

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
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From the President:

Robert Landis Armstrong will ever be known as a Champion for Texas State Parks and for Public Lands Stewardship across the Nation. I am saddened to announce that our good friend Bob died on March Sunday March 1.

In 1970 Bob was elected Land Commissioner to manage the 22.5 million acres of public land and mineral ownership, and he was elected virtually unopposed for the next twelve years. Under Armstrong's leadership, revenue from Texas' lands was maximized, while putting the management into an environmental context.

Bob was appointed to the Parks and Wildlife Commission in 1985. This assignment culminated his 17 year personal effort for the state to purchase the 212,000 acre Big Bend State Park, adjacent to the Big Bend National Park. That single acquisition doubled the total park acreage of Texas, a state that, until then ranked 47th in park acreage per person.

And to the membership of Texans for State Parks, Bob was a great friend and colleague. He was a member of our Board of Directors from 2007 until his death. He was serving as our Vice President when he died. The tribute below from Parks Director Brent Leisure gives additional highlights of the life of this extraordinary Texan.

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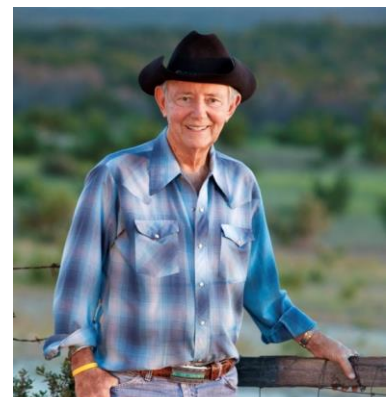
John Gosdin, President

Texas Has Lost A Champion for Texas State Parks and Public Lands Conservation

Former Texas Land Commissioner Bob Armstrong, who as a state parks and wildlife commission member helped establish Big Bend Ranch State Park, died Sunday night at Heart Hospital of Austin. He was 82.

Born and raised in Austin, Robert Landis Armstrong served seven years in the Texas House after first winning a special election in 1963. In 1970, he ran for land commissioner and served for 12 years. He campaigned for governor in the 1982 Democratic primary, finishing behind Mark White and Arthur "Buddy" Temple.

But Armstrong also will be remembered as one of the state's pioneering conservationists. Appointed by White, Armstrong served on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission and was instrumental, along with TPWD Director Andrew Sansom, in getting the more than 200,000 privately owned acres of Big Bend Ranch purchased and designated a state park, a move that more than doubled the acres of state parkland. A visitor center there was named for Armstrong last summer.



TfSP Board of Directors Meeting at Mother Neff State Park

There is a lot of "buzz" going around about the grand reopening of the newly renovated Mother Neff State Park. And there is good reason to celebrate the \$6.5 makeover of what has been called the "grand dame of state parks". This



original State Park is nearly 80 years old and badly needed a major makeover. An additional 140 acres were added to the park in 2012 is now substantially larger than the 256 acre park originally designated by Governor Pat Neff in 1934. The renovation added a new headquarters with a State Park Store, multimedia room and new “state of the art” exhibits.

On March 21st the TfSP Board of Directors convened its quarterly meeting at Mother Neff State Park. After approving a budget for 2015 and reviewing important legislative initiatives being considered by the current Legislature, the Board participated in a tour of the new facilities. Hosting the Board meeting were Park Superintendent Melinda Chadwick and members of the Friends of Mother Neff State Park. They also conducted an insightful tour of the camping loops and modern visitor facilities at this newly renovated park. (See the article in the April edition of Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine for photos and details about the “facelift” and new facilities at Mother Neff.

State Parks Issues Being Considered by Texas Legislature

- **State Park Funding:** Both Chambers, House and Senate, have largely maximized appropriations of the Sporting Good Sales Tax needed by TPWD to meet the highest priorities for Local and State Parks in the upcoming biennium. Many of the high priority Special Items (including planning for Palo Pinto State Park, a Visitors Center at Franklin Mountains, and repairs for Battleship Texas) have passed one Chamber, but not both.
- **Constitutional Dedication of State Park Funding:** Resolution is pending in House Ways & Means; this matter is currently under negotiation.
- **Park Volunteer Liability:** Legislation is moving and promising in both Chambers.

Budget conferees are expected to be named shortly and as soon as they are, we will post that information on the TfSP website so members can consider appropriate responses to their legislators.

Thanks to all who responded to the recent ‘Call to Action’ and who have supported parks-related legislation!

Texans for State Parks Provide Assistance to New and Existing Volunteer Groups

Volunteers provide hundreds of hours of work in parks each year, assisting the park staffs with everything from providing interpretive and children’s programs to general maintenance. Those volunteers put in 424,550 hours valued at \$7,739,545 in the past year but not all parks have the advantage of organized volunteer groups.

During 2014 TfSP implemented the Development Grants program to encourage the development and growth of Parks Partners by offering Development Grants within available funds.

Development Grants may be awarded to any existing 501 (c) (3) non- profit organization sanctioned as a “Friends Group” through a Memorandum of Agreement with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, or to a group in process of organizing a “Friends Group” with TPWD. However, priority will be



given to help fund the development of a new Friends Groups, reactivate a group, or increase a group’s membership.

Seven grants of \$500 each were awarded in 2014. Two of those provided ‘seed money’ to develop a new group and five were to fund a specific program or activity for an existing park. Grants went to Compadres del Rancho Grande, Friends of Colorado Bend SP, Blanco SP, Enchanted Rock and Purtil Creek State Parks to help fund and publicize events benefiting the parks. Cleburne and Lake Colorado City State Parks recently received grants to help with start-up costs associated with forming a new group.

The TfSP Board will finalize a budget for 2015 which will determine the number of grants that may be awarded during this year.



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.

Pay Pal Coming Soon to TfSP Website

Texans for State Parks is in the process of setting up a Pay Pal account for the convenience of new and renewing members for membership dues, and for the purchase of our sale items. We have quality, reasonably priced denim shirts and sweatshirts as well as caps and visors with the TfSP logo on them. Please visit www.texansstateparks.org in the coming weeks to take advantage of the Pay Pal option if you find that more convenient than mailing a check!

As a member, you will ---

- ✓ Add your voice in support of the Texas State Park System.
- ✓ Receive "The Voice" – E-news keeping you informed of issues and events.
- ✓ Contribute toward activities, events and projects not possible in park budgets.
- ✓ Receive information about legislation and other issues impacting Texas parks.

For information and a membership application, see www.texansstateparks.org or e-mail leevans@texas.net.

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