

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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Presidents Message

Texans for State Parks has had a busy month with our Annual Meeting held at Lockhart State Park, assisting Fort Parker State Park with a second residence, Hearings before the House Committee on Culture, Recreation and Tourism, and trying our hand with a grant for assisting Mustang Island State Park with needed equipment.

Texans for State Parks was well represented at the House's Culture, Recreation, & Tourism committee held a hearing on two interim charges - Charge #3 on state park funding and Charge #4 on drought & wildfires. Vice President Bob Armstrong and Director Jamie McNally spoke on behalf of TfSP. While Director Evelyn Mertz spoke on behalf of the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club. Hopefully, better funding (long range) will come out of these hearings.

With the new year, we find ourselves performing more outreach and taking a more active role with our Parks. We as visit these Parks, we are leaving application information about TfSP and hopefully, we will be adding new members. Anyone interesting in our Texas State Parks is invited to join us in our effort to support all our State Parks.

Now is the time to help support your Parks, visit them, make a day of it, donate to Texas Parks and Wildlife (more on this in this newsletter), and volunteer at your local Park.

Hope to see you in our travels through the Parks,
John Cobb, President

Thanks to Lockhart SP for Hosting TfSP Meeting

Texans for State Parks presented Lockhart State Park with a Microwave Oven as a thank you for allowing us to hold our 2012 Annual Meeting at their Park. I am glad to say they have the Park back up and running and everything is green after last week's floods! *John Cobb.*



Texans for State Parks Annual Meeting Review

TfSP held their annual meeting at Lockhart State Park in January beginning Friday evening with soup, snacks, and video presentations from Fort Richardson, Caprock Canyons and Lockhart State Parks. Saturday morning after a welcome by TfSP President John Cobb and Lockhart State Park Superintendent J. Hess, Parks Division Director Brent Leisure reviewed the year's events and their impact on the park system.

The big stories for parks were extreme heat and drought, then fires at Fort Davis, Possum Kingdom and Bastrop. All combined have had a serious impact on visitation. Because approximately 65% of funding for the parks is derived from revenue, the park system has a serious fund shortage. These events followed legislative budgets with a charge to continue to operate all sites. In order to lower the amount of General Revenue funds provided to state parks, the legislature has implemented an "Opt In" donation when citizens renew their vehicle license plates. Donations can be made when renewing at a county tax assessor's office, by mail, or online. Unfortunately, if the amount of donations does not meet the legislature's forecast, the result could be a further reduction in park budgets!

Brent praised the heroic actions of staff at Ft. Davis, Possum Kingdom and Bastrop which saved park structures from fires at these parks. Indian Lodge in Fort Davis State Park became a staging center for the disaster operations during the weeks-long fires in the Fort Davis area. Along with saving park structures, the staff also saved many other structures in the area.

Combined events have left the state park system with a \$4.6 million shortfall. As a result, Parks and Wildlife officials have recently began a campaign appealing to the public to visit parks, and to donate to the State Park System. In the short time following the press conferences, \$1 million has been donated.

In addition, Bastrop State Park has experienced further damage to roads and culverts including one that collapsed, and forced a road to close following the recent heavy rains. However, the Texas Department of Transportation is seeking emergency road contracts to start repairs quickly to help the park restore operations. Normally the process would take several months, but emergency contracts will make it possible to make repairs more quickly.

Brent also talked about recent acquisitions and the funding from public/private partnerships.

- The majority of the funds for the acquisition of property on Devil's River came from private donations, along with approximately a million dollars toward operations.
- A new park was also acquired in Stevens and Palo Pinto Counties. This purchase was made with funds from the sale of Eagle Lake SP which had been specified for other parkland in the same area of the state. Parks Division received \$250,000 in donations for minimal staff and operations of that site.
- Ranch land on the rim of Palo Duro Canyon was purchased to protect the canyon rim. Beyond the strip needed to protect the view, the remainder will be sold with a conservation easement, and the income received from the sale will remain in the parks division.

Angela Reed with the State Parks Division's Historic Sites program briefed the group on the CCC Legacy Parks Initiative to promote CCC parks as historically significant, and to raise much needed funding - through grants, donations, and public-private partnerships - for their interpretation and restoration needs.

John Cobb reviewed TfSP's accomplishments during the year, including the quarterly featured park on the web with a copy presented to those parks for showing on digital displays; a \$5,000 donation to fire victims, assistance with the Caprock Canyons Bison Release program and assistance with the location of a mobile home for a second residence at Fort Parker State Park.

Texans for State Parks Facilitates Donation to Fort Parker

In December Fort Parker State Park had the good fortune of a benefactor ready to donate \$30,000 for the purchase of a used mobile home for a second residence in the park, but both were faced some hurdles with accepting the donation in time for the benefactor to get the tax deduction for 2011 and negotiating through the state procedures for donations, purchased of used property and other issues. As a result TfSP was able to accept the funds as a restricted donation, provide the donor with the needed paperwork for his tax deduction, and use the restricted donation to complete the purchase. The park and Parks and Wildlife made the necessary provisions for location of the second residence in the park, and within a couple of months, the park will have the mobile home on site. At last report, the move had been temporarily delayed due to heavy rain. However, the superintendent reports that the lake is full for the first time since last spring, the river is rolling over the dam, and they hope to make the move as soon as the ground dries sufficiently.

Texas Parks & Wildlife Foundation Donates to Parks

The [Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation](#) board of trustees voted to donate \$500,000 to Texas State Parks, hoping to encourage more donations to aid the state park system, which is facing a \$4.6 million revenue shortfall caused by heat, drought, wildfires and a drop in park visitation.

“Our intent is to encourage many other donors large and small to step up and help keep our Texas State Parks open,” said Kelly Thompson, TPW Foundation board chairman. “Our mission is to support the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and there has never been a greater need for private support of our parks. We will be aggressively seeking donations for state parks from private individuals, corporate partners, and other foundations to help reach the \$4.6 million goal.”

“We are deeply grateful to the foundation for today’s generous contribution, and to all those who have donated in recent weeks,” said Carter Smith, TPWD executive director. “We have a long way to go yet, but with this gift we have raised close to \$1 million toward our \$4.6 million goal, a remarkable achievement in a short time. This is yet another indication of how much Texans care about their state parks.”

Since 1991, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation has been the official non-profit funding partner for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. By bringing together companies, corporations, communities and individuals, the Foundation has successfully raised more than \$70 million benefiting a wide variety of projects.

Texas State Parks Donations Break \$1 Million Mark

Since Texas Parks and Wildlife Department launched a statewide appeal in early December for donations to aid a financially strapped Texas State Parks system, more than \$1 million has been raised, bolstered by three large contributions and smaller donations from more than 1,000 individuals.

Two Texas-based nonprofit foundations accounted for the bulk of the more than \$1 million in donations to the state parks general fund, with \$500,000 coming from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Foundation board of trustees and \$250,000 from the T.L.L Temple Foundation. Online donations from 980 donors through Jan. 16 totaled \$104,135, with the average donation being \$106. Mail-in donations reached \$58,000 and state park offices reported onsite donations approaching \$12,000, more than twice the amount from the same period year ago.

The commission acknowledged a number of donations benefiting wildfire-damaged Bastrop State Park, including a \$100,000 gift from Meadows Foundations, Inc. to replace park vehicles and capital equipment.

TPWD and the TPW Foundation continue to aggressively seek donations from individuals, foundations, non-profit organizations and corporate partners who recognize the importance of Texas State Parks and to work with media and other partners to promote visitation to state parks and awareness of the fundraising effort. Revenue from park visitation funds about half of the state park system’s \$69 million annual operating budget.

- **Park officials continue to stress three ways Texans can help keep state parks open:**
- **Go to <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/helpparks> to make a tax-deductible donation.**
- **Make a donation when you renew your motor vehicle registration. You also can make a \$5 donation when you renew your boat registration.**
- **Finally, because visitor fees pay for about half of park system operating costs, visit state parks often with family and friends.**

Unlike earlier in the year when record heat kept visitors inside, parks are now experiencing cooler weather, parks are greening up after recent rains, and most importantly for many overnight visitors, campfires are being allowed again in most state parks. Check each park’s web page online for the latest information.

TPWD Looking to Sell Part of Palo Duro Canyon’s Fortress Cliff Ranch

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department got the go-ahead today from the Texas Parks & Wildlife Commission to provide public notice of the pending sale of 2,014 acres of the state-owned Fortress Cliff Ranch overlooking Palo Duro Canyon. *[Click on the underlined title to see the full article on the TPWD website.]*

A key part of the purchase agreement for the property is the inclusion of a conservation easement to be held in perpetuity by TPWD that prevents any development near the rim and limits subdividing the property in the future into only two tracts. The property to be sold includes a modern ranch house, roughly 1,000 acres of grassland and mixed brush, a side canyon and a quarter mile of the canyon rim. The acquisition was made primarily to protect the views from the park of seven miles of cliffs targeted for possible development that would have allowed small, canyon-front home lots.

The sale of much of the Fortress Cliff property will protect the cliffs and the park’s view shed, and make the best use of limited funds by selling the ranch house and uplands at some future date. A perpetual conservation easement will ensure the land’s important wildlife conservation values are permanently protected and proceeds from the sale will be used to acquire state park property elsewhere in Texas, where we have many high-priority needs.” *[Click on the underlined title to see the full article on the TPWD website.]*

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. If you have news or an event you would like to include, send it to leevans@texas.net.

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