

What's an Idaho Master Naturalist Doing Down Here in Texas?

And the answer is----I live here in San Antonio for eight months out of the year. The other four, I spend in Island Park Idaho.

Island Park is part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem. Its southern end lies within the Henry's Fork Caldera, one of three enormous volcanic eruptions that have taken place within the past 2.1 million years in that area. It is also the headwaters of the Henry's Fork of the Snake River which joins the Snake below and then meanders through the Snake River Plain, home of Idaho's famous potatoes.



Last summer I received my Idaho Master Naturalist (IMN) certification through the Henry's Fork Chapter. In many ways our chapter is similar to the AAMN. The IMN program is patterned after the TMN and a great deal of credit is given to the Texas program which has served as a model for so many other states. Some of our text material is taken from the Texas curriculum with modifications and additions for Idaho. There was even a Texas connection in the makeup of our 2010 class. Three of the fourteen who achieved certification were summer residents from Texas.

The Henry's Fork chapter was the first in Idaho. Long time summer resident Mary Van Fleet did all of the organizational work and the first classes were held in the summer of 2008. We now have about 28 active volunteers and in 2010, these volunteers logged in 1688 hours of service.

The Henry's Fork chapter does differ from the AAMN in several ways. For one thing, Island Park is a very small community. Winter is brutal and year round residents number less than 300. The population grows in the summer with summer residents, campers and fishermen. Continental Divide hikers often drop down from the trail to pick up mail and replenish supplies. With such a small pool of potential members, summer residents make up a good portion of the chapter. Fortunately there is a core of very dedicated year round residents to help with projects in the late fall, winter and spring.

Another way the Henry's Fork chapter differs from AAMN is that the volunteer emphasis is on Stewardship and Citizen Science. Fewer hours are devoted to Interpretation and Communication. Stewardship projects have included fence building, habitat restoration, non native plant removal and native garden work. Citizen science volunteers do cygnet watching, fish surveys, and data collection for a number of studies including a moose-elk migration study. National Geographic filmed the collaring of Moose this past winter and

it will be shown as part of a documentary series entitled “America’s Big 5” on Nat Geo’s WILD channel.



Bren Dismuke



Bren Dismuke

I took part in a Forest Service survey monitoring the use of a boat dock that is the launch point for an amazing number of people floating down the clear and shallow Henry’s Fork in canoes, kayaks, rafts, pontoon boats, tubes and once, a surf board. The floaters are apt to spy Moose, Trumpeter Swan, Pelicans, Canada Geese, Sand Hill Cranes, Osprey and Bald Eagles. Volunteers spent many hours counting and measuring Aspen trees as part of an Aspen regeneration program at Harriman State Park. And still more volunteers monitored and cleaned fish traps at the fish ladder on the Buffalo River.



Leacy Piper



Dan Kupchyk

Concerns over responsible development; bear and human interactions, water use, invasive species, insect damage, the impact of ATVs and snowmobiles, and the shortage of funding for governmental and non profit agencies are just a few of the challenges facing the Island Park community. Partnering with the Idaho Fish and Game, Idaho Parks and Recreation, US Forest Service, Henry’s Fork Foundation, and the Nature Conservancy gives the growing number of passionate and dedicated Master Naturalists of the Henry’s Fork chapter the opportunity to work in the area of natural resource management and conservation.



Mary Van Fleet



Karen Davidon

Now back to San Antonio. I am proud and excited to be a part of the 28th class of the AAMN. I hope to be able to learn more about, and give something back to our great state of Texas. Y'all are welcome anytime to visit our chapter up in Idaho.