

State of Parks

JANUARY
2008

THE TEXAS STATE PARKS MISSION: Manage state parks and historic sites to conserve natural and cultural resources, provide recreational and educational opportunities, and foster an understanding of the diversity of Texas' lands and heritage for all generations.

**MESSAGE FROM STATE PARKS
DIVISION DIRECTOR
WALT DABNEY**

This is an exciting time for Texas State Parks, involving positive changes brought about by the efforts of many people.



In 2006, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission chairman appointed a State Parks Advisory

Committee to review the state of the park system and recommend improvements. The committee's recommendations became the basis of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Legislative Appropriations Request.

The 80th Texas Legislature took a very positive step in addressing many of the recommendations by providing substantial additional funding to begin bringing our parks to a quality level. This is the first edition of a regular newsletter that will keep you informed of the many positive changes taking place in Texas State Parks.

We are in the process of hiring over 200 employee positions, replacing many previously eliminated positions and adding new positions statewide. Additional staff will increase our capabilities to better maintain

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



TPWD File Photo

Voters approve Proposition 4!

Bonds Provide \$52 Million for Texas Park Repairs

AUSTIN / On Nov. 6, 2007, Texas voters again voiced their support for state parks by passing Proposition 4. The \$1 billion bond package also funds repairs for state historic sites, crime labs and other projects. But, as with the similar Proposition 8 passed in 2001, parks became a focus of awareness and support.

State parks will get \$52 million in bond authority from Proposition 4 for 2008-2009, including \$27 million for major repairs at parks across the state and \$25 million to help fund a new dry berth for long-term preservation of the Battleship TEXAS (shown above).

There is something for every Texas region from Proposition 4, as illustrated by selected examples listed below.

In Southeast Texas, Sea Rim State Park has been closed since 2005 because of Hurricane Katrina. The park should soon reopen with \$1,268,273 in Prop 4 dollars to repair wastewater and electrical system damage.

In South Texas, Choke Canyon State Park will get \$1,179,758 for roof and water treatment plant repairs.

In Central Texas, Bastrop State Park will get \$3,670,193 for major repairs to several historic buildings built 70 years ago by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Garner State Park will get \$1,556,552 to repair foundation failures at 17 CCC cabins and repair roofs, doors, and peeling paint on 22 screen shelters.

In West Texas, Balmorhea State Park will get \$397,427 to repair failing roofs, chimneys and walls, including historic adobe, in facilities originally built by the CCC in the 1930s.

In the Panhandle, Palo Duro Canyon State Park is allocated \$454,662 to study alternative water supply options and make renovations to provide access for people with disabilities.

In North Texas, Cedar Hill State Park will receive \$4,356,253 to replace electrical systems and water lines and add wastewater service to five camping loops. Cedar Hill has the highest overnight camping rates in the state park system, but its older systems can no longer handle the demands of newer, larger recreational vehicles.

In East Texas, Tyler State Park will get \$2,585,641 to replace restrooms and renovate camping areas, convert screen shelters into cottages, and repair CCC buildings.

Message from State Parks Division Director Walt Dabney

parcs, conduct visitor and student educational and interpretive programs, provide law enforcement security, enhance fee collection and business management capability and conduct needed work to maintain natural and cultural resources. This makes it a great time to consider joining the state parks staff for a career that will make a real difference for Texas today and tomorrow.

Significant additional funding was also provided to allow parks to begin addressing critical equipment needs, replacing the worst mowers, tractors, and vehicles. This will increase the staff's ability to do other important work and reduce the frustration and delays of trying to repair worn-out equipment. Additionally, significant additional funding was provided to address recurring small-repair needs and preventative maintenance. This will allow us to paint, repair roofs, replace fixtures and wiring, siding, etc., before they become major problems, as well as enhance the appearance and functionality of facilities.

Major repair funding is also coming from voter-approved bond packages Proposition 8 and more recently Proposition 4. This will fund many major repair projects including the renovation of Civilian Conservation Corps facilities built in the 1930s and replacement of numerous poor quality restrooms.

The parks are already starting to improve in appearance and park staffs are very excited and having better resources to do their jobs. We hope you will soon come out and see how Texas State Parks are getting better all the time!

New funding means positive changes for State Park visitors



Chase A. Fountain, TPWD

SOMERVILLE, Texas / Christmas came early in 2007 for dozens of Texas state parks and the many people who visit them. In May, the 80th Texas Legislature increased annual funding by tens of millions of dollars and authorized more than 200 new staff positions.

The upshot for visitors this spring is better-maintained park facilities, more interpretive programs such as guided tours, reopened campgrounds and trails, and better customer service.

But flash back to a Christmas that was not so merry, in 2005, and you can see how far the park system has come.

That December, Austin Vieh sat in his office at Lake Somerville State Park/Nails Creek Unit, wondering what he was going to do. The park superintendent was one of several dozen employees across the state that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department had to let go because of financial constraints.

"You might say my habitat was reduced, so I adapted and moved to Austin for two years," Vieh joked recently, describing how he was able to get a job at headquarters in charge of park literature and visitation collection.

In December 2005, Nails Creek lost five employee positions, and the park unit had to cease overnight camping and discontinue guided tours, ranger talks and other interpretive programs. Similar cutbacks began to make news in dozens of other communities across Texas. The public took notice, and so did state elected leaders, who responded with a significant funding increase during the 2007 legislative session.

This spring, a renaissance is sweeping the state park system, and the good things happening at Nails Creek are emblematic of the rebirth occurring statewide.

Austin Vieh is back in his old job. "I always considered myself a park guy, a field person," Vieh said. "I like to be out here on the front line with the customers. I like being here at the counter and talking to folks as they're coming in, trying to do what we can to make sure they have a memorable experience."

On Thanksgiving weekend 2007, Nails Creek resumed overnight camping for the first time in two years. Interpretive programs are returning, such as ranger-led talks in campgrounds and guided canoe trips. Families are coming back to camp in the park and paddle down Yegua Creek into Lake Somerville. By spring break 2008, Vieh says the park should be fully reopened.

Across Texas, \$27 million in new funding for major facility repairs statewide will repair and improve historic buildings, water plants, restrooms and leaky roofs—the physical backbone of the state park system.

But it's the people who make a difference. Parks are a labor-intensive enterprise. Dozens of new employees are bringing new energy, new ideas and passion—peace officers making parks safer, rangers and interpreters telling the story of Texas, its history and wildlife.

Complete information about state parks is online. Camping reservations can be made via the Internet at www.tpwd.state.tx.us, or by phone at (512) 389-8900.

PICTURE THIS

Caprock Canyons State Park celebrates 25th anniversary, unveils all-new 4,400-square-foot visitor center



Robert McCorkle, TPWD

Rising Anew

The center houses a State Park Store, 24-hour restrooms, a lobby/registration area and offices. A new group meeting pavilion, adjacent bison viewing platform overlooking the State Bison Herd pasture, wayside signage and a new parking lot also were part of the Visitor Center project.



Robert McCorkle, TPWD

Grand Salute

A cavalry salute was part of the Oct. 20 grand opening ceremonies for the new Visitor Center at Caprock Canyons State Park in Quitaque.



Robert McCorkle, TPWD

Recent History

Opened in 1982, the park offers day-use and camping facilities; hiking; horseback riding; mountain biking; boating; fishing; lake swimming; scenic drive; guided tours; and seasonal horse rentals. Caprock Canyons State Park boasts 90 miles of multi-use trails with a wide range of difficulty levels.

Johnny Crawford: A moving target



Ronny Gallagher, TPWD

Johnny Crawford logs thousands of miles a year installing equipment and fixing things that break down throughout the Panhandle Plains region. A typical week might find the Lubbock-based maintenance technician installing a digital traffic counter in San Angelo one day, putting the system in place at Big Spring the next, and doing the same in Brownwood the next.

The 50-year-old Texas Parks and Wildlife veteran of 16 years is a mighty busy fellow. And he likes it that way.

“People tell me to slow down, but I’m always ready to jump in and get it done,” Johnny says. “I love to travel and go to the various parks. I love my job and getting to meet great people wherever I go. I’m always up for any challenge and look forward to dealing with projects I’ve never done.”

The energetic employee works for State Parks Region 6 in Lubbock, where he was hired in 2000 as a Ranger IV to help with special projects and emergency repairs. Supervisor Ronny Gallagher says Crawford has been instrumental in making repairs to historic structures at Fort Griffin and Palo Duro Canyon, taking care of Region 6 office and grounds, and participating in interpretive programs at several other state parks. He also has accomplished many high-skill projects such as the Bison Overlook Pavilion at Caprock Canyons State Park and the yurts at Abilene State Park.

Due to a recent infusion of funds

from the Texas Legislature, Johnny was promoted recently to the Maintenance Technician V slot, a position that has gone statewide in all eight state park regions. The new maintenance positions, which require an advanced level of skills, have been dubbed “Johnny Crawfords.”

As a regional maintenance tech, Johnny spends much of his time going from project to project at the 12 parks throughout Region 6, occasionally being called to assist parks outside the region with special needs. He might be clearing brush for campsites to help get a new park open one week, and the next be helping host Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) veterans at Garner or Bastrop state park. One CCC team project he was a part of earned the group a 2002 Employees Service Award.

Says Johnny, “My granddad once told me, ‘You’ll find a job you love and never work a day in your life.’ Now I know what he meant.”