

The George Observatory/Challenger Learning Center, operated by the Houston Museum of Natural Science, is open to the general public on Saturdays only, from 3-10 p.m. This facility houses exhibits, a gift shop, a 36-inch telescope and two smaller scopes. There is a fee for viewing through all three scopes. Astronomy Day is in October. Weekday viewings and educational classes are available by reservation, or by calling (979) 553-3400 for general information. Or visit www.georgeobservatory.org.

The park gates close every night at 10 p.m. The gift shop located in the park headquarters is open during office hours (all three gift shops in the park offer their own unique merchandise). Hunting and fishing licenses, Annual State Park Passes and Youth Group Permits can be purchased at headquarters. The Annual Pass allows free entry to all Texas State Parks and includes discounts on camping and State Park Store purchases. For more information about the State Parks Pass, visit the Web sites listed below.

Park information/office hours: (979) 553-5101
All reservations: (512) 389-8900
TPWD information: (800) 792-1112
www.brazosbend.org • www.tpwd.state.tx.us

Nearby Points of Interest

Houston, the state's largest city, is a center for world trade and the second-largest seaport in the nation. It has all of the amenities of a major metropolitan area.

On the east side of the city is San Jacinto Battleground State Historic Site. The park and its museum commemorate the site where Texas won its independence from Mexico. The Battleship *Texas* is next door.

The Gulf of Mexico with its beaches, fishing piers and ports is less than 50 miles to the south in

the Freeport/Brazosport area. Galveston Island with its numerous attractions, including Galveston Island State Park, is a few miles farther up the coast.

West Columbia was founded in 1826 and served as the capital of the Republic of Texas for a brief period in 1836. It is the site of Varner-Hogg Historic Site and is approximately 25 miles south of Brazos Bend.

About the same distance to the north are two other towns of historical interest. Rosenberg was a shipping point on the Brazos River as early as 1830. Richmond was an important river crossing during the Texas Revolution and became the county seat in 1837. Nothing remains on the site of Fort Bend where the county received its name. The George Ranch Historical Park located to the north on F.M. 762 offers a step back in time to the ranching days of the late 1800s. Home and farm tours, as well as demonstrations of various aspects of ranch life, are offered.

For a slower, relaxed atmosphere, Needville, a small farming town approximately 20 miles northeast of the park, holds a quiet country charm where one can shop for antiques and crafts and dine on BBQ, seafood and home cooking.

The park is located near the southern end of F.M. 762. From Houston, either take U.S. 59 south to the Crabb River Road exit, then head south on F.M. 762; or take Hwy. 288 south to F.M. 1462, exit west, then head north on F.M. 762.



4200 Smith School Road
Austin, Texas 78744

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Brazos Bend

STATE PARK

A Natural Experience



21901 F.M. 762
Needville, Texas 77461
(979) 553-5101
www.tpwd.state.tx.us



The Park

Less than 50 miles from downtown Houston, Brazos Bend State Park has a quiet, natural setting with a variety and abundance of wildlife that contradicts its proximity to the nation's fourth-largest city. Located on the south-east border of Fort Bend County in the area of Texas' first Anglo colonization, the park was purchased by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department in 1976 and covers approximately 5,000 acres with an eastern boundary of 3.2 miles along the Brazos River.

History

Archaeological materials show that prehistoric peoples visited this area, possibly as early as 300 B.C. In early historical times, the Capoque band of Karankawa Indians roamed between the mouth of the Brazos River and Galveston Bay and may have traveled inland as far as Brazos Bend.

In the early 19th century, this area of Texas was the site of Stephen F. Austin's first colonial land grant from Mexico, and present parkland was included in a grant to Abner Harris and partner William Barrett in 1827. Most of the riverfront was sold shortly after the Texas Revolution, and records show that in 1845 part of the park and 2,400 feet of river frontage were in the hands of cotton brokers who lived in nearby Brazoria. At that time, the Brazos River was one of the principal routes of commerce, and it may be that the brokerage firm used the area for one of their riverboat landings.

In recent times the land on which the park is located was used for cattle grazing, pecan harvesting and as a private hunting preserve.

Natural Features

Brazos Bend is on the comparatively flat Texas Gulf Coastal Plain and falls within the Coastal Prairie Vegetation Region. Most of the park land is in the Brazos River floodplain, but there are areas of flat uplands typical of the coastal prairies.

The Brazos River bottomland and portions of Big Creek support a mixed hardwood vegetation community which includes pecan, elm, sugar hackberry, various species of oaks, and numerous species of shrubs and vines. Gallery forests along the river, creek banks and bayous are dominated by sycamore, cottonwood and black willow. The old meander escarpment of the Brazos River is characterized by magnificent moss-covered and vine-draped live oak woodlands. The flat uplands support tallgrass prairie, and the numerous swales and depressions become ponds during periods of heavy rainfall.

In addition to the Brazos River, the major water course is Big Creek, which meanders diagonally across the park and is associated with sloughs, bayous and cutoff meanders called oxbows. Two of these meanders form natural oxbow lakes, and two other oxbows are man-made by the channeling of Big Creek. Other lakes, such as Elm and 40-Acre, have been created by levees, dissecting the main channel of the ancient Brazos River. Pilant Lake, a shallow, freshwater marsh, is shared by the park and private landowners.

Wildlife is diverse and abundant. The white-tailed deer is the largest of more than 25 different species of mammals, which also include bobcats, coyotes, raccoons, gray and red foxes, river otters, feral hogs and several species of rodents. Approximately 21 species of reptiles and amphibians have been recorded, and the smaller turtles, lizards, snakes and frogs are overshadowed in general interest by the American alligator, which is present mainly in the wetland areas of Elm, 40-Acre and Pilant lakes. (Feeding/harassment of wildlife is prohibited.) Birds of 290 species have been sighted in and around the park. The diverse habitat is a haven for migratory waterfowl, a variety of shorebirds, wading birds, songbirds and raptors. Brazos Bend is a "must" on your coastal birding tour. (Bird feeders are allowed.)

Recreational Facilities

Accommodations for a wide variety of outdoor activities and pursuits are provided by structures and facilities designed for compatibility with the park's natural features. Nature lovers, birders, hikers, campers and other outdoor enthusiasts will delight in an observation tower on 40-Acre Lake trail and

almost 35 miles of hiking/biking and foot trails, including an eight-mile equestrian trail system.

For day-use visitors there are three separate areas with a total of 120 picnic sites with grills, water and rest rooms (40-Acre, Elm, and Hale Lake picnic areas). Elm Lake and Hale Lake areas also have picnic pavilions with water and BBQ grills to accommodate large groups. The group dining hall offers a complete kitchen plus an outdoor BBQ grill. (Reservations are required for all three day-use group facilities.) Fishing is allowed in the park from bank or pier only. No boating, wade fishing or swimming is permitted.

Facilities for campers include 77 sites with water, electricity, tent and parking pad, table, fire ring and grill. Fourteen screened shelters provide the same amenities. A trailer dump station is provided. There are also three primitive youth group camping areas and primitive equestrian camping. There is a daily per-person entrance fee. Camping and group facilities are extra.

Park Activities

A multitude of interpretive and educational activities are available. The **Nature Center** is open to the public on weekends from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and weekdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. At least three free programs/hikes are offered on Saturday and Sunday. The Creekfield Lake Self-Guided All-Accessible Trail is a half-mile long and starts across the street from the Nature Center parking lot. Guided hikes and programs are also offered during the week by reservation only, either on-site or off-site (fee involved). For information call (979) 553-5123 or (979) 553-5124, or see Activity Guide brochure for details.

There are seasonal events such as our Astronomy Day event in October, and "A Simple Christmas." There are badges for children to earn such as the Gatorwise Club and Junior Naturalist. The Brazos Bend State Park Volunteer Organization Web site has an abundance of information and activities as well as information on becoming a volunteer. Visit us at www.brazosbend.org.