

The Naturalist

Volume 11 Issue 8

August 1, 2026



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

Hope everyone is having a great summer and staying safe!

About a week ago, I had the opportunity to go on a birding field trip to a place I had never visited before—Ganado, Texas. Our goal was to see Mississippi Kites and Swallow-tailed Kites, and it turned out to be a very successful trip. We saw numerous kites at Devers Creek Park, making the journey well worth it.

We also visited Lake Texana and the two parks operated by the Lavaca- Navidad River Authority. I never even knew these parks existed! Each one offers something unique, and for anyone who loves nature, the trails are full of life. On one trail, we found numerous tiny frogs. Although I wasn't able to identify the species, simply having the opportunity to observe them was rewarding.

While Ganado is outside the area covered by our chapter, the trip reminded me that there are probably many places within our own chapter's boundaries that I have yet to explore. One destination I definitely plan to visit is Kenedy County. My goal is to scout out areas of interest now so I can return and explore them more thoroughly once the temperatures become a little more comfortable.

I encourage everyone to get out, explore somewhere new, and enjoy all the natural treasures our region has to offer. Just remember to stay hydrated in this summer heat!

I hope to see everyone at our upcoming Meet and Greet!



The South Texas Chapter
MEET & GREET

You are invited
Tuesday, August 18, 2026
6:30 pm - 8:00 pm

at the historic HEB House in Corpus Christi
3700 Ocean Drive

T E X A S

Master
Naturalist

- Meet the New Members in Training
- Catered Food (from HEB, of course)
- Bobcat Challenge Prize Grab
- August Chapter Meeting

The Naturalist

Reading the Landscape at Welder Wildlife Refuge: How shells, landforms, and geophysics reveal an old Aransas River story

By: Jarrett Kernen and Randy Bissell, Texas Master Naturalists

Naturalists notice what seems out of place. Along the Hackberry Trail at Welder Wildlife Refuge, small white shells weathering from the soil offered just such a clue. They are *Rangia cuneata*, brackish-water clams normally found near bays and lower river reaches—yet these were found about eleven miles inland from the Aransas River Delta at Copano Bay. These tasty clams were a favorite food of the Karankawa Indigenous People from centuries ago!



Randy Bissell (South Texas TMN) happened upon this previously undocumented Karankawa shell midden during his initial training in 2019.

Randy's discovered "midden" (archaeological site) sits on a high terrace above the Aransas River floodplain right along the Trail. That habitation location provided water, woodlands, game, and river access while avoiding the river's most destructive floods. The surrounding Refuge preserves a striking mix of uplands, old river terraces, floodplain soils, and modern alluvium.

Even a few feet of elevation can change soil moisture, vegetation, drainage, and wildlife use. These shells also connect inland South Texas to the coast and the Karankawa lifeway. The Aransas River flows into Copano Bay, where clams, oysters, fish, shorebirds, and other wildlife thrive. *Rangia* presence far upstream reminds us that bays, rivers, prairies, and woodlands function as one connected ecological landscape. The Karankawa utilized the bounty of the estuarine system - intentionally moving up and down the river for seasonal food sources.

To begin a study of the new site without disturbing it, Jarrett's Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi undergraduate research project used ground-penetrating radar and electrical resistivity surveys to profile or remotely image the midden. Both methods detected consistent subsurface irregularities near the shell-bearing midden area - and both suggest the buried extent and depth. Mapping the potential breadth of the deposit allows for selective sampling instead of extensive digging. The next step may be dating the ages of the buried shells - hundreds, or thousands, of years of Indigenous occupation history?



Jarrett Kernen (Mid-Coast TMN) surveys the Hackberry Trail Midden site with ground-penetrating radar in November 2025.

For geologists, these surveys demonstrate diverse applications of geophysical methods to resolve otherwise "invisible" subsurface phenomena. For archaeologists, geophysics can improve efficiency and reduce the destruction of sites caused by excavation.

For Texas Master Naturalists, the project offers a simple lesson: read the landscape closely and disturb it as little as possible. Shells, soils, elevation, vegetation, and geophysical images can reveal a remarkable story beneath an ordinary-looking trail. Respect nature and history.

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Paradise Pond

by Cindy Frank and Ann Flanagan

For our Thursday workday with the Port Aransas Nature Preserve, we gathered at Paradise Pond and were going to pull Guinea grass from the back side of the pond. But Justin had told us it would be a good day to ask questions about insects and plants because it was going to be so hot. As we walked from the front parking lot towards the back, there were a bunch of hackberry tree leaves on the sidewalk. I questioned Justin about what was causing that, and an hour and a half later we finally pulled a few weeds. Instead, we had a great learning session! I made some notes, and Ann took some pictures.



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Paradise Pond Cont.

by Cindy Frank and Ann Flanagan

1- Ribbon Snake

2- Master Naturalist, Cindy Frank

3- Woolly aphids were on the Hackberry trees, causing sap/"honey"/sticky stuff to be on the leaves. That was why all the dead leaves were on the ground. The "honey" caused by the sucking aphids meant the blooms from the Black Willows were sticking to the leaves, making it look like there were spider webs everywhere.

5- Third instar Giant Swallowtail. Looks like way bigger bird poop.

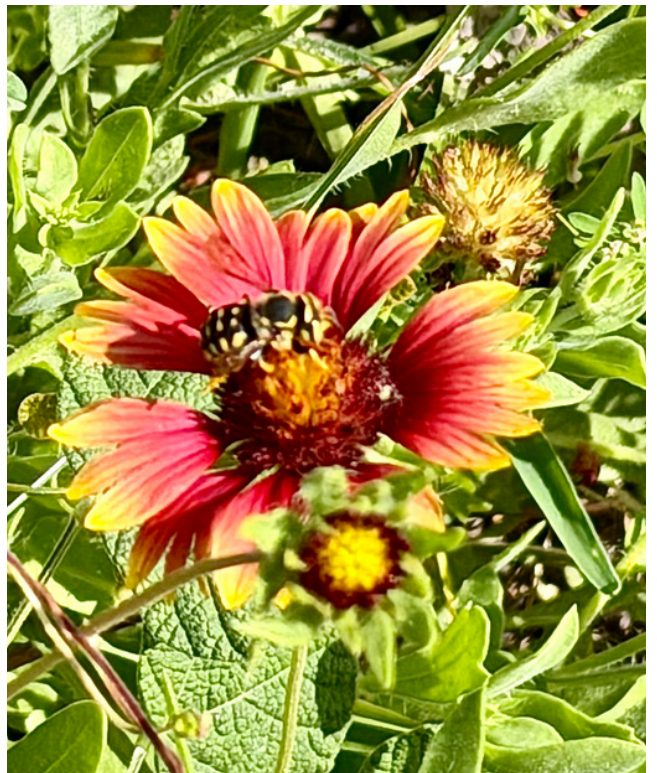
4 - Dragonfly nymph carcass. It looked like an empty Cicada "shell" only light tan- colored, and the carcass resembled a grasshopper.

6- Paradise Pond was covered with Duck Weed. We looked at individual "pads" and each pad had a long root underneath. The flowers from duck weed are the tiniest flowers of all (at least I think that's what Justin said.) We saw Leopard frog pollywogs come up for air in the duck weed.

7- Justin found a ladybug nymph = black and yellow "bug" crawling on a hackberry leaf.

Volunteer Opportunity

Remember that every Thursday between 9:00 and 11:00 some of us try to go to Port A Nature Preserve and volunteer. Besides Ann Flanagan and Cindy Frank, Michele Connolly, Julie Findley, and Ray Dillahunty frequently help, along with PJ Pratt, Leslie Hoekstra, and Liz Abel. Come join us!



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Turtle Release

By Cindy Frank

This year's fourth, and final, Kemp's ridley sea turtle release took place on Saturday, July 25, 2026, at 6:45 a.m. at Padre Island National Seashore. 234 babies made their trek across the sand to the Gulf. Thirteen South Texas Master Naturalists were on site to assist – either waving flags at gulls, holding nets over the babies as they crept along the sand, or showing the hatchlings to children. Some of the babies were less than two hours old.



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STMN Awards



(Top Left) **Kathy Cima** and **Brad Stockman** have earned their 500 hour dragonfly pins.

(Top Right) **Jessica Bruyere-England** has earned her 250 hour dragonfly pin and her Bobcat recertification pin

(Bottom) **Neesy Tompkins** attained her 250 hours and got her new dragonfly pin

Congratulations on your hard work!

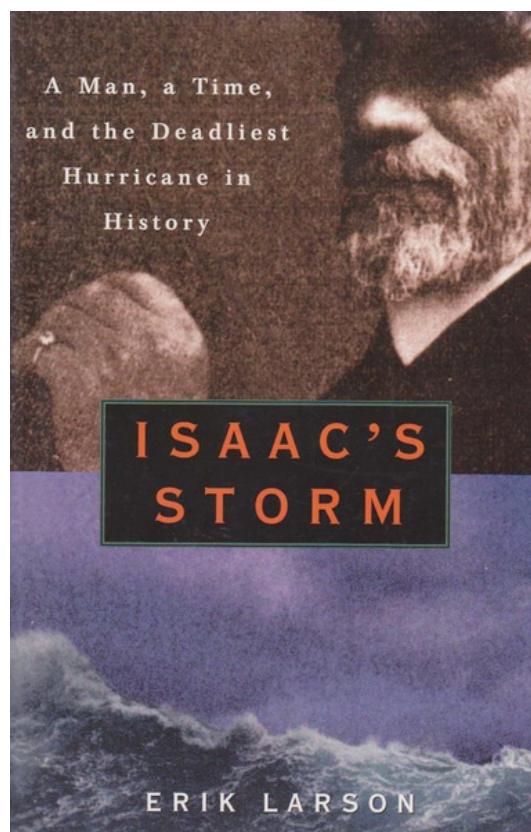


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Brief Notes on Books a Fellow Naturalist Enjoyed Reading

By Cornelia Gates

Every Hurricane Season calls to mind over sixty years of childhood and adult memories of boarding up windows and discussions of evacuations. The names Carla, Beulah, Celia, Gilbert, Harvey, Hannah, and Fern, among others, all make real the need to respect the power of the weather and our limited control. Wanting to dust the cobwebs off a bit of hurricane preparedness complacency, I decided to re-read Isaac's Storm by Erik Larson - the account of the September 8, 1900, Hurricane that devastated Galveston. I first read the book shortly after it was published in 1999, and had forgotten that the first half of the book gave an excellent history of the poor state of weather forecasting at the time. It was the second half of the book about the actual storm and it's aftermath that gave me bad dreams during that first reading. I'm older and wiser now, and know what happens, so I enjoyed it from a different perspective. It's well-written, deeply researched, and hard to put down. The Washington Post called it "... the jaws of hurricane yarns."



Night at the Ballpark (June 2026)

By: Holly Ahern



The South Texas Chapter and Mid-Coast Chapters teamed up once again for a memorable Night at the Ballpark, celebrating our shared commitment to conservation, education, and volunteer service. Members from both chapters enjoyed showcasing the Texas Master Naturalist program to thousands of baseball fans throughout the community.

A special highlight of the evening was welcoming Texas Master Naturalist Executive Director Mary Pearl Meuth, who returned to throw out the ceremonial first pitch for the second consecutive year. Pictured with Mary Pearl are Mid-Coast Chapter President Steve Ferguson, South Texas Chapter President Mike Wenzel, representing the strong partnerships that continue to grow across the Texas Master Naturalist family

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Birds In My Backyard

Photos via Facebook by Riekie Roncinske



Tricolored Heron

Tricolored Herons use dynamic, hyper-active fishing techniques—often darting, running, or pirouetting through shallow wetlands to chase down small fish.

Photo By: Riekie Roncinske



Reddish Egret

Reddish egrets are entertaining to watch—known for sprinting, jumping, and spinning around in shallow water with its wings held up. Dark morph is more common than white morph

Photo By: Riekie Roncinske



Painted Bunting

The French name for the Painted Bunting is nonpareil which translates to “without equal” — an accurate description of this bird’s dazzling colors.

Photo By: Riekie Roncinske

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 I want to feature some photos I took on a recent trip to Devers Creek Park in Ganado TX. A Mississippi Kite and some Cattle Egrets were kind enough to pose for me. The next couple of photos are from our place in Wilson County. A White-Tailed Deer wanted to say hi and two jack rabbits are enjoying some corn. It was refreshing to see how much rain we got out there and I hope it continues. Seeing everything green up is quite magical.



The Naturalist

New Member Training Schedule

Our Initial Training Class is Ready to Begin!

Our newest Members in Training kick off their journey on **Saturday, August 15** at the Corpus Christi Museum of Science & History. Check out the August - December training calendar to see the exciting locations they'll be exploring with trainers **Dawn and Randy Bissell** and New Class Representatives **Monica and Dan Garcia**.

Current chapter members are welcome to attend training sessions if space allows. If you'd like to join a class, please text or call **Dawn Bissell at 361.960.2151** to see if an opening is available.

Be sure to join us for our MEET & GREET on **Tuesday, August 18** - a wonderful opportunity to welcome our newest class, make new connections, and help them feel at home in the South Texas Chapter. We hope to see you there!

August

Packery Flats
Saturday, August 29, 2026



SALINITY. HALOPHYTES. ECOLOGICAL SITES

Mustang Island State Park
Saturday, August 29, 2026



LOW PROFILE BARRIER ISLAND. VOLUNTEER OPPS.

The Patton Center
Saturday, August 29, 2026



INVERTEBRATES. ICHTHYOLOGY. WATER

Padre Island National Seashore
Saturday, September 12, 2026



HISTORY OF PINS. SOILS

Oso Bay Wetlands Preserve
Saturday, September 19, 2026



ESTUARIES. TAMAULIPAN THORNSCRUB. PROJECT WILD

Hans & Pat Suter Wildlife Refuge
Saturday, September 19, 2026



NATIVE PEOPLES. BIRDS. PLANTS

September

The Naturalist

New Member Training Schedule cont.

October

Nueces Delta Preserve
Saturday, October 3, 2026



RIPARIAN & DELTA WETLANDS. WATER QUALITY. HERPETOLOGY

Hazel Bazemore County Parks
Saturday, October 3, 2026



HAWKS. LOWER RIVER. SOILS

South Texas Sand Plains
Saturday, October 17, 2026



PLUS CAESAR KLEBURG WILDLIFE

November

Lake Corpus Christi State Park
Saturday, November 14, 2026



BRUSH COUNTRY. INTERPRETATION

Welder Wildlife Refuge
Saturday, November 21, 2026



WOODED COASTAL PLAIN. RIPARIAN ECOLOGY

UT Marine Science Institute
Saturday, December 5, 2026



WETLANDS EDUCATION CENTER. WILDLIFE RESCUE

Amos Rehab Keep, ARK
Saturday, December 5, 2026



MARINE BIRD & SEA TURTLE REHABILITATION

Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center
Saturday, December 5, 2026



BIRDING ON THE FRESHWATER WETLANDS

December

The Naturalist

Outreach Kits: Take Nature on the Road!

By Holly Ahern

Ready to share your love of nature with others? Our new **Outreach Kit Checkout System** makes it easier than ever to participate in community events. Packed with hands-on activities, displays, and educational materials, our outreach kits are designed to help you confidently engage children, families, and adults - whether you're a seasoned volunteer or participating for the very first time. Watch your email for upcoming outreach volunteer opportunities or contact Holly if you have a small local school event and want to help inspire the next generation of naturalists, one conversation at a time!



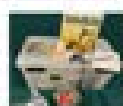
Outreach Kit Checkout

Remove complete kit only ... do not take bits & pieces
Date & Time Checkout & Check in with your name
Take photo(s) of Checkout sheet(s) and TEXT to Holly at 512.784.9951. OUT and IN

OUT Date _____ Time _____
IN Date _____ Time _____
Your Name _____
EVENT NAME/DATE _____

Box #1 Kit Contents
Booth Set up

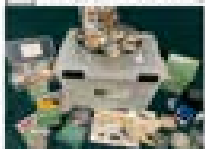
☐	100 yardline and black metal stand
☐	11 x 17 Organically no QR code
☐	Water Clusters: ADULTS & KIDS
☐	Small White clipboard w/ pen Volunteer registration
☐	Connect with Nature Volunteer with US ACROSS BOARD (2)
☐	Only Business cards: VOLUNTEER (adults only) & QR CODE (kids)
☐	Barcode SIGNAGE CARD (volunteer)
☐	100 Yardline
☐	100 yardline 3-fold flyer
☐	Scheduled Post for (ADULT)
☐	Scheduled Post for (KID) (USGS)
☐	Scheduled Post for (BIOLOGY) (FISHES)



OUT Date _____ Time _____
IN Date _____ Time _____
Your Name _____
EVENT NAME/DATE _____

Box #2 Kit Contents
Beach Critters & Shells

☐	Beach Bug Deckle of 100
☐	Plastic Beach Bug Deckle
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	Beach Bug sign
☐	Lighting Beach Bug sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	Signage for Beach Bug sign (adults only) (kids only)
☐	Signage for Beach Bug sign (adults only) (kids only)
☐	Signage for Beach Bug sign (adults only) (kids only)
☐	Signage for Beach Bug sign (adults only) (kids only)



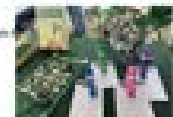
OUT Date _____ Time _____
IN Date _____ Time _____
Your Name _____
EVENT NAME/DATE _____

Box #1A Kit Contents
Booth Set up - Tablecloths

☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign

Box #2A Kit Contents
Sea Bean BINGO

☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign
☐	100 yardline water sign





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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



Opportunity to volunteer to help this happen.

The Naturalist

Volunteer Opportunities



Aransas National Wildlife Refuge

We're looking for two RV volunteers — either a couple or two individuals — to join our Visitor Services team this October through December.

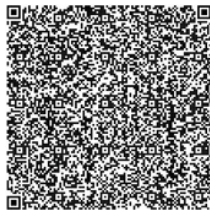
If you love wildlife, enjoy meeting visitors, and want to spend three months on the Texas coast, we'd love to have you!

Commitment: 3 months, with potential to extend up to 6 months

Schedule: 24 hours/week

RV pads available on-site, full hook-ups included

Scan the QR Code
to APPLY ONLINE:



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

marakdoemland@gmail.com

Volunteer Opportunity

November 21, 2026



Contact - Chelise.hyatt@scouting.org

Education Opportunity



Environmental Research in the Matagorda Bay System



Come listen to talks about the ongoing research!

Bay Health Study
Josh Lerner, PhD (Texas A&M University)

Benthic Mapping and Habitat Assessment
Mike Page (Compass Environmental Solutions, LLC)

Mercury in the Alcoa Superfund Site
Jess Dutton, PhD (Texas State University)

Save the Date!

Bauer Community Center
2300 TX-35, Port Lavaca, TX 77979

 **Tuesday, August 4th, 2026**
6 – 9 pm

 **More Details Soon** 

The Naturalist

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

Who Did What in July

by Cindy Frank

List of who did what – July, 2026
(total volunteer hours for month = 952.50)
(total people seen for month = 2645 adults and 2288 youth)

ARK-RM – Neesy Tompkins, Paula Baker, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman
Blucher Park-RM – Bibi Dalrymple, Sharon Heilman, Sue Barley
CC Museum-PO – Chuck Blend, Randy Bissell
CC Museum-RM – Chuck Blend, Randy Bissell, Katie Heuermann
Citizen Science-FR – Cindy Frank, Carol Singleton, Pat Clark, George Gardiner, Cindy Hanifen
Community Presentations-DO – Randy Bissell
ComPartServ-PO – Mandy Bever, Ron Collier, Chad Huckabee, Christy Blend, Chuck Blend, Carla Haskett
Flour Bluff-PO – Chad Huckabee
Flour Bluff-RM – Cindy Frank, Chad Huckabee, Rick Martin, Nada Martin, Pat Clark
Hazel Bazemore-RM – Chad Huckabee
Mustang Island SP-RM – Randy Bissell
NDP-PO – Phil Woods, Jean Meadors
OBWPNC-FR – Randy Bissell
OBWPNC-PO – Gerry Vahle, Phil Woods
PINS-PO – Patti Baker, Bill Beaman, Denise Beaman, Rick Martin, Nada Martin
PINS-RM – Cindy Frank, Carol Singleton, Phil Woods, Ann Flanagan, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman, Claude Smith, Suzanne Smith, Bill Beaman, Denise Beaman, Melodi Wells, Jessica Bruyere-England, Cherie Heimann, Emma Hengst, Debbie Plowman
Port A Nature Preserve-RM – Cindy Frank, Ann Flanagan
Public CleanUp-RM – Michele Connolly, Pat Clark, Margaret Cleaves, Ted Cleaves, David Major, Randy Bissell, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman
STBGNC-DO – Adel Casiano, Carol Singleton
STBGNC-PO – Randy Bissell
STBGNC-RM – Adel Casiano, Margaret Cleaves, Pat Clements, Carol Singleton
TSA-PO – Patti Baker
TSA-RM – Patti Baker
TSC-RM – Patti Baker
UTMSI-DO – Jenny Dailey
UTMSI-PO – Jenny Dailey, Kathy Cima, Brad Stockman, Ann Flanagan
WWF-DO – Randy Bissell

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

