

Citizens working to preserve and enhance the state park system for the benefit of the people of Texas and their guests.



The Voice, Online – TfSP E-News

April, 2012

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From the President:

Wildflowers are in full bloom in our Parks as the country comes back to life with springtime rains. This is the time to use your State Parks and get out in the country! Make sure you take a camera with you and capture the memories!

This is also the time for you to contact your members of the Texas State House and Senate about funding for our State Parks. It is truly a shame that TPWD has to go asking for donations to keep our Parks running. We need a better funding plan. Once again, we would like to see our Parks get more of the money from the Sporting Goods Tax, as passed by the law, instead of a small piece of it.

Also, as you will see in this issue of the Voice, we have an opportunity to participate in the design and future use of the Devils River State Natural Area. There are hearings over several areas of the State and if you would like to make comments take advantage of this and be heard!

Go visit and support your Texas State Parks! Hope to see you there.

John Cobb, President

Monahans Sandhills SP and Texas Parks Loses Friend and Supporter

Texas State Parks lost a good friend with the passing of Mrs. Kathlyn "Kitty" Dunagan in Monahans on Sunday, March 4. Mrs. Dunagan was the President of the Friends of Monahans Sandhills State Park for many years and long time supporter of Texans for State Parks.

Kathlyn Dunagan's long involvement with Texas State parks began after reading *Adventures with a Texas Naturalist* by Roy Bedichek in the late 1940's, which suggested a portion of the sandhills area be preserved as a state or national park. Inspired by this suggestion, Kitty Dunagan and husband Conrad began to introduce local residents and visitors to the unique region of sand dunes that was largely inaccessible at the time. Their efforts bore fruit when the park finally opened to the public in November 1957.

When the park was threatened with cutbacks in 1992, Mrs. Dunagan again stepped up and led community efforts to ensure the park's viability. Enlisting the support of other community leaders, they established the Friends of Monahans Sandhills to promote the park and educate local residents on the impact of the park to the local economy. The group raised funds for promotional brochures and leased billboards on Interstate 20 near the park to raise awareness of the site. Not content with those efforts, the group contributed half the cost of renovations to the park visitor center and established the first state park endowment fund.

Kathlyn Dunagan will be missed, but her enthusiasm for the Monahans Sandhills will continue to inspire others as they visit the Dunagan Visitor Center at the park. If you are traveling west of the Midland/Odessa area on I-20, be sure to visit this unusual site and learn about the exceptional resources that so inspired Mrs. Dunagan.

The 20th Annual TPWD Retirees Reunion Scheduled

Past and present employees, friends and family are invited to the annual reunion Sunday, April 22 at the Refectory in Bastrop State Park beginning at 10 am. Lunch will be served and there will be a short presentation on some of the fires and other events. The cost is \$20 per person. Send checks, made payable to Emily Carter to Emily Carter, PO Box 1067, Wimberley, Texas 78676 by April 1. Late registrations will be accepted but please notify Emily by phone or e-mail of the number attending so lunches can be ordered.

TPWD News Releases

Public Meetings Scheduled for Devils River State Natural Area Public Use Plan

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is holding public meetings to present and take comments on the proposed Devils River State Natural Area Public Use Plan. TPWD is welcoming and encouraging public comment regarding recreational and public use of the State Natural Area and its associated river frontage. Proposed changes and new recreational use will be presented. This is an opportunity to participate in the proposed Public Use Plan for the Devils River State Natural Area.

Please refer to the Devils River State Natural Area website for general information and maps concerning the proposed Public Use Plan. http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/devils_river/. The public meetings will take place on the following dates:

- Houston — April 10, 7-9 p.m. — Houston Zoo, Brown Education Hall, 6200 Hermann Park Drive, Gate 5, Houston 77030 (Enter through GATE 5)
 - Arlington — April 11, 7-9 p.m. — Bob Duncan Center, Garden Room, 2800 S. Center Street, Arlington 76014
 - Austin — April 12, 6:30-8:30 p.m. — LCRA Redbud Center, Room RBC 108 North, 3601 Lake Austin Blvd., Austin 78703
 - Del Rio — April 16, 7-9 p.m. — Civic Center, Kennedy Room, 1915 Veterans Blvd., Del Rio 78840
 - San Antonio — April 19, 7-9 p.m. — Central Library Auditorium, 600 Soledad, San Antonio 78205
- Comment can also be made by emailing devilsrivercomment@tpwd.state.tx.us. For further information, please contact Chris Beckcom, (512) 389-4661, chris.beckcom@tpwd.state.tx.us or Joe Ranzau, (830) 395-2133, joe.ranzau@tpwd.state.tx.us

TPWD Commission Approves Deal to Sell Portion of Palo Duro Canyon's Fortress Cliff Ranch

The Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission has approved a real estate deal that calls for TPWD to sell 2,014 acres of the state-owned, 2,867-acre Fortress Cliff Ranch, while retaining roughly 850 acres to expand Palo Duro Canyon State Park. Under the sales contract, Sooter Ranch Ltd. will pay \$2.4 million for the property that includes a modern ranch house, roughly 1,500 acres of grassland and mixed brush, a side canyon and a quarter mile of the canyon rim.

TPWD, working with the Trust for Public Lands, acquired the valuable ranchland overlooking the almost 29,000-acre park in a dual transaction straddling several years ago primarily to protect the state park's view shed. The sales contract mandates that the purchased property be placed under a perpetual conservation easement held by TPWD to ensure that the land's important wildlife conservation values are protected and to protect views from the park of seven miles of the canyon rim that had been targeted for possible development into small, canyon-front home lots, Ted Hollingsworth, TPWD's land acquisitions program manager, told commissioners Thursday. TPWD determined through the use of computer modeling and site visits to map park views that the portion of the ranch being sold did not contribute significantly to the mission of TPWD or the state park. TPWD also evaluated recreational access and public use options in making the determination. The retained acreage will be integrated into existing resource management and the park's public use plan one day is expected to allow visitors to hike from the canyon floor up to the rim to enjoy the spectacular views.

"By selling much of the Fortress Cliff property to a conservation buyer, the agency is staying true to its original stated intent and plan to sell the ranch house and uplands at a future date to protect the cliffs and the park's view shed, and make the best use of our limited funds," said Carter Smith, TPWD executive director. "The sale proceeds will allow us to acquire high-priority state park property elsewhere

in Texas.” The Fortress Cliffs property, formerly Tub Springs Ranch, is located about 15 miles southeast of Amarillo in Randall and Armstrong counties. RM 2012-03-29

TPWD Exploring Non-lethal Burro Control at Big Bend Ranch State Park

The TPWD is continuing to explore the feasibility of non-lethal alternatives to manage the feral burro problem at Big Bend Ranch State Park. Since the mid-2000s, TPWD’s State Parks Division has explored non-lethal options such as live trapping to remove the burros. State parks staff met early on with veterinarians and other experts with the USDA-Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) based in Presidio, but APHIS was unsuccessful in trapping feral burros along the US-Mexico Border within the state park. In 2007, no feasible alternatives had been found and TPWD began lethal control. In 2008, the agency temporarily ceased lethal efforts to allow Peaceful Valley Donkey Rescue to try live trapping burros at the park, but after nearly two years of efforts by the group no burros were caught. In 2011, TPWD Executive Director Carter Smith challenged critics of the department’s burro control methods to bring resources to bear on the problem and to suggest practical alternatives. “We have said consistently that Texas Parks and Wildlife does not have the financial resources to control burros at Big Bend Ranch State Park through alternatives such as capture and quarantine, but that we are open to substantive discussions with interested parties who wish to offer their own resources to help address this problem,” Smith said. “However, any proposed plan must account for adequate and sustained funding, and we must be clear that the goal is to remove feral burros from the park.”

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) has offered its resources to assess non-lethal options. In January, state parks and HSUS staff met at Big Bend Ranch to allow HSUS to assess the landscape and conditions. HSUS is working with a private contractor to conduct an aerial survey to determine the numbers and locations of burros at the park, an essential first step to assess costs and feasibility of control options. TPWD has agreed to cost-share up to \$10,000 to help pay for the survey, which should occur this spring. If HSUS determines that non-lethal alternatives are feasible, the organization will prepare and submit to TPWD for its consideration a proposed timeframe, strategies, methods and resources required to accomplish non-lethal management alternatives. At present, there is no formal proposal or agreement between TPWD and HSUS.

The burros are a feral, exotic, invasive species threatening the state park’s native plants and animals, precious desert springs and seeps, and other natural and cultural resources, a threat similar to that posed by feral hogs and other invasive plants and animals across Texas. TPWD has a statewide policy to control all such exotic, invasive plants and animals on its public lands. In 2011, the agency posted an [online factsheet](#) with photos and video detailing the park burro problem. Smith said it is not likely that TPWD will conduct lethal burro control in the near future, until it has been determined whether any non-lethal methods are feasible. On the Net: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/burros/>

Bastrop State Park Campsites Available for Easter Weekend

[Bastrop State Park](#) continues to recover from last year’s wildfire and reports that the Piney Hill and Deer Run campgrounds are currently open, with many of the 41 campsites unreserved for the typically busy Easter Weekend. In addition, the 18-hole golf course and most of the park’s interior hiking trails are open, and recent spring rains have refilled the lake and helped green up the park. The cabin re-roofing project is expected to wrap up soon. Persons wishing to reserve a cabin for April 13 and later should act quickly. Call the Customer Service Center at (512) 389-8900 or e-mail: reservations@tpwd.state.tx.us. By April 13, most park facilities will be open. The historic Refectory is scheduled to reopen by the end of the month. For more information, call Bastrop State Park at (512) 321-1673.

Donations Received to Help with Bastrop State Park Recovery

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission acknowledged \$134,600 in donations to assist with the ongoing wildfire recovery efforts at Bastrop State Park. The historic park suffered significant losses to its natural resources last September during the state’s worst ever wildfire. As soon as the fire had been controlled, work began to remove hazardous trees, rehabilitate campgrounds, repair roads and develop new trails, but in January flash flooding caused further damage to the park’s sensitive ecosystem by washing away most of the topsoil from heavily burned hillsides. That soil contained most of the remaining loblolly pine seeds. Drought-hardy loblolly pine seeds will soon be sown in private nurseries and nurtured until next winter when the first wave will be ready for planting. It is estimated that 400 acres will

be planted with over 200,000 pine seedlings the first year with the next 4 years doubling to 800 acres and 400,000 seedlings each year.

“Soon after the smoke settled, it became a reality that TPWD could not afford the monumental costs associated with the tasks without some serious financial assistance,” Smith continued. “Three organizations have stepped up to the plate to present TPWD with generous donations to help us move forward with these critical projects.” Immediately after the fire, the Friends of Lost Pines State Parks began soliciting donations, pledging that all money raised would be used solely in the restoration efforts of Bastrop State Park. The group has committed \$64,600 for erosion mitigation, hazardous tree removal, purchase of a greenhouse, trail markers and supplies for volunteers.

The Encana Corporation has made a \$50,000 donation toward the erosion mitigation project and has committed to future assistance with replanting efforts.

Finally, the Apache Foundation will be covering all of the costs of seedlings for the first year for not only the state park but the entire area burned within Bastrop County for a total of \$60,000. Of this amount, \$20,000 will be used for the purchase of approximately 200,000 seedlings for Bastrop State Park.

Don't forget to send e-mail or other address changes to leevans@texas.net so you will continue to receive news and information about the State Park System. Selected news items from various sources are edited and forwarded by Texans for State Parks. If you have news or an event you would like to include, send it to leevans@texas.net.

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www.Texansstateparks.org

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TEXANS FOR STATE PARKS invites you to join with us in protecting our Texas treasures.

Whether you are an individual, organization, school group or represent a small business or a major corporation, membership categories provide a way for you to become involved. For more information, see www.texansstateparks.org.

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Goals

- *Provide a united, state-wide voice for users of state parks and related groups on park matters of shared concerns.*
- *Serve as an information resource for interested persons on state park matters.*
- *Educate park users, legislators and the general public about state park matters.*
- *Support stable and adequate financing for the state park system.*
- *Work in partnership with local state park support groups and other interested groups on state park matters.*
- *Advise the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Commission on State-wide matters of importance to state park users and related groups.*