



BRAZOS BEND BUNCH  
BUGLE

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 1

JANUARY 2006

## DECEMBER MEETING NOTES

*submitted by Anna Dell Williamson*

President **Judy Strauss** called the December 10 meeting to order. There were fourteen members, and one staff person present. **Walt Bailey**, Regional Interpreter, was a guest. Minutes of the November meeting were approved as posted.

**Steve Killian** brought his report, and Judy Strauss presented information from **Sharon Hanzik**. These are printed elsewhere in the newsletter.

**Bryan Leach** reported that the maintenance report is in the newsletter. The crew will be coming up with projects for the next year. If you have any suggestions, let Bryan know.

**John Bradford** brought two **budget requests**:

A request for a new fax machine for the Nature Center was approved.

A request for supplemental funds for maintenance on the Kubota for a tire and front end work., for the current quarter was approved.

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**Budget report:**

Income was up in several areas, such as donations, Gift Shop sales, wood sales and Kroger card receipts. Expenses included maintenance, Simple Christmas and DVD's for educational programs.

**Old Business:**

We still need an **Outreach Coordinator**. See Judy or Chuck Duplant if interested.

Judy thanked all the volunteers for their help with **Simple Christmas**. It was all appreciated. Approximately 1500 people attended, and we received donations from visitors.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

The Executive Committed made the following appointments:

**Frank Willett** as Interpretive Representative on the Budget Committee.

**Beth Debenport** as Gift Shop Representative on the Budget Committee.

**Bryan Leach** as Maintenance Representative on the Budget Committee.

**Anna Dell Williamson** as newsletter editor.

Bruce remarked that during Thanksgiving week the **Nature Center** was open, and we had many family groups come in. We had over 1000 visitors during that week.

The meeting was adjourned.☺

## *THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER*

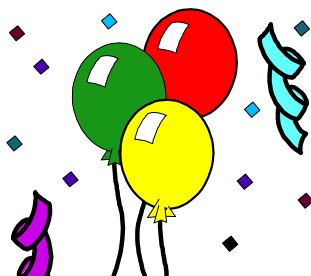
I sincerely hope that everyone had a wonderful Christmas and Holiday Season, and that you each had a good start to the New Year ahead.



I would like to thank each of you for your contribution to our organization. We've had a great year and a year with many changes, and everyone has stepped up to address those changes, as needed. Without you, our organization could not have the impact on our park that it does. And even more important, without you there would be no volunteer organization. Thank you, again, for all of your support and dedication.

May the New Year bring you health, love, happiness. laughter and friendships in abundance !

*Judy Strauss*☺



# STAFF REPORTS

## STEVE KILLIAN

**BUDGET:** Due to budget cuts, the Parks Division has let forty-four people go. These include park specialists and rangers. Another forty positions have been done away with. Brazos Bend has lost 2 vacant ranger positions. We are doing all right, in large part because of the volunteers. Others parks are in bad shape. We need to let the legislators know that this is a valuable resource for today and for future generations. There is a great need for investment in parks.



BBSP will raise the entrance fee from \$3.00 to \$4.00 in a month or so. Other parks haven't seen a decline in visitation after raising fees. Some parks charge as much as \$5.00, and some as little as \$2.00.

**PLANS FOR TX DOT FOR PILANT SLOUGH AND RENOVATION:** The lift station is completed except for minor cleanup and fencing.

**DEER HUNT:** There were 112 total deer taken in the three weeks of hunts, about what the biologists wanted removed. There were 17 bucks, one 10-point, and 155 hunters, with a 72% success rate. No hogs were taken. So far, 195 hogs have been trapped/

**FORTY-ACRE LAKE:** John Bradford, Tom Brooks and other volunteers have cut tallow trees, cleaned the bank by the picnic area, cut trees in the lake, and lowered rice. Now we are ready for a good rain. You can actually see water in the lake, although it is 20 inches below normal. A public meeting is to be set to discuss stocking grass carp in the lake.

**NEW FEE PROGRAM:** Dennis Jones will be leading night hikes on Thursdays from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. Fees will be \$5.00 for children and \$9.00 for adults. A minimum of five individuals is required for the hike to make. It will be advertised at the park and by word of mouth.

**PRAIRIE WORK:** Prairie work is continuing. The window is open to get a big tractor out on prairie, and using the tree cutter to remove the forest. We will keep working until rained out.

**ANGLER EDUCATION PROGRAM:** This program is to teach kids and adults the basics in fishing of fishing. Six or seven parks have been identified for the project. We will hire someone for a few hours a week to teach the course as an independent contractor. We plan to get the program started in late February or early March. There will be no fee to the public. Funding will come from fisheries, including gear, rods, reels, and tackle. Free fishing in state parks is still in effect.

**MITIGATION FUNDS:** We have funding for prairie management, lake management, and construction of the wetlands in front. Plans are available for you to view after the meeting.

## NOTE FROM DAVID

I spent a week recently in Bastrop State Park training and visiting with employees from other state parks in this region. It doesn't take long to realize just how fortunate Brazos Bend (and I) are to have the support, assistance and loyalty of an active volunteer organization. There are soooo many things we can do at BBSP that other parks couldn't dream of doing.

# SHARON HANZIK

Sharon Hanzik sent congratulations to **James and Joyce Blankenship** and **Ron Morrison** who have finished their training and are now full volunteers. Jerry McGinty and Hannah Blanton have dropped out.

On December 17 Brazos Bend Baptist Church will be caroling through the campgrounds.

The next new volunteer training will be January 28, February 4 and 11. At this time we have nine confirmed, and eleven left to interview.

Sharon will be out of the office December 19 to 26, and David will be out of the office December 29 to January 3. Holiday hours for the Nature Center are on the web site.

## HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL!

*by Sharon Hanzik*

On behalf of the park staff, I would like to thank you all for your contributions and support to the staff and visitors of Brazos Bend State Park. Whether you give 48 or 448 hours that you donated last year, as long as they are quality hours, you have made an important contribution. Always remember that even though volunteers may not know what each member has contributed, David and I certainly do!! Yes, it's a large group and many of you travel in different "time zones" and never meet. That doesn't matter all that much. What matters is the service you have provided, and the warm, fuzzy feeling that you hopefully get in return.

### THE PAST

**Look back with pride.** In the past year the organization has come a long way. Here are some highlights:

- T There are at least 6 volunteers presenting programs and hikes, and Creekfield is covered almost every weekend.
- T There is a gazebo at Hale Lake
- T Due to improvement efforts, the once little-known Red Buckeye Trail has become a visitor favorite.
- T Sign up for weekend/weekday duties is improving. Let's keep on improving.
- T Pilant Slough Trail is now an all-weather trail.
- T The nature center is open every day. Something many thought was not possible.
- T Volunteer retention is at an all-time high, partly because you all make it a fun experience. (You all are a major influence on our trainees.)
- T We have another Kubota!
- T There are lighted information signs next to each wood rack at the host sites.
- T There is now a 10 X 18 metal storage barn at the wood yard.
- T Three islands in Elm Lake have been cleared.
- T Eleven oak trees were purchased and planted along the roadside to Elm Lake.
- T Twenty-eight tons of granite gravel was spread on the Elm Lake Trail.
- T Twelve cords of salvaged firewood were cut, split, tied and sold.
- T Forty-six cords of purchased wood were tied and sold.
- T We pulled off another Earth Day event, bicycle parade, Halloween movie and Simple Christmas.
- T Volunteer assistance with post-storm cleanup.
- T Rice mashing has improved the views into Creekfield, Elm and 40-Acre Lakes.

## THE FUTURE

**Look forward with promise.** There is still a vast wilderness to explore.

What do you see for the future of the organization? The public demands are leaning toward more educational opportunities and with more visitation there is more a demand for maintaining the resource. Have you found yourself involved in only one or two aspects of volunteering? Been doing the same old-same old for quite some time? Obviously you must enjoy it, but why not take a chance and explore another area? Try something new. I'm not saying that you need to shift your focus, just renew, refresh, grow and experience.

When was the last time you attended a program or hike? For most of you I'd bet it was during your initial training.

I've heard many of you say that you would like to present a program or lead a hike but you just aren't ready. How long before you are? How many bird hikes will you attend before you decide to lead one yourself? You have the knowledge and the skill.

Why not take a day off from work every now and then and participate in a weekday work party? Or, if you can't take off from work, why not organize one on a weekend morning?

Get involved with training. Many of you have a lot to offer the new volunteers as well as continuing education for the entire group.

What happened to outreach? Can we find a few volunteers willing to organize those efforts? Outreach promotes our park and our mission. What once was a thriving endeavor has dropped off completely.

### **Remember the Mission -**

*"To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide....outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations."*

# CONGRATULATIONS



**CONGRATULATIONS TO**

**JANE MINARD**

**ON THE BIRTH OF HER FIRST GRANDCHILD**

**Future BBSP volunteer Travis Charles Minard,**

**arrived December 29 at 7:22 p.m.,**

**7 lbs. 6 oz, 19 inches long**



# BEST WISHES

## JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Joe Carmichael  
Sharon Hanzik  
Jim Hiatt  
Warren Jackson

Jane Minard  
Laszlo Perlaky  
Marilyn Vossler  
Bruce Williamson



## FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

Peggy Farley  
Bill Godley  
Johnny Hite (VIT)  
Sid Jones  
Judy Strauss

## JANUARY ANNIVERSARIES

Fletcher Morgan



Thanks

- ( to Frank Willett for the dinner at the December meeting.
- ( to Steve Killian for the campsite for Simple Christmas. Several vols participated and /or camped.
- ( to everyone who helped with Simple Christmas
- ( to those who help keep the Nature Center open weekdays
- ( to Bryan and Jean Leach for the generous donation of the fax machine. It is working just fine. We are 979-553-5135.
- ( to Glen Kilgore for the article and picture on the nutria
- ( to all who volunteered to help with the VIT park tour
- ( to all who volunteered to be mentors to a VIT

## ITEMS OF INTEREST

*by Anna Dell Williamson*

Be sure to look at the **Items of Interest** binder in the volunteer lounge upstairs. We have several new articles, including information on the current financial state of the parks, and articles on birds, butterflies, snakes, and reptiles. Thanks to Jane Minard for several articles from the *Houston Chronicle*. There are also articles from several Texas Parks and Wildlife magazines

# INTERPRETIVE WORKSHOPS

by Sharon Hanzik

There are two interpretive training workshops scheduled for Saturday, January 7 and Tuesday, February 14, 9:00 - 11:00 AM. You will learn all you ever wanted to know about the history and art of interpretation, presenting hikes and programs. There is enough space for approximately 15 students in the classroom. Currently there are ten volunteers signed up for the January 7 class.

There are four signed up for the February 14 class. If you want to sign up for a class and can make it on the 14th please choose that one. The minimum to present is five students. The deadline for registration is February 6. Both classes are the same and will be classroom training. Handouts will be given to those signed up even if a class is cancelled. The class is open to all volunteers and VITs.

# NATURE CENTER ACTIVITY REPORT

by Anna Dell Williamson

*Here is a breakdown of the various activities and attendance recorded for the Nature Center, hikes, and programs from October 1 to December 31. We've seen some record highs and record lows for these dates, mostly due to weather conditions and holidays. The week of Thanksgiving (November 21-27) saw high visitation, as did the week between Christmas and New Year's. Several bad-weather weekends cut our attendance, but the beautiful weeks in between made up for some of that loss.*

		OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
NATURE CENTER	<b>SATURDAY (14)</b>	<b>3568</b> High, 1100, 10/22	<b>1802</b> High, 736, 11/12	<b>1197</b> High, 536, 12/3
	<b>SUNDAY(12)</b>	<b>809</b> High, 332, 10/30	<b>1092</b> High, 466, 11/6	<b>431</b> High, 263, 12/4
	<b>WEEKDAYS (36)</b>	<b>501</b> High, 61, 10/28	<b>1412</b> High, 388, 11/25	<b>1443</b> High, 265, 12/29
<b>CREEKFIELD HIKES (24)</b>		<b>338</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>BIRD PROGRAMS AND HIKES</b>		<b>203</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>ALLIGATOR PROGRAMS</b>		<b>115</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>OTHER REPTILE PROGRAMS</b>		<b>97</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>OTHERS</b>		<b>209</b>	<b>259</b>	<b>216</b>

*Notes: The week of Thanksgiving (November 21-27) saw high visitation, as did the week between Christmas and New Year's. Several bad-weather weekends cut our attendance, but the beautiful weeks in between made up for some of that loss.*

# VISITOR COMMENTS

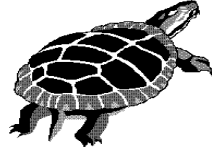


Here are some of the visitor comments that have been collected in the past few weeks:

"The park is cool with all the wildlife...I love this park, it is awesome with all the plants and animals and it has a low cost to get in which makes it easy to be able to visit."

What keeps you coming back? "Nature Center, lots of trails, friendly staff"

"BBSP has good exhibits, neat trails, relaxed camping - thanks for being open during the holidays"



## LET THE LEGISLATURE KNOW HOW YOU FEEL AS AN INDIVIDUAL

*by Ken Debenport*

Hopefully most of you are aware of the situation regarding the budget of State Parks. There is an editorial from the *Houston Chronicle* in the "Items of Interest" binder upstairs really blasting the State legislature on the lack of state park funding, and several other articles have been printed on the same subject.

You are encouraged to express your personal opinion to your legislator regarding this issue. Please remember that this must be done as an individual, not as a spokesperson for our organization. Our 501(c)3 status with the IRS prevents the organization from participating in any sort of political activity.

## TWO NEW PROGRAMS AT BRAZOS BEND

### NIGHT HIKES

Thursday night hikes will be conducted by Dennis Jones, November through March, 7:00 - 9:00 PM. Hikes vary in length from 1/2 - 3/4 miles. Fee are \$5.00 per person age 7-12 (not suitable for ages 6 and under) and \$9.00 per person age 13 and up, which includes park entrance fee. Reservations and advance payment required. For complete information, visit the web site home page, featured links.





## MUSICAL PERFORMANCES



The Brazos River Pickers/Old Time Volunteer Blue Grass Band , which is Fort Bend County's Volunteer Community Band will be performing at BBSP on a regular basis. Listen to old-time, bluegrass sounds at the amphitheater the first Saturday of the month 6:00 to 8:00 PM, January through April (summer months pending), weather permitting. They welcome sit-ins. Free with park entrance fee. We will post this on our web site, and they will do the same at [www.brazosriverpickers.com](http://www.brazosriverpickers.com). We will also post throughout the park and prepare a press release.

## VOLUNTEER T-SHIRTS

We are going to place an order for the volunteer t-shirt with the emblem on front and back. We have a hooded sweatshirt with a zipper front available now. The order envelopes are in the gift shop workroom. The order will be placed after the February 11 meeting.

**Short sleeve t-shirts** – 100% cotton Hanes Heavyweight 5.5 ounce  
Colors –white—ash—light steel—stonewashed blue—stonewashed green  
Sizes – small, medium, large, x-large, 2x-large  
Price --\$7.00

**Long sleeve t-shirts** 100% cotton  
Colors and sizes —same as short sleeve  
Price --\$8.00

**Long sleeve sweat shirts** –Hanes comfort blend 50-50 cotton poly blend 7.8 ounce  
Colors—white—natural—ash—light steel--Stonewashed green  
Sizes—small, medium, large, x-large, 2x-large  
Price--\$11.00

**Sweatshirt with hood and front zipper** —comfort blend 50-50  
Colors—oxford—birch—white—black—navy—red-Royal  
Sizes—small, medium, large, x-large, 2x-large, 3x-large  
Price--\$25.00--small thru x-large, \$27.00--2x-large, \$30.00----3x-large

## MEETING NIGHT SUPPERS

*by Anna Dell Williamson*

Thanks to **Frank Willett** for bringing the meeting night supper for December. **John Bradford** will be bringing supper for the January 14 meeting. We will collect \$3.00 per person to cover costs. If you are willing to prepare a meal for a future meeting, please contact me by email (<[awilliamson4@houston.rr.com](mailto:awilliamson4@houston.rr.com)>) or by phone (281-485-2843). No one is signed up after January. Thank you to all those who have already brought a meal.g

# WETLANDS RESTORATION

*By Sharon Hanzik*

Okay folks, brace yourselves!! On your next visit to the park you will undoubtedly notice the drastic change in the Creekfield area. Management has decided not only to clear as much rice as possible but also clear out as much Chinese Tallow as possible. The northwest corner near the alligator interpretive display has been clear of all but a few trees. There are plans to take out more. The stumps have been treated and the trees will be piled up and burned, pending approval. As we are told, "it looks bad now but it will get better". We understand this and hope you will too. If you are concerned about Creekfield hikes they will go on. You can incorporate wetland restoration into your hike. I have seen more wading birds out this week as they are easier to see since John flattened all that rice. Following is the sign that will be placed around Creekfield.

## WETLAND RESTORATION IN PROGRESS

**PLEASE BEAR WITH US. IT LOOKS BAD NOW BUT IT WILL GET BETTER. THE CREEKFIELD LAKE AREA IS EXPERIENCING POND SUCCESSION. IF LEFT ALONE IT WILL EVENTUALLY BECOME A FOREST OF CHINESE TALLOW.**

**PARK STAFF, THROUGH WETLAND MITIGATION FUNDS, IS ATTEMPTING TO RECLAIM THIS AREA. TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THIS SUMMER'S DROUGHT, MUCH OF THE INVASIVE SOUTHERN WILD RICE AND CHINESE TALLOW TREES WERE ERADICATED.**

**ONCE THE WATER LEVELS RETURN TO NORMAL THE AREA WILL BE MORE ATTRACTIVE TO WILDLIFE.**

# MAINTENANCE REPORT

*By Bryan Leach*

Tied and split wood and hauled tied wood to the wood racks

Put 2 new tires on the tractor

Cleaned up the wood yard

Cut overhanging limbs off the trail by the map standard at the play ground area and off the Creekfield Forest, Red Buckeye, Pilant Slough and Hoots Hollow Trails

Cut up downed trees off the Creekfield Forest Trail and the Creekfield ADA Trail and hauled useable wood to the wood yard on two occasions

Watered all of the newly planted Oak trees and put hay around 12 of them

Smashed wild rice in Creekfield Lake

Reinstalled a Handicap sign at the Hale Lake parking lot

Replanted 2 of the newly planted trees that were under the power lines along the road to Elm Lake

Installed 3 "Vehicles Prohibited on Grass" signs along the roads in the park

# NUTRIA (*MYOCASTOR COYPUS*)

by Glen Kilgore

Nutria are animals that people love to hate. Although they resemble beaver, they are generally described as “large rats”. Nutria were introduced to the Gulf Coast about 1937, when E. A. MacIlheny, of Tabasco Sauce fame, brought about 15 of them to his estate in Avery Island, Louisiana. They were to be raised in cages for their fur. Unfortunately, in 1940, a hurricane destroyed the cages and the nutria escaped. They proliferated wildly and spread across the entire Gulf Coast. Their value in the fur industry has not nearly compensated for the ecological havoc that they have wrought.

They have defoliated large areas of wetlands, damaged sugar cane and rice crops, and their burrows have weakened canal banks and levees. They have displaced the native population of muskrats, whose fur is much more valuable, throughout their range. They did, however, contribute to the recovery of the alligator from near extinction. Their arrival coincided with alligators achieving protected status. An abundant food source and not being hunted allowed the alligator to make a remarkable come-back.

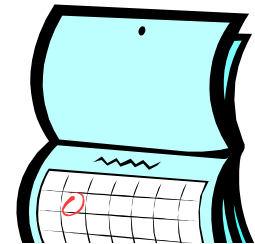
Adult nutria are about 3 feet long, with long reddish brown hair and bushy whiskers. They have a hairless round tail which makes up about half of their body length. Nutria are normally nocturnal but are occasionally seen in daylight. They spend most of their time in the water, and are graceful swimmers. They feed primarily on water plants, but do wander inland for other food such as grass and sugar cane.

Nutria construct burrows that may be 2 feet wide. They have also been known to use the abandoned dens of other animals, or a handy culvert for a home. One adult male usually lives in the burrow with two or three females and their young. Females may become sexually mature when as young as three months old. Two or more litters are produced a year, with an average of five in each litter. The mother can nurse her young while swimming, because her nipples are located on her sides rather than her chest. In the park, populations swell in winter, but quickly are brought down in spring due to predation by alligators.



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January 8, 2006	Bird Hike, 8:00 AM, Forty-Acre restroom building
January 13	Bird Hike, 8:00 AM, Forty-Acre restroom building
January 14	Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
January 21	Sunset Birdwatching, 5:00 PM, Observation Tower
January 28	New Volunteer Orientation, 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
February 4	Bird photography Photo-walk #1, 3:00 PM New Volunteer Training, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM
February 5	Bird Hike, 8:00 AM, Forty-Acre restroom building
February 10	Bird Hike, 8:00 AM, Forty-Acre restroom building
February 11	New Volunteer Training, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM Regular meeting, 5:30 PM
February 12	Sunset Birdwatching, 5:00 PM, Observation Tower



**Brazos Bend State Park**

Texas Parks and Wildlife  
21901 FM 762  
Needville TX 77461

÷ **NEXT MEETING DAY AND TIME<sup>2</sup>**

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 14, 2006, 5:30 PM**

J J J J J J



**FIRST CLASS MAIL**

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**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                                 |

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.

**BRAZOS BEND STATE PARK  
VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION**

**VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION OFFICERS**

- |                 |                      |
|-----------------|----------------------|
| President:      | Judy Strauss         |
| Vice-President: | Sue Warden           |
| Secretary:      | Anna Dell Williamson |
| Treasurer:      | John Bradford        |

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.

**NEWSLETTER TEAM**

- |                       |                                      |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Editor                | Anna Dell Williamson                 |
| Production Assistants | Bruce Williamson<br>Terry Williamson |