunteer Training, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
February 24	New Volunteer Training, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
March 3	Photo-walk, Landscape #1, 5:00 PM
March 10	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
April 7	Earth Day Celebration
	Photo-walk, Plant #1, 5:00 PM
April 8	Easter
April 14	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
May 12	Photo-walk, Birds #2, 5:00 PM
	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM



Brazos Bend State Park

Texas Parks and Wildlife
21901 FM 762
Needville TX 77461

→NEXT MEETING DAY AND TIME←

SATURDAY, JANUARY 13, 2007, 5:30 PM
GUEST SPEAKER, BE SURE TO COME

☆☆☆☆☆☆

FIRST CLASS MAIL



**REGULAR VOLUNTEER
EVENTS**

Creekfield Hikes	Every Saturday and Sunday at 11:00 AM, led by volunteers
Photo Hikes	First Saturday of each month
Volunteer meeting	Second Saturday of each month at 5:30 PM
Bird Hikes	See schedule in calendar

**BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK
VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION**

VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION OFFICERS

President:	Bruce Williamson
Vice-President:	Anna Dell Williamson
Secretary:	Nicole Olson
Treasurer:	Chuck Duplant

NEWSLETTER TEAM

Editor	Anna Dell Williamson
Production Assistants	Bruce Williamson Terry Williamson

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, if mailed to Anna Dell Williamson, or at the meeting if delivered to the park. (E-mail address: awilliamson4@houston.rr.com). Notify Anna Dell (281-485-2843) well in advance of any events you want announced in the newsletter.