

The Tracker

Central Texas Master Naturalist Newsletter February 2019

Photo by Terri Matthew

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Calendar at a Glance

Feb 23-24 Home & Garden Show

Mar 2 Mother Neff SP workday

Mar 2 Harker Heights Seed Swap

Mar 6 Science Fair Judging

Mar 12 Board Meeting—Belton

Mar 12 Chapter Meeting—Belton

Mar 14 Miller Springs NC workday

Mar 19 Volunteer Training Class 1

Mar 26 Volunteer Training Class 2



Become a
**TEXAS
MASTER
NATURALIST**

Volunteer Training Course

March 19th – June 4th

Tuesdays: Classroom & Field Trips

Applications
Now
Available



For information on the
Central Texas Master
Naturalist Program contact:

Zoe Rascoe 254-913-1013

Lynn Fleming 254-760-4739

Mary Ann Everett 254-721-0931



txmn.org/centraltexas



President's Pen



- John Atkins

Greetings! This will be my first contribution to the newsletter as Chapter President. First, I would like to thank Past President Rene Berkhoudt for his service to this organization. His vision and professionalism have moved this organization forward by leaps and bounds. On a personal note, I would like to thank him for his friendship and mentorship. I've learned much from Rene over the past few years.

As your new President I thought it would be fitting to tell you a little about myself. I grew up in west-central Iowa, in a small town with a population of 250. It was a good area for an outdoorsman to grow up, since like Bell County, my county was also a transition zone. I lived at the southern tip of prairie pothole region where it blended with the rolling hills of western Iowa and the oak forests of southern Iowa. My youth was spent doing farm work, hunting, fishing, and trapping.

I was planning to join the Army after high school, but was awarded a 4-year ROTC scholarship and chose to attend Iowa State University instead. I majored in Fisheries and Wildlife Biology and graduated in 1990. While in college, I continued to help feed myself and pay my bills through hunting, fishing, and trapping. During the summer breaks, I worked various internships and studies with ISU, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and several County Conservation Commissions. My experiences were largely wetland management, pothole restoration, vegetation management, and prairie restoration.



After college, I had to repay the Army for my schooling. Since the money was better in the Army than what I would have been making as a Wildlife Biologist, I ended up sticking around the Army for the next 25 years, retiring from the Infantry as a Lieutenant Colonel. While in Army I did get a couple of opportunities to continue working with environmental topics. I attended a great Environmental Compliance Officer course, where I furthered my knowledge of working within EPA guidelines (and other three letter agencies). At Fort Hood, I worked as the III Corps Training Officer, where I dealt with resource management, protected species and sites, and training area development. It wasn't working as a biologist, but it did keep my toes in the water. I finished my Army career as the Deputy Inspector General for III Corps.

After retiring, my wife drug me to my first CTMN meeting three years ago. I found out that I actually liked it, so I stuck around and the rest is history.

I'm looking forward to my next two years as the President, and hope to carry on the great work of our Past Presidents. Thank you for this opportunity to serve you.

2019 Home & Garden

Temple Area Builders Assoc. SHOW

Sat. Feb 23rd
10:00-6:00

Sun. Feb 24th
Noon—5:00



These are Master Naturalists at work. Come by our booth (A29) or the Kids Zone and learn how we make a difference — and you can too!

FUN FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY!

JOIN US AT THE ASSEMBLY HALL

Saturday & Sunday
2/23 2/24

Parental Supervision Required





Mother Neff State Park

1680 TX Hwy-236, Moody

- **Bill Abright**

Bill can be reached at b_abright@yahoo.com

Bird Feeder Class

Sunday, February 24th 2:00-4:00pm

February is National Bird Feeding Month and MNSP will host a “Create Your Own Bird Feeder” project. Register at the park headquarters for the free class (Park Entry Fee is \$2 per person 13 and older). The program will be at the bird blind near the rock tower so allow time to travel there.

CTMN Work Days

February 27th and March 2nd 10:00am at Park HQ

CTMN members will be helping with trail maintenance and other projects in advance of Golden Cheeked Warbler nesting season. Our efforts provide important work that assists the Park Rangers in getting the areas ready for both guests and wildlife.

John Atkins advises: Remember to bring gloves. Poison ivy takes no prisoners and green briars require a blood sacrifice.

First-Ever MNSP Earth Day Festival Saturday, April 27th

Summer Miller, a Texas State Park Ambassador with MNSP, is organizing an Earth Day event. CTMN plans to participate with a booth of activities. Earth Day has been celebrated in the US since 1970—nearly 50 years! - and is a great opportunity to share what we know about conserving our natural resources and fostering curiosity about nature. If you would like to participate in this outreach event, please let Bill Abright know.

Making Tracks



- Lynn Fleming

I like to make tracks. It's a simple thing and easy to do, but it creates a snapshot of what you have seen. It creates a story if you read it. It makes you wonder where this animal was going and why they were headed there.

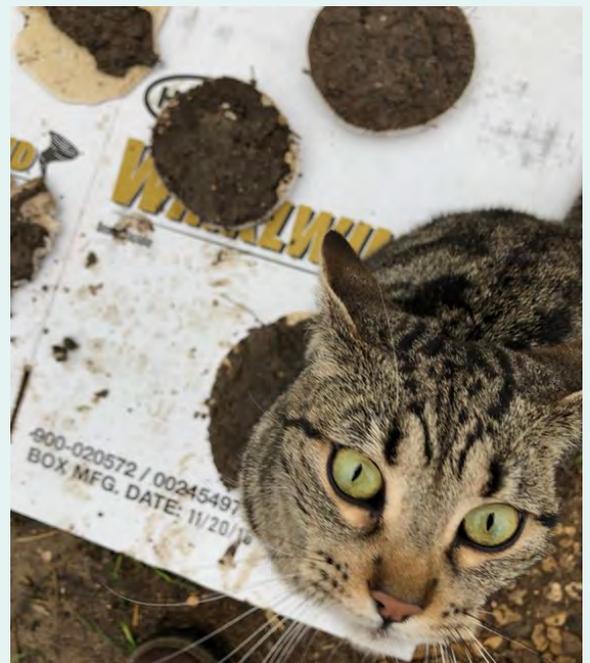
Track casts don't have to be of wild animals. I recently made some casts at our farm shop just because it looked interesting. What you see on the ground is not always what takes with the plaster.

I try to use a moat when I make casts because you can make them deeper and control the flow of the plaster a little better. File folders cut in strips then taped together make great moats.

In a small mudhole, there were cat, bird and rodent tracks all crossing paths. I mixed some plaster and set out to see what would be captured.



Rodent tracks in red. They were busy. Cat in blue.



Photobombing cat!

Making Tracks cont



I had more plaster than I had moats to hold it so I went free-form.



Cat in blue, rodents in red, ring neck dove in green. Rodent tracks are tough to capture!



Results were not as good as I hoped.



Wolf? Coyote? No, just our Great Pyrenees, but they make BIG tracks!

January 2019 Chapter Meeting

- Zoe Rascoe

Jerry Evans provided a tour of his extensive website that chronicles his discovery of wildflowers and ferns, fossils and geology, insects and aquatic invertebrates, lichens and mushrooms and other natural wonders in Central Texas. Jerry has spent years documenting these natural items at various locations in Bell County, including Miller Springs Nature Center. You can find his electronic field guide with hundreds of photos at www.centexnaturalist.com.



Not sure what's happening here, but Kathy Cantu is pretty much pretending that Lynn Fleming is going to be OK.



Our own crafty Lynn Williams continues to find ways to engage kiddos in nature. She is preparing kits of finger puppets similar to these to sew and sell at the Home and Garden show in February. Once displayed at the meeting, Linda Fairlie and Shirley Watts stepped up to help stitch the little critters. Check them out at our Expo Home & Garden Show booth Feb. 23-24th.

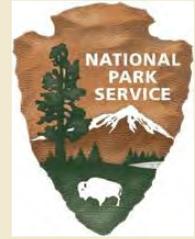


Photos by Zoe Rascoe

GRAND TETONS NATIONAL PARK

Wyoming

- Linda Fairlie

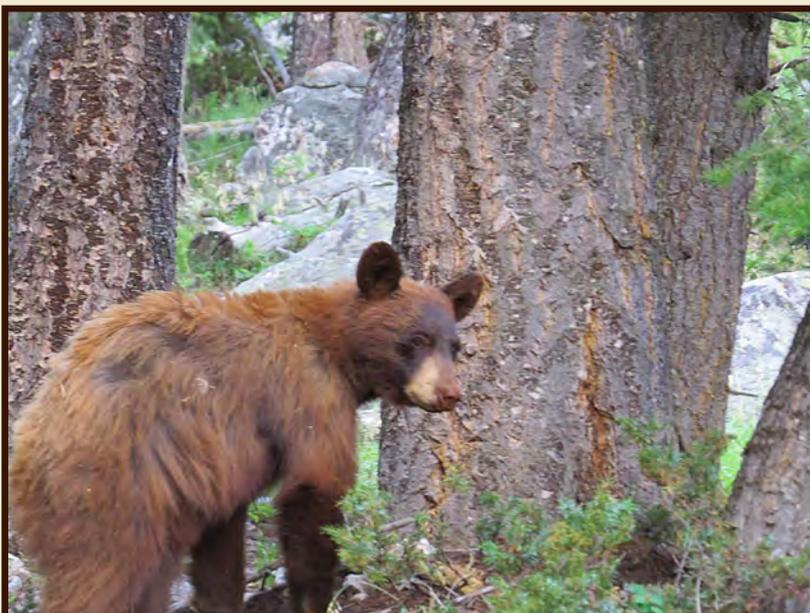


It was the summer of 2015. My husband and I were not yet married, but we went on a 5-week camping trip to 23 National Parks. We slept in a tent. Really.

One of our stops was the Grand Tetons, and we took a hike up Garnet Canyon. The trail consisted of a lot of switch backs, so there was only one way to get where we were going. Suddenly this big bird came running up to us chattering. I believe it was a grouse, not sure.



At any rate, this bird was basically telling us about a bear down the path a few feet! This was an older juvenile and it was tearing up a tree to get at the grubs in the root system. He looked at us, and we looked at him. We yelled and he headed toward us, and we backed up a bit. We watched him for about a half hour, but the only way up was past the bear. We didn't know if it was a black bear or a grizzly because it was cinnamon colored.



A few other people wandered up the path and we discussed the bear. The whole time, the bird wandered around and chattered at us. I showed them a closeup of the picture I took to decide if it was a grizzly or a black bear. It didn't have a hump, and its ear and nose shape determined it was a black bear even though it was brown colored. Apparently black bears are a lot less likely to attack humans than a grizzly.

GRAND TETONS *CONT*

We finally decided with 5 people we might be able to scare off the bear. No, I do not recommend this. I was in the minority on the vote. The men began to pick up large

rocks and threw them at the bear. He popped his head up once, then went back to eating. The second rock hit him in the shoulder and he ran off. We were able to continue our hike.



Next, we encountered a bull moose! It was just hanging out, munching on green stuff. He was huge, and majestic!

We also saw a Pika further up the path. Not nearly as scary, and really cute! These animals are hamster sized, and are related to rabbits.



We soaked our feet at the top of the trail in the glacier fed spring before we came back down. The whole experience made the Tetons one of my favorite National Parks!

Photos by Linda Fairlie

2019 January/February Awards

- Zoe Rascoe



Juan Anaya—TMN Certification



Linda Fairlie—TMN Certification



Don Wyatt—2018 Recertification



Lynn Fleming—2018 Recertification

2019 Awards cont.



Richard McCarthy—2018 Recertification



John Atkins—250 Hour Milestone



Gail Hughling—1000 Hour Milestone Award rates flowers and a hug from Tina Atkins—John was in charge of the handshake.



Zoe Rascoe- 2018 Recertification

February 2019 Chapter Meeting



Kevin Beavers, Director of Parks and Recreation for City of Temple, presented the history of the area designated as Miller Springs Nature Center in the 1990's from its roots in the community of Tennessee Valley and the building of Lake Belton. This 260 acre nature preserve is often called a "jewel" because encompassing canyons, woodlands, waterfalls and springs, prairies and riparian areas filled with wildlife and beautiful plants is quite the treasure in the middle of an urban area. The land near the Lake Belton Dam is the responsibility of US Army Corps of Engineers, but in 2018 the Cities of Temple and Belton partnered with the ACOE through a lease to maintain Miller Spring Nature Center so it can be open to

the public 365 days a year. Kevin assured the attendees that the plan is to keep the preserve a natural area for hiking, biking, running, dog walking, bird watching, geocaching, wildlife observation; and from the adjacent Miller Springs Park, fishing and kayaking. Kevin reviewed future plans for trail marking, new restrooms, updating signage and possibly extending handicap accessibility. Our Master Naturalist Chapter, under the leadership of member John Burns, is gearing up to tackle invasive plant removal at Miller Springs. A number of the Top 10 Texas Invaders are found there. Additional training in invasive plant identification and removal techniques is coming this spring. The first workday for our members will be March 14th when wax leaf ligustrum will be on the chopping block, followed by china berry trees. Thanks to Cody Weems with the Temple Daily Telegram for covering Kevin's presentation on the front page! If any of our readers would like to volunteer on a public work day contact Matt Bates with City of Belton at parksandrec@beltontex.gov. Members, watch for information by email.



February 2019 Chapter Meeting



The program topic included invasive plant issues at Miller Springs Nature Center. Do you see what we're doing here? =)



More sign up sheets for volunteer opportunities than you can shake a walking stick at. (Below) Zoe Rascoe is showing Cody Weems, Temple Daily Telegram reporter, the beneficial characteristics of using a sotol flower stem to make a walking stick; sturdy but very light weight and tapered just right. Andreas Wooten made this one for her—finally one short enough! We will have his walking sticks for sale at the Expo Home & Garden Show.



Lynn Williams and her helpers have bags of animal finger puppets ready to sell at the Home Show. And yes, these are critters you can find here in Central Texas! No penguins.

Photos by Terry Rascoe, Story by Zoe Rascoe

My Sub-Urban Backyard

(aka—all those slimy critters mom hates)

- Andreas Wooten

Editor's Note: Second in a series (Here, invasion of Gulf Coast Toads).

This toad was in our small pond on the back porch. Its amazing how they get to some places. This is a 2 ½ foot tall galvanized tank with no escalator or stairs.



So I don't think he flew up, and the dogs probably didn't gently place it in, all I can guess is he jumped! Notice the bulging chin. He was calling to a female (found her under the chair nearby heading his way, the useless dogs just sitting there watching!) These guys are sooooo loud. This picture was taken about 12:30am (not joyfully) after I was woken from my sleep by his mating calls.

This little guy is one of our many newborn toads (like his daddy above) and is only about the size of a kidney bean. We literally have hundreds of these around the garden and house (maybe that's why the dogs don't care, they are just tired and outnumbered)



My Sub-Urban Backyard *cont*

This is a little Rough Earth snake. If we let the yard grow up we get a lot of these. They especially like the compost pile and the low bushes in the garden. Biggest one we have had hangs out in a knot hole in the side of the big pond and is about ten inches long (twice the size of this one in the photo.).



In addition to our ground dwellers and bugs we get a fair amount of birds. This year we have identified Blue Jay, Cardinal, Mocking bird, Painted Bunting, Blue Bird, Yellow Warbler, Eurasian, White Wing and White Tip dove, House Sparrow, Lesser Gold Finch, Red Tail and Red Shoulder Hawk, Eastern Screech Owl, Ruby Throat Hummingbird and my personal favorite the Mexican Free-tail Bat. I am sure there are some I forgot to mention but it's a lot for a little ½ acre lot in a sub-division.

We just keep trying to make sure everyone has the “big three”, food, water and shelter. Nothing special, and nothing specific to any one critter. They seem to find what they want by just having water and a compost pile!! If your a frustrated sub-urban dweller, just keep trying. Keep planting stuff, keep water out and have a nice pile of leaves and twigs somewhere, the critters will show up.

Texas Parks and Wildlife partners with the [National Wildlife Federation](#) to certify backyards in Texas as “[Wildscapes: Backyard Habitats](#)”. The website provides ideas on the “big three” necessities to sustain wildlife in your backyard that Andreas mentions. TPWD is not able to process applications right now (funding!), but NWF has an online application at the link above. -editor

Safflower Research Project USDA-ARS



Editor's Note: Dr. Hal Collins, Soil Scientists at USDA– ARS in Temple, is testing high value crops that are typically not grown in Central Texas. Dr. Collins donated 500 lbs of safflower seed to CTMN to sell at low cost to spread the word about our chapter and his research as well. Thanks to Ward Critz for leading a team to bag and label the seed: Sue Critz, Wade Matthews, Christina Culp and Juan Anaya.

The potential to include crops like safflower in rotation may offer Texas producers an alternative strategy to improve farm economies and gain additional benefits from improved soil and water conservation, reduced pest cycles, and diversify cropping systems. Dr. Collins is evaluating the production capacities of safflower in Central Texas. Safflower has low resource requirements and is drought tolerant. Safflower trials in 2017 showed it to be a viable crop for the Blackland region. Safflower meal is 24% protein, high in fiber and fat and can be used as a protein supplement for livestock and poultry feed. Whole safflower seeds are also used as birdseed.

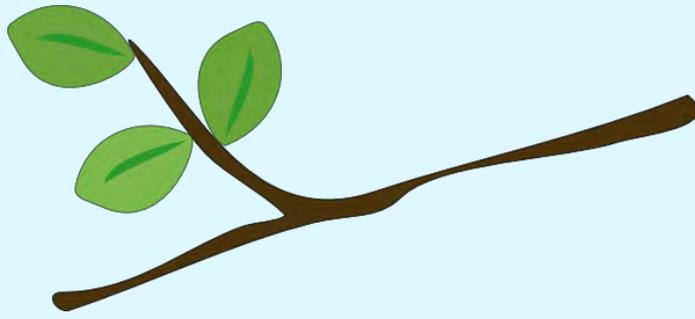
Sunflower-eating birds love safflower; *squirrels, grackles and blackbirds - not so much.* Birds that eat safflower seeds include: chickadees, grosbeaks, blue jays, woodpeckers, house finches, mourning doves, cardinals, nuthatches and titmice.



Ward Critz, Christina Culp and Sue Critz sift and package the seeds. Dr. Collins, center.

Sue Critz, Juan Anaya and Wade Matthews sift out stems and fill bags with 2 pounds of seed.





Out on a Limb

- Mary Ann Everett

Tree Description: Up to 40 ft tall, yellow wood that is very hard; twigs are rigid and armed with stout thorns at the tip; bark is thick, brown tinged with red having deep fissures and narrow flat-topped ridges.

Blooms: Inconspicuous, five petaled clusters of white flowers, somewhat fragrant, blooms in midsummer.

Fruit: Ripens in the fall, oval fleshy blue-black berries with a single brown seed.

Location: Dry rocky soils, along fence lines, open woods. Greatest sizes reached along creek bottoms. Found in East, Central, and parts of West Texas.

Leaves: Nearly evergreen, alternate, simple, often clustered on short branches. Dark green and shiny above, rusty to white hairy on the underside.

Interesting Facts: Kiowa and Comanche Indians were fond of the fruit. Birds love the fruit. When the tree has a wound, it exudes a gum that children once chewed, resulting in the common name. Another common name, Chittamwood, is in reference to a Biblical tree, Shittamwood. The Ark of the Covenant was made of Chittamwood. This tree has at least 11 common names. Good luck!

[Click here for name of the tree!](#)



MOTHER EARTH NEWS FAIR



Andreas Wooten introduces a visitor to our acorn-toting squirrel as Lynn Williams looks on.

John Atkins can't scare this little naturalist with a plastic coral snake! Even as mom pulls him back in the aisle for the rescue.



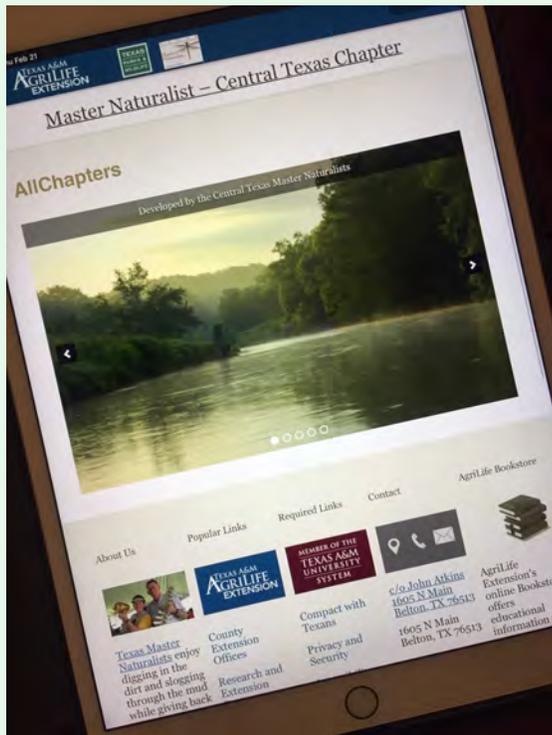
Over 400 visitors stopped at our booth. Several have already signed up for the Volunteer Training Course.



MOTHER EARTH NEWS FAIR



Lynn Williams and Tina Atkins bust out all the animal puppets. Our wingspan banner is in the background — how does your wingspan measure up?



The second annual match-up of Buzzard Boy's (alias Joe Dorn) buzzard puppet and Zoe Rascoe with a baby screech owl in a stump. Now which puppet is cuter? Really?



A new app developed by our own Dale Hughling debuts at this event. Any Texas Master Naturalist Chapter website can be accessed by county name. This helps us assist out-of-area visitors locate their home chapter while learning about the TMN program at our booth.

On the Horizon

Check out the CTMN Weekly e-mail for a full listing of upcoming events!

Photo by Terry Rascoe—Lake Belton

February 2019

Sat 23-Sun 24: TABA Home and Garden: Sat: 10:00am-6pm; Sun: noon-5pm. trascoe@hot.rr.com (V)

Thurs 28: Bell County Museum Workday. 8am. lynn.fleming99@gmail.com (V)

March 2019

Sat 2: Trail Project. Mother Neff State Park: 10am jfahhtx@gmail.com (V)

Sat 2: Harker Heights Spring Fling/Seed Swap. gailhughling@aol.com (V)

Mon 4: First Monday Gardening. Salado Museum. 7:30am-9:30am. (V)

Tue 5th Enter your volunteer & advanced training hours into VMS

Wed 6: Science Fair. St. Mary's Catholic School. 9:30am-2pm. everett.maryann4@gmail.com (V)

Tue 12: CTMN Board of Director's Meeting. Belton Church of Christ. 4pm-6pm.

Tue 12: CTMN Chapter Meeting. Belton Church of Christ. 6pm-8pm.

Thurs 14: Miller Springs Work-Day. Time TBA. jaburns@utexas.edu (V)

Tues 19: CTMN Training Class #1. Harris Community Center, Kinchion Room. 6pm-8pm. (V) for members

Tues 26: CTMN Training Class #2, Harris Community Center, Kinchion Room. 9am-3pm. (V) for members

Thurs 28: Bell County Museum Workday. 8am. lynn.fleming99@gmail.com (V)

Fri 29: Pond Project. USACE, Belton Dam Office. 9:30am. awwooten101@gmail.com (V)

April 2019

Mon 1: First Monday Gardening @ Salado Museum. 7:30am-9:30am. (V)

CHECK US OUT ON FACEBOOK!

Central Texas Chapter Texas Master Naturalists

(V) Approved for Volunteer Hours

(AT) Approved for Advanced Training

Newsletter Mission Statement

“Our mission is to inform and educate Master Naturalist members and the general public about our local environment and resources, and what we, as caretakers, can do to protect them.”

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Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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Editor: Zoe Rascoe

Contributing Writers: John Atkins, Andreas Wooten, Linda Fairlie, Mary Ann Everett, Bill Abright, Lynn Fleming, Zoe Rascoe,

Contributed Photos: Linda Fairlie, Andreas Wooten, Terry Rascoe, Terri Matthew, Zoe Rascoe

We now have options for recurring columns on member visits to National Parks and Texas State Parks, along with “Fish Tales” (of any kind!) If you have a story to share, just send me your idea.

Zoe Rascoe
trascoe@hot.rr.com

Mormon barn at Grand Teton National Park, Zoe Rascoe



The Central Texas Master Naturalist Chapter

Chapter meetings are held the 2nd Tuesday of February, April, June, August, October and December at 6 p.m. at the Belton Church of Christ at 3003 N. Main. Location exceptions are in December and June.

***PACE** meetings are at the Church location at 6 p.m. the 2nd Tuesday of January, March, May, July, September and November. **THE PUBLIC IS WELCOME AT ALL OF OUR MEETINGS.**

***Programs Activities Committees Everything else**

The Board of Directors meets the 2nd Tuesday of January, March, May, July, September and November at 4 p.m. in the Board Room at the AgriLife Extension Center at 1605 North Main in Belton.