

The Naturalist

Volume 11 Issue 7

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The mission of the Master Naturalist Program is "to develop a corps of well-informed volunteers who provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas within their communities for the state of Texas."

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The Naturalist

President's Corner

by Mike Wenzel

The heat of summer is upon us. I encourage everyone to go outdoors and enjoy these days but at the same time be careful. Remember to drink plenty of water and take frequent rest in the shade. With all the recent rainfall in our area you can see how much everything has greened up and the wildlife is enjoying it. Thank you to everyone that made it out to Whataburger Field for TMN night. If you ever find yourself being interviewed on the field be prepared for the delay from when you say something and when it comes out over the PA system. It caught me by surprise, but I was able to recover quickly and continue and hopefully make sense. I want to remind everyone that our August meeting will be our Meet and Greet at the HEB House on Ocean Dr. There will be valet parking, at no charge to us, and you will also need to sign a waiver. We will be doing the drawing for the Bobcat Challenge and there will be some cool things available. More information will be sent out via email as the date gets closer. Till next month thanks for all you do, know that it is greatly appreciated.



No Chapter Meeting in July

Next Chapter Meeting - Meet and Greet

Texas Master Naturalist – August Chapter Meeting | Tuesday, August 18, 6:30 pm
HEB House, 3700 Ocean dr., 78411



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My Visit to Camp Karankawa

by Ron Collier, PhD

4 inch Mattress?

I knew when the call came, I should have taken my own mattress to Camp Karankawa. The Scouting USA camp on the shores of Lake Corpus Christi needed volunteers for their summer camp. Being that I am a Master Naturalist and also an Eagle Scout, I accepted the challenge to teach young people about the joys of Nature.

I was selected to teach the following merit badges: Sustainability, Environmental Science, Insect Study, Reptiles and Amphibians, Mammals to Scouts. I volunteered for two weeks, one week for Staff setup and training and another for the actual camp for the Scouts.

Upon my arrival for Staff training I was assigned a Staff cabin shared with 3 others. I should have taken my own mattress. Luckily the cabin was Air Conditioned and had a hot shower, but the wooden bunk reminded me of why I like my own bed. Staff training went fairly well as really we just setup everything for the following week and inventoried all the Nature items from nets to books to signage to use. There was really no Staff training to assist me at the Nature Center to help teach the classes, but their help with the kids and showing me the ropes was very helpful. Chelise, the Nature Director, was so great for acquainting me with Scouting today, as I had not been in Scouting for over 40 years. She helped me with identifications and made sure I was comfortable all the time in my role.



Don't worry about going hungry at Camp Karankawa, the Food Director was top notch, and the food was incredible and very tasty. We even had steak! Every night we had a salad bar, multiple desserts, and seconds if we wanted.

The actual week with the Scouts was so much fun and I really enjoyed reminiscing the Scout Oath, Scout Laws, Flag Ceremonies, and other rituals of Scouting.

Next time they call for Volunteers you may want to join them as they have many opportunities to serve. The challenge I found was trying to relate my topics to Scouts from ages 8-16. Many of my merit badges were easy for the whole group, but age differences made teaching complex subjects like Environmental Science and Sustainability more difficult. As Naturalists, knowing our audience is most important to our delivery.

The two weeks were fun and working with the youth was very rewarding. Thanks again for the Opportunity.



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Finders Keepers, History's Weepers

by Randy Bissell

I remember a time when “finders-keepers” wasn’t considered controversial in the outdoors. For example, if a child found an arrow point in a plowed field, it went into the big jar beside the stamp collection, the coin folder, the pretty rocks from vacation, and the fossils collected along roadway cuts. Parents encouraged it. Collecting taught observation. It taught curiosity. It rewarded patience and led children outdoors.

Like Indiana Jones, possession of the unique seemed an aim of scientists, archaeologists, and naturalists.

A horn coral or ammonite weathering from limestone represents countless millions of similar fossils deposited over vast stretches of geologic time and still stored in layers not yet exposed. Collecting one more specimen from a stream or along a road rarely alters the larger story. Nature has been producing and exposing fossils for hundreds of millions of years. Thousands of people have added to their collections.

An arrowhead is different.

Cultural artifacts are finite. They represent brief moments in a person’s life and the actions of that very real person. These objects are unique, and their total number is limited. Once removed from their context and location, part of their value disappears forever. Their relationship with other artifacts, to the landscape, and to the evidence of how people lived can all be lost in the simple act of slipping one into a pocket.

Now, it is admittedly unfair to condemn the generations of children and adults who collected arrowheads on Texas properties. People were acting within the values of their time, often from a place of genuine wonder rather than insensitive greed. I understand that the instinct to pick up, examine, and preserve interesting objects is deeply human. We are, after all, hunter-gatherers.

Perhaps the answer is not shame, but change.

Today, every one of us carries a remarkable tool in our pocket. A phone camera can photograph an artifact in place, record its location, document its surroundings, and preserve information previous generations had no practical way to capture. In many cases, the photograph of the item in its place may be more valuable than possession of the object itself.

Texas property law remains rooted in the supremacy of ownership. What is found on private land belongs to the landowner, and very few people accept suggestions—let alone direction—about what to do with their property. I’ve traveled the world, collecting numerous rock samples for analysis and dealing with owners, crowns, and governments. The United States offers surprisingly little comprehensive top-level protection for heritage (cultural and natural) resources outside public lands, parks, and designated sites. Accountability depends more on private regard than on public policy, and even then, is complicated by a myriad of obscure laws and jurisdictions.

Maybe the old philosophy of “Finders-keepers” deserves revision rather than rejection.

Finders learners? Finders stewards?

I don’t want to ruin all the fun. The excitement of “discovery” need not disappear. Children should still collect stamps, coins, rocks, and fossils. They should still be taught to notice what others overlook. But they should also learn that some objects carry stories larger than us—and that sometimes the greatest act of appreciation is to leave those stories where they still have something left to say.

This essay and figure were created with the assistance of ChatGPT.



The Naturalist

Turtles in July

By Cindy Frank

Since the inception of our chapter, Master Naturalists have been helping with Kemp's ridley sea turtles at Padre Island National Seashore. Chad Huckabee and Grace Lopez were involved with some of the very first turtle patrols, and they helped Cynthia Rubio perform necropsies from pickup tailgates.

Fast forward 25 years, and that's about the number of folks from our South Texas Master Naturalist Chapter who continue to assist with the turtles. We do egg running, turtle patrols, dispatch, and record temperatures from nest boxes in the incubation rooms. We pick up brand new HEB ice chests, return them to PINS, drill (air) holes in them, wash them, and put temperature probes in them so they are ready for nests. We sweep floors and wash towels. And some of us even get to help with the most exciting/best part of all, which is baby turtle releases.

Last year was a record-setting year for Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests, and 449 were found along the Texas coast. This year has far surpassed last year, with the current number (as of me writing this article on June 26 th) of 625 nests. Crazy! But crazy in a good way, and so satisfying to know that we all have had a hand in helping Dr. Donna Shaver and all the National Park Service and Sea Turtle Stranding and Recovery Network employees along the way.

Back to the releases: I am including a couple of pictures from last week's public release. Please know that the babies are normally around four hours (4 HOURS) old when they are released, and those of us who help are required to be on site at 5:45 that morning. We help set out cones, put up flagging tape, cover up crab holes, remove debris and seaweed that might hamper the babies' on their journey to the ocean, and then hold nets over them and snap flags at gulls so turtles aren't eaten for "breakfast." And a few of us get to show the new hatchlings to children so they get an up-close view of the babies. Last week I talked with two young girls from Minnesota whose family was in Corpus on vacation and happened to hear about the event. The girls told me it was their best day ever! Yep, that makes it all worthwhile to be on the beach well before sunrise.

I am going to try to list everyone that I know of who had anything to do with turtles this year. Some of these only helped at PINS. Some only helped in Port Aransas. Some only helped on Padre Island by doing walking patrols for Nueces County Coastal Parks. If I omitted anyone, I am truly sorry!

Adel Casiano; Ann Flanagan (and her husband, Neal); Brad Stockman and Kathy Cima; Carol Singleton; Claude and Suzanne Smith; Denise and Bill Beaman; Elaine Tiller; Emma Hengst; George Gardiner; Heather Cooley; Ingeborg Holt; Jenny Dailey; Jessica Bruyere-England; John Wilkins; Linda Cowley; Michele Connolly (and her husband, Matt); Nada and Rick Martin; Neesy Tompkins; Pat Clark; Patti Baker; Paula Baker; Phil Woods; PJ Pratt; Stephanie Lewis; Winnie Shrum. Plus Amanda Gabehart (who trained with us in 2017 and has moved up the coast) and Scott Swanson (who trained in the DFW area and is now a member of Mid-Coast Chapter.) And me.

Texas Master Naturalists can truly say we help to make a difference when it comes to Kemp's ridley sea turtles!



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Spring Showers

By Cindy Frank

I am pretty much the person in charge of maintenance for the Flour Bluff Intermediate School garden. We had our STMN monthly workday on Sunday, May 31st, but I have not set foot in the garden since then – until yesterday (Sunday, June 28th.) Shame on me! It has been raining. A lot. And I know my yard at my house has needed mowing more than just once a week. So why didn't I remember that the path through the garden would need the same thing???

I am attaching a few pictures of the jungle that I encountered – before and after. I have mowed through the pathway and started doing some weed eating. Thankfully it was windy yesterday so the mosquitoes weren't bad. It will probably take me the whole month of July to get the garden back to where it should be...and hopefully I have learned my lesson to NOT leave it alone for a month!!!

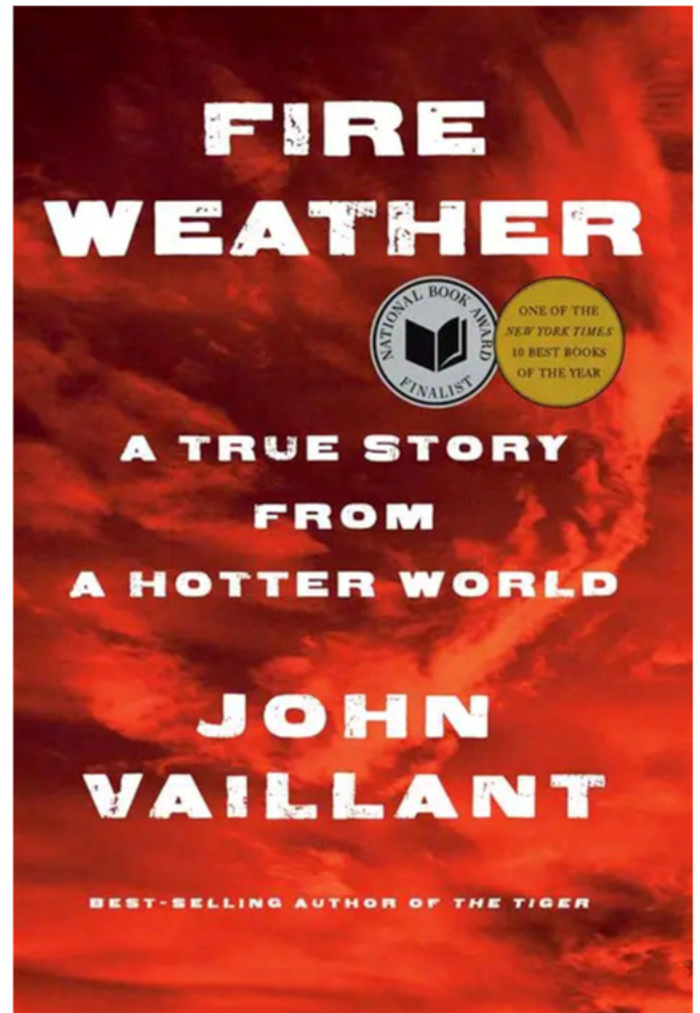
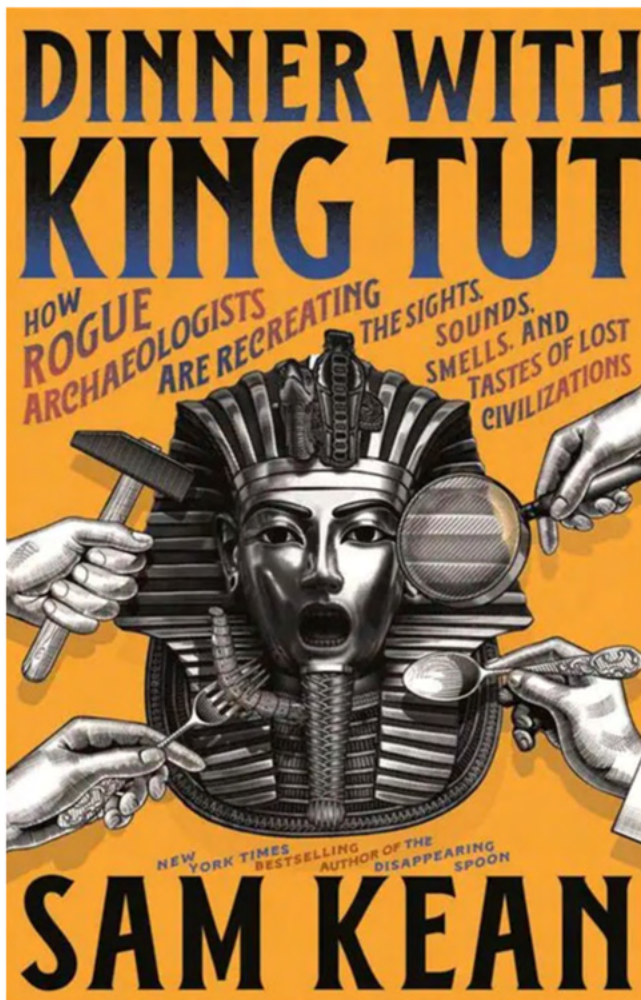


The Naturalist

Brief Notes on Books a Fellow Naturalist Enjoyed Reading

By Cornelia Gates

If you delight in throwing Randy Bissell's atlatl (or just delight in the antics of those doing so), then **Dinner With King Tut by Sam Kean** is the book for you. Kean's book is a series of slyly humorous essays documenting experimental archeologists' putting their ideas about the past to the test in real life, nature, and their labs. Weaving a fictional narrative into each chapter along with small illustrations and photographs, Kean illuminates the archeologists' findings in a very readable and engaging way. The expanded book title sums it up: *How Rogue Archeologists Are Re-Creating The Sights, Sounds, Smells, and Tastes of Lost Civilizations*.



Having been awakened by the smell of wildfire smoke in San Angelo in my not-too-distant past, I was drawn to the book **Fire Weather by John Vaillant**. This three part book examines the 2016 burning of Fort McMurray, Canada, by a fast-spreading wildfire through a survey of the region's backstory, the devastation of the fire itself, and climate science. A well-written and compelling read, despite some of the traumatizing scenarios, this book offers a way into understanding magnitude and nature of fire in the recent wildfires in Hawaii and California. In other words, Fire Weather provides a foundation for insight into contemporary wildfires in an historically sound and thrilling way.

The Naturalist

Birds In My Backyard

Photos via Facebook by Riekie Roncinske



Photo By: Riekie Roncinske

Snowy Egret

The Snowy Egret is a beautiful, graceful small egret, very active in its feeding behavior in shallow waters. Known by its contrasting yellow feet, could be said to dance in the shallows on golden slippers



Photo By: Riekie Roncinske

Black-crowned Night-Heron

Black-crowned Night-Herons normally feed between evening and early morning, avoiding competition with other heron species that use the same habitat during the day. They may feed during the day in the breeding season, when they need extra energy for nesting.



Photo By: Riekie Roncinske

Great Blue Heron

The Great Blue Heron's eyes can shift focus instantaneously, acting like a built-in zoom lens. They can look at something far away and immediately transition to pinpointing a wriggling fish inches from their beak

The Naturalist

Wildlife Watch: Captured by Camera

By Mike Wenzel

Welcome to this month's edition of Wildlife Watch, where I share some of the fascinating birds and wildlife captured by my game cameras—both locally and beyond.

This month features photos from the trail camera I have at our place in Wilson County. First up is of a buck in felt. It is that time of year for their antlers to grow and soon enough I will be finding rub marks where the felt is sticking to the tree or bush. Next is a friendly whitetail deer. Next is a jackrabbit that I assume is enjoying some corn. The last photo is of a crested caracara who just happened to land in a spot where it could get a quick photo made.



The Naturalist

Volunteer Opportunities

Visit our South Texas Chapter homepage to view all of our July opportunities.



Goose Island State Park

Goose Island State Park around the Big Tree

Main need is guinea grass management

Other opportunities -

- Herpetofauna surveys
- Vegetation surveys
- Trail maintenance
- Other stewardship tasks as needed

Contact- Catalina Berry - (361) 729-2858

Volunteer Opportunity

Scan the QR Code
to APPLY ONLINE:



Volunteer Opportunity



NEW DATE!

Enjoy a day of nature, exploration, and fun exclusively for Coastal Bend Bays Foundation members.

Saturday, July 11, 2026

8:00 am – 12:30 pm

Location: Nueces Delta Preserve

DON'T MISS OUT!
Join. Engage. Make a Difference.

Members Check your email for info on how to sign up!

www.baysfoundation.org

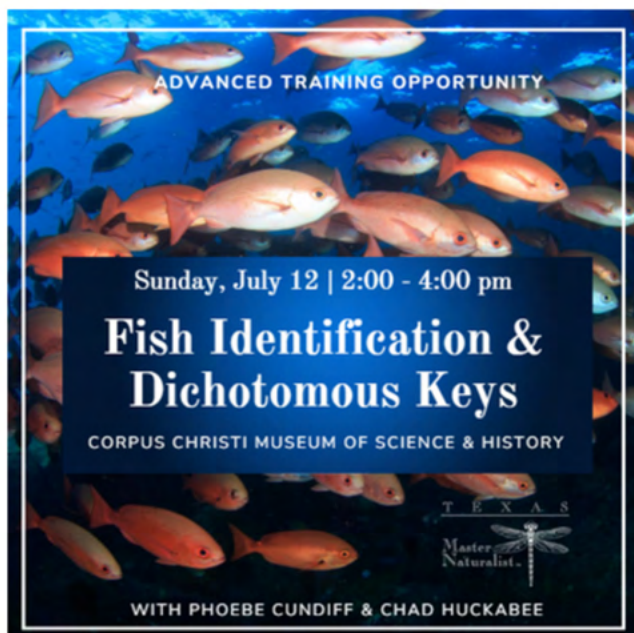


Priority registration will be given to those who were registered for the original June 20 excursion.

If you were previously registered, please check your email for your exclusive registration link.

The Naturalist

Advanced Training Opportunity



July 12, 2026

Explore the remarkable diversity of fish found in South Texas coastal waters during this hands-on advanced training at the Corpus Christi Museum of Science & History.

Scan the QR Code
to APPLY ONLINE:



Volunteer Opportunity

November 21, 2026

SAVE THE DATE
**Conservation
DAY**

@CAMP KARANKAWA | NOVEMBER 21, 2026



Contact - Chelise.hyatt@scouting.org

T E X A S



If you have a submission to make,
please send them to:

marakdoemland@gmail.com

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Who Did What in May

by Cindy Frank

List of who did what – May, 2026

(total volunteer hours for month = 1420.75)

(total people seen for month = 922 adults and 1936 youth)

ARK-PO – Paula Baker

ARK-RM – Neesy Tompkins, Paula Baker, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman

Blucher Park-RM – Bibi Dalrymple, Sharon Heilman, Jon Brandt, Sue Barley, Ted Cleaves, Margaret

Cleaves, David Major

CC Museum-RM – Chuck Blend, Christy Blend, Katie Heuermann, Randy Bissell, Jessica Hernandez

Citizen Science-FR – Cindy Frank, Randy Bissell, Cindy Hanifen, Jessica Hernandez, Neesy Tompkins, Julie

Findley, Phil Woods, Aracely Negrete, Holly Ahern, Jim Butcher, Erica Salinas

Community Presentations-DO – Randy Bissell, Chad Huckabee

Community Service-TG – Cindy Frank, Chad Huckabee, Rick Martin, Lari Jo Edwards

ComPartServ-PO – Mike Wenzel, Pat Clark, Debbie Plowman, Erica

Salinas, Jim Butcher, Mandy Bever,

Ingeborg Holt, Lari Jo Edwards, Jason Edwards

Flour Bluff-DO – Chad Huckabee, Janice Knezek, Janice Ainbinder, Julie

Findley, Grace Lopez

Flour Bluff-PO – Cindy Frank, Chad Huckabee, Denise Beaman, Rick Martin, Nada Martin, PJ Pratt

Flour Bluff-RM – Cindy Frank, Chad Huckabee, Rick Martin, Pat Clark, Janice Ainbinder, Janice Knezek, Suzanne Smith

Lake CCSP-PO – Phil Woods

Mustang Island SP-PO – Chad Huckabee, Randy Bissell, Dawn Bissell, Bill Beaman, Denise Beaman, Rick

Martin, Nada Martin, Pat Clark, Ann Flanagan

Mustang Island SP-RM – Dawn Bissell, Bill Beaman, Denise Beaman

NCCPS-RM – Adel Casiano, Carol Singleton

NDP-DO – Cindy Frank, Phil Woods, Chad Huckabee

NDP-RM – Phil Woods, Cindy Frank

OBWPNC-DO – Randy Bissell

OBWPNC-FR – Dawn Bissell

OBWPNC-PO – Gerry Vahle

OBWPNC-RM – David Major, Margaret Cleaves, Ted Cleaves

PINS-PO – Patti Baker, Gerry Vahle

PINS-RM – Elaine Tiller, Cindy Frank, Carol Singleton, Rick Martin, Phil Woods, Ann Flanagan, Jenny

Dailey, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman, Hope Warne, Claude Smith, Suzanne Smith, Bill Beaman, Ingeborg Holt

Port A Nature Preserve-DO – Julie Findley

Port A Nature Preserve-PO – Paula Baker

Port A Nature Preserve-RM – Cindy Frank, Julie Findley

Public CleanUp-RM – Michele Connolly, Morgan Pyle, Pat Clark, Gerry Vahle, Patti Baker, Christina Lee,

Jill Smith, Aracely Negrete, Margaret Cleaves, Ted Cleaves, David Major, Jenny Dailey, Kathy Cima, Brad

Stockman, Jason Edwards, Julie Findley

Sea Turtle-PO – Neesy Tompkins

Sea Turtle-RM – Michele Connolly, Cindy Frank, John Wilkins

STBGNC-DO – Adel Casiano, Grace Lopez

STBGNC-PO – Carol Singleton

STBGNC-RM – Adel Casiano, Margaret Cleaves, Pat Clements, Dawn Bissell

TSA-RM – Patti Baker

TSC-PO – Patti Baker

TSC-RM – Patti Baker, Elaine Tiller

UTMSI-PO – Jenny Dailey, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman, Ann Flanagan, Michele Connolly

WWF-PO – Phil Woods

Who Did What in June

by Cindy Frank

List of who did what – June, 2026

(total volunteer hours for month = 1133.00)

(total people seen for month = 1576 adults and 2350 youth)

ARK-RM – Neesy Tompkins, Paula Baker, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman

Blucher Park-RM – Bibi Dalrymple, Sharon Heilman

CC Museum-PO – Chuck Blend, Christy Blend, Randy Bissell, Bill Beaman, Denise Beaman

CC Museum-RM – Chuck Blend, Randy Bissell

Citizen Science-FR – Cindy Frank, Randy Bissell

Community Presentations-DO – Randy Bissell, Ann Flanagan

ComPartServ-PO – Mike Wenzel, Mandy Bever, Lari Jo Edwards, Jason Edwards, Jean Meadors, Denise

Beaman, Bill Beaman, Ron Collier, Chad Huckabee, Grace Lopez, Holly Ahern, Cindy Frank

Flour Bluff-RM – Cindy Frank, Chad Huckabee, Suzanne Smith

Mustang Island SP-PO – Claude Smith, Phil Woods

Mustang Island SP-RM – Claude Smith

NCCPS-RM – Adel Casiano, Carol Singleton

NDP-PO – Phil Woods, Denise Beaman, Bill Beaman

NDP-RM – Phil Woods

OBWPNC-PO – Gerry Vahle, Phil Woods

OBWPNC-RM – Cornelia Gates

PINS-PO – Patti Baker

PINS-RM – Cindy Frank, Carol Singleton, Phil Woods, Ann Flanagan,

Jenny Dailey, Kathy Cima, Brad

Stockman, Claude Smith, Suzanne Smith, Bill Beaman, Denise Beaman, Melodi Wells, Jessica Bruyere-

England, Michelle Alvarez, Stephanie Lewis

Port A Nature Preserve-RM – Cindy Frank, Julie Findley, Ann Flanagan

Public CleanUp-RM – Michele Connolly, Pat Clark, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman, Bill Beaman, Denise

Beaman, Katie Heuermann

Sea Turtle-PO – Neesy Tompkins

Sea Turtle-RM – Neesy Tompkins, Rick Martin, Nada Martin

STBGNC-DO – Adel Casiano, Grace Lopez

STBGNC-OT – Ric Garces

STBGNC-RM – Adel Casiano, Margaret Cleaves, Pat Clements, Melodi Wells

TSA-RM – Patti Baker

TSC-RM – Patti Baker

UTMSI-PO – Jenny Dailey, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman, Ann Flanagan

WWF-DO – Phil Woods

The members of Texas A&M AgriLife will provide equal opportunities in programs, activities, education and employment to all persons regardless of race, color, sex, religion, age, national origin, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation or gender identity and will strive to achieve full and equal employment opportunities throughout Texas A&M AgriLife.

TEXAS A&M
AGRI LIFE
EXTENSION

TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE