TPWD Grants Support Parks in Williamson County

Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) Commission awarded $15.8 million in local park grants to Texas communities. Two of these grants totalling $1.2 million are going to local parks here in Williamson County where Good Water Master Naturalists volunteer.

Williamson County is the recipient of a $750,000 non-urban indoor grant for its Williamson County interpretive center project. The funds will be used to support the development of a nature interpretive center in River Ranch County Park. The proposed developments includes a 3,100 square foot building with a classroom, exhibit display space, interpretive signs, an outdoor classroom with fireplace on the porch, meeting space, reference library, office space, and restrooms.

Hutto has been awarded a $500,000 non-urban outdoor grant for its Creekside and Fritz Park enhancement project. Proposed development includes renovation of youth ball fields with irrigation, parking lot, soccer and ball field lighting picnic tables, and a botanical garden with solar lighting and drip irrigation at Creekside Park. Fritz Park’s improvements feature an all-inclusive playground with shade shelter and recirculating splash pad. The native grass walk will follow the curved creek treeline.
River Ranch County Park Work Days

On February 24th, Master Naturalist Volunteers David Armstrong, Mike Farley, Dave Gage, Glenn Kleinnert, Mary Ann Melton, and Vicky Zardiackas met with River Ranch County Park Manager, Jay Gomez in a beautiful outdoor office. The group met to plan workdays at River Ranch County.

March 25  Wildflower and Prairie Survey
April 29  Invasive Plant Removal
May 20  Clean Homestead
June 17  Riverbed Trash Cleanup
October 21  Fall Prairie Clearing
November 4  Fall Prairie Clearing
December 9  Fence Removal
January 20  Fence Removal

March 25 was a beautiful day to be out at the ranch. Weather was beautiful and everything was lush and green. Jay set up transect lines for monitoring the prairie area. First monitoring study was a Nest Clump survey. Native clump grasses such as little bluestem provide nesting areas that provide concealment and protection from predators for bobwhite and other grassland birds. A second group performed Grass Stubble Height Surveys along the same transect lines. This survey also helps evaluate habitat needs for ground nesting birds. In addition, they made notes of plant species found at each measuring point. These same lines will be monitored over time to measure progress of the planned prairie restoration.

The next workday is planned on April 29th to remove invasive species under the trees along the road. On May 20th a workday is planned to do cleanup around the homestead area with some additional invasive removal planned as time permits.

Learn To Fish at Southwest Williamson County Regional Park

Southwest Williamson County Regional Park near Cedar Park hosted a Learn to Fish event on April 1st. Good Water Master Naturalists, Williamson County Commissioners, Williamson County Employees, and other volunteers came out to help kids learn to fish. The Backyard Bass station teaches casting skills and fish identification skills. Kids practice casting for plastic bass. Each bass has a fish picture and size to help the kids learn to identify fish and to learn what the rules are for size and catch limits. Other station helped them learn how to assemble tackle and to tie knots needed for attaching hooks and lures to their lines. The final station for many was to put their lines in the pond and hope to catch a real fish.
Most people are aware that rabies is generally transmitted through the bite of an infected animal, but there are other possibilities for transmission.\(^1\)

According to the Centers for Disease Control:

> Transmission of rabies virus usually begins when infected saliva of a host is passed to an uninfected animal. The most common mode of rabies virus transmission is through the bite and virus-containing saliva of an infected host. Though transmission has been rarely documented via other routes such as contamination of mucous membranes (i.e., eyes, nose, mouth), aerosol transmission, and corneal and organ transplantations.\(^2\)

There have been cases of rabies transmission through organ transplant,\(^3\) exposure through a break in the skin or by exposure to or inhalation of aerosolized virus.

What? What is aerosolized virus and where/how might one come in contact with it?

Rabies in Texas, A Historical Perspective, a report by the Texas Department of Health, discloses two cases of deaths resulting from contraction of rabies through exposure to aerosolized virus. A 1956 case involved a health department researcher, George Menzies, who presumably contracted rabies “in the course of conducting research inside a cave” (Frio Cave, Uvalde County, Texas).\(^4\) Mr. Menzies had a case of poison ivy and open lesions on his neck which, it is believed, provided an entry for the virus.

The second case involved a veterinary microbiologist, Dr. Earl L. Mundell, who was in the business of manufacturing rabies vaccine. Dr. Mundell reputedly contracted the virus by inhaling aerosolized virus during the production of the vaccines at a time he had a respiratory infection and died within days of admission to the hospital in 1972.\(^5\)

While it is unlikely that many of us will be working in a laboratory with rabies virus, some may spend time in caves or other areas inhabited by bats. So, what is the risk of exposure to aerosolized rabies virus while caving? Apparently the answer is “minimal.” I found no reports of deaths due to rabies in cavers. Many cavers do, however, take prophylactic rabies vaccinations because of potential exposure to bats.\(^6\) So, if you are going to spend time in bat caves, you might want to consider prophylactic rabies vaccination.

Wait, I promised you a “couple” of things. You may or may not know this – it is a repetition of what your mother taught you (or maybe you learned it in scouts or first aid class). If bitten or scratched by an animal, WASH THE WOUND IMMEDIATELY! The CDC recommends immediate washing of any bite, scratch, or other wound with soap and water as an effective way to decrease contraction of the rabies virus. Then get to your doctor who will decide, depending on the circumstances whether you should start postexposure vaccination.\(^7\)

References:
5. Scott and White Hospital Rabies Deaths (1972) – available on https://books.google.com

Notes: Amy is a Good Water Master Naturalist self-characterized as a “rabies obsessed researcher.” Her brother was bitten by a raccoon while trapping, and her mother worked with George Menzies.
Wildflower season is upon us in Central Texas. One of the more interesting and important flowers is the Antelope Horn milkweed plant (Asclepias asperula) also known as spider milkweed, or green-flowered milkweed. From a distance the blooms appear as large green balls, but closer examination reveals the balls are actually clusters of small green and white flowers. The plants are one to two feet tall and are spreading. The leaves of the plant are long and narrow and often folded lengthwise. When the flowers fade, the seedpods grow curved and pointed resembling antelope horns. When the pods burst, the seeds are attached to a silky down that helps disperse the seeds. This down was used in World War II in regular and aviation life jackets.

Milkweeds are host plants for monarch and queen butterflies. Monarch butterflies use Central Texas as their first stop on their long migration north. Milkweeds are important because Monarch Butterfly caterpillars can only eat milkweeds. These caterpillars form chrysalises and then the new Monarchs continue their journey north for the next set of eggs and caterpillars. The flowers also produce nectar with a high glucose content that benefits many other species. Native bees and honeybees are also attracted and benefit from Antelope Horn.

As our pasturelands give way to development, planting milkweeds in gardens is more important. Grow antelope horns using seeds or propagating by root cuttings. Root cuttings can be done in fall or early spring. Plant seeds in either late fall or early spring. Seeds can be collected in June from established plants or can be ordered online. Pretreatment of seeds increases germination. Soak seeds overnight in water. Cold moist stratification involves chilling the seeds at 40 degrees for up to three months. Planting in late fall also allows this exposure to moist cold conditions. The seeds germinate best in warmer parts of the year.

Antelope horns develop large tap roots that allow it to flower even in dry years. It prefers well-drained soil with full sun. When growing Antelope Horn as a cultivated plant, you can trim it back one plant at a time to provide new fresh leaves for caterpillars all summer.

While it is of great benefit to butterflies and other pollinators, it also has some toxicity from cardiac glycosides. Deer and livestock leave it alone because it tastes bad. The toxins do not affect Monarch butterflies but it causes them to taste bad and be poisonous to the predators. Tropical milkweeds do not have the toxins and monarch caterpillars that feed on them do not have the benefits to protect them from predators. The sap can cause skin irritation in humans. Sensitivity varies based upon age, weight and individual sensitivity. However, children are vulnerable because they are curious and their small size can make the effects of a small dose of toxin more potent. The toxicity in the milkweed varies by season, which part of the plant, and the growth stage. The plant also has beneficial medicinal properties. However, the toxic cardiac glycosides are similar to digitalins used in treating heart disease. Native Americans made tea that was used as a tonic to strengthen the heart. Navahos used it to treat bites from rabid animals.

Antelope Horn is not the only milkweed that helps monarch butterflies. Green Milkweed, Butterfly Weed, Common Milkweed, Showy Milkweed, and Swamp Milkweed are other native species that can be planted in landscapes.
The March workday and potluck at Berry Springs Park and Preserve was already a success before it started--a record number of people volunteered to help out with giving our beloved park a spring cleaning! By the time the event date came, I think Susan was turning folks away. How amazing! The work started that morning around 8am with Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners, Williamson County staff, and other friends of the park gathering round to hear Susan giving a rousing pep talk and then commencing work before the threatening clouds opened up on us. I think she said something like "we're working as long as we can before it rains." Ha! Well, it did rain, and we had to stop pruning, weeding, and mulching a little earlier than planned.

Stopping work early is not always a bad thing really, especially when you know what amazing culinary masters we have among us. There was more food at the potluck than we could all eat, even with many of us having seconds! The potluck part of the work day is usually my favorite, I'll admit. I love to eat and try out new recipes that my fellow volunteers have brought. I like to sit and visit with people that I don't know very well and find out why they are helping out. The perspectives I hear really open my eyes and mind about the world. I appreciate it.

The rain did eventually stop and work could commence again for the hardy few that were willing to do so with full bellies. As I left, relishing the time spent outdoors among bluebonnets and friends, I'd call it a very successful day!
River Ranch County Park

Find out more on page two about upcoming work days to develop this new natural space in Williamson County.

Amphibian Watch

Join us for an upcoming Saturday evening amphibian watch. Come 30 minutes before sundown.

- 1st Saturday each month at Devine Lake led by Beth Duncan
- 2nd Saturday each month at Lake Creek Damn led by Sue Anderson
- 3rd Saturday each month at Berry Springs Park and Preserve led by Kathy McCormick

Find out more about the TPWD Amphibian Watch program at:
http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/texas_nature_trackers/amphibian_watch/

Youth Activities Update

The Good Water Chapter loves to teach kids about nature. Recent presentations for the Rockin Kids Club at the Round Rock Library focused on mammals and soils. The Junior Master Naturalists learned about astronomy, wildflowers, and astrophotography, and they are excited for a trip to explore Booty’s Crossing. Our Master Naturalists will be helping with science events at several schools this spring and are getting ready for summer camp activities including weekly visits to the Georgetown Recreation Center and Hutto Park Kids summer camps.

For information about the Good Water Chapter
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