

TRACKS & TRAILS

A monthly newsletter for employees of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

"To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations."

September 2009

Tracks &
Trails going
paperless!
See pg. 4

WAN project completed

Adapted from a story in the latest issue of Eye on IT, a newsletter that can be found on the IT pages of WILDnet.

The IT Division recently completed the connection of all 93 state parks to the agency's wide-area network, or WAN, a project that has taken over two years to complete. The project was labor-intensive, requiring a huge amount of coordination across divisions and locations, but the end result has been well worth the effort with all but a handful of parks now connected.

The WAN eliminates the field offices' needs for Internet connections such as satellite or dial-up, which can be costly and offer little in the way of data security. Data transmitted over the WAN travels across a private network, not the Internet "at large," which helps us to protect valuable information and comply with security standards. Expanding the WAN also gives field employees better, faster, and more secure access to critical agency resources like e-mail and the agency financial system.

The WAN simplifies life for IT, as well. Once a computer is on the WAN we can easily push out security updates that help keep our computers protected. Our technology support groups (like the Help Desk and Desktop Computing Support) can access machines remotely in order to troubleshoot, which makes solving computer problems quicker, easier and less frustrating for users.

Lance Robinson, Regional Director of the Dickinson Marine Lab, is already enjoying the many benefits of being on the WAN. He says that "the WAN has opened up opportunities for Coastal Fisheries staff to network with researchers from around the U.S. and the world. This capability creates opportunities for professional staff development while also communicating to others about the high-quality resource management programs within TPWD."



Sea Rim State Park

TPWD

One year later, memory of Ike still looms large for TPWD

Sept. 13 marks the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Ike, and although tremendous strides have been made to repair facilities, restore ecosystems and rebuild lives, much remains to be done. More than half the oyster reefs in Galveston Bay were lost, at least 8,000 acres of public reef. This summer, TPWD received about \$7 million in federal Ike relief funding, and most of that will go to place about 14,000 cubic yards of material to create new oyster reefs.

"It will take years to create 350 acres of oyster reef, but it's a start," said Lance Robinson, Coastal Fisheries' upper coast regional director.

When strong tropical storms approach the Texas coast, Robinson said, his team may close offices and move boats earlier, even if it means occasional false alarms when storms change direction. Also, for big research vessels that require electricity to pump bilge water, they've installed solar arrays to charge batteries during power outages.

Similarly, after rescue operations on Bolivar Peninsula, the Law Enforcement Division has purchased portable, inflatable command tent systems that have sleeping quarters and electric generators.

"Because of recent experiences with Rita, Gustav and Ike, I feel we have consistently improved," said Ted Tolle, regional commander for southeast Texas.

"We gave our staff time to deal with their families before Ike hit. Thus, when it passed through we were ready to respond immediately. We've got district supervisors and game wardens that have been tried under fire and know what needs to be done. It's made us a better team."

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER



Dear Colleagues:

Last night as I returned home from Houston, I drove through a blinding storm between Columbus and La Grange. I presume it was rain but can't say for sure, as it has been so long since any has fallen in Central Texas. Suffice to say, it was welcome, although we have a long way to go to compensate for the shortfall that has accumulated over the last 24 months. After what transpired last year, I no longer pray for hurricane relief, but I do hope the prediction of a cooler, wetter winter under the El Niño regime comes to pass.

The impacts of the drought on many parts of the state and the resources we are responsible for stewarding are among the many challenges that we confront in our work with this agency. Last week, we received the unwelcome news that our Inland Fisheries team had documented evidence of zebra mussels in Lake Texoma and Lake Lavon near Dallas. In the central, western and northern portions of our state, our teams are contending with prospective impacts from the 2,300 miles of new transmission lines slated for construction by 2012. Our biologists in the Trans-Pecos in West Texas are working to arrest a decline in pronghorn numbers, particularly in the Marfa basin area. At Goose Island State Park, our colleagues are watering the 1,000-year-old "Big Tree," with the help of the local volunteer fire department and their large pumper truck, to keep it alive. Rest assured there will always be something for us to do in the realms of fisheries, wildlife and parks.

To that end, the subject of major challenges to our agency was a central matter of conversation during a recent Natural Leaders retreat in Camp Allen. At that gathering, alumni from the Natural Leaders program gathered to discuss how to best position the agency and to prepare us all for the inevitable changes that we face organizationally, culturally, demographically, financially and ecologically.

In our kick-off session, questions were debated about how to contend with the pressures of habitat fragmentation, loss of farm and ranchland to development, water allocation, climate change and invasive species. Can we meet the changing recreational needs of a growing, diverse and urban-based population? How do we build effective teams around the multiple generations of workers in our agency? How can we best secure sustainable and robust funding streams to invest in our mission of conserving cultural and natural resources? The ways that we anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to change at all levels will unquestionably be a key barometer of our success together.

In that vein, we will soon complete the agency's revision to our *Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan*. At a high level, that plan will reflect the Department's highest, mission-based priorities and most strategic allocation of capital, both human and financial. Division-specific operational plans will support the goals articulated in the Land and Water Plan. So, if you haven't yet taken a look at the draft and offered input, please do so now. This is your plan, and we need your best thinking to see it through to completion. You may find the plan on our Web site at www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

Thanks for all you do for Texas' wild things and wild places.

Carter Smith

TRACKS & TRAILS

Published by Texas Parks and Wildlife's Communications Division for distribution to employees and retirees throughout the state. We welcome submissions for publication, but reserve the right to edit or screen materials according to newsletter policy. All submissions for the newsletter are due by the last working day of each month.

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♻️ Printed on recycled paper.

KUDOS

TPWD received the following awards for informative, high-quality products at the recent Association of Conservation Information (ACI) Annual Conference. Congratulations!

- 1st place – External Newsletter – *El Solitario* (Phil Hewitt, Linda Hedges, Tim Peterson, Karen Blizzard)
- 1st place – Internal Communications – Open Line, Fall 2008 (Cynthia Griesser)
- 3rd place – Four-Color Magazine – *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine (Robert Macias)
- 2nd place – One-Time Publication – Texas State Park rack cards (Thomas Wilhelm, Sonia Yeck)
- 2nd place – Television Series – Texas Parks & Wildlife Television, 1707 & 1708 (Don Cash)
- 1st place – Video News Release – Texas Toads in Trouble (Karen Loke)
- 2nd place – Video News Release – Eggs-otic Collection (Karen Loke)
- 3rd place – Video News Release – Ike's Aftermath (Karen Loke)



Congratulations go out to the staff of Franklin Mountains and Wyler Aerial Tramway State Park, which figured prominently in *El Paso* magazine's "Best of El Paso 2009" awards.

- Best Hiking Trail – Franklin Mountains State Park
- Best Bike Trail – Franklin Mountains State Park
- Best Place to take visitors – Wyler Aerial Tramway State Park

HR POLICY CORNER

At Will Policy

All employees serve "at the will" of the agency. The agency may elect to terminate the employment of an employee for any reason that does not violate the law. Likewise, an employee may choose to leave the department at any time, with or without prior notice. This at-will relationship may not be modified or limited in any way by another TPWD employee. Supervisors are not authorized to make any promises or assurances of continued employment, either verbally or in writing. Please direct any questions regarding this policy to the Human Resources Director.

Correction: On page 3 of the August 2009 issue, we incorrectly printed that TPW Commissioner Dan Hughes is the president and CEO of CX Service Company, Inc. and was a member of several associations and boards. The paragraph was actually referring to TPW Commissioner S. Reed Morian, not Dan Hughes. We apologize for the error.



Natural Leaders symposium

The second biennial Natural Leaders symposium, held at Camp Allen July 14–16, brought together alumni from Classes I through VII and the TPWD executive management team for three days of networking opportunities, discussions, seminars and inspirational talks, including a lunch talk by former TPWD Executive Director Andy Sansom. A series of nationally renowned facilitators led seminars on a variety of timely workplace issues, such as “Intergenerational Differences.” Fun-filled evening activities included skeet shooting, fishing and a final-evening performance by the Natural Leaders Band, led by Maestro Tom Harvey.

TPWD started the Natural Leaders program in 2000 to build leadership strength for current and future challenges, and to support succession planning at the agency. The program is led by Al Bingham and Jim Lopp, with support from HR’s amazing Natural Leaders team.



KAREN BLIZZARD



EARL NOTTINGHAM



REGGIE WALKER



EARL NOTTINGHAM

Big Tree gets big drink

To help Goose Island State Park’s Big Tree survive the current severe drought conditions, members of the Lamar Volunteer Fire Department have teamed up with staff from nearby Goose Island State Park to water the tree once a week with more than 10,000 gallons of water, the equivalent of a one-inch rain shower. The huge famed tree is a thousand-year-old coastal live oak—the champion among its kind in the state and one of the largest in the U.S., and is considered a prized and iconic resource for this region of the Texas coast.

Volunteer Firefighter Jason Bruns (left) and Goose Island State Park Ranger Bill Wilson (right) give “the Big Tree” a much-needed drink from a fire truck’s high-pressure hose.



BRYAN FRAZIER

MILESTONES



NEW EMPLOYEES

ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES

Rajul Mehta
Accountant I, Austin

INFRASTRUCTURE

Thomas Cornett
Maint. Tech. III, Austin

STATE PARKS

Alex Gomez
Custodian I, Falcon Heights

Darlene Jones
CSR II, Austin

John Towers
Park Rgr. III, Karnack

WILDLIFE

Jeremy Mayhew
F&WT II, Sulphur Springs

Cody McEntire
F&WT II, Alpine

Austin Stolte
NRS I, Sanderson

Michael Warriner
Prog. Spec. V, Austin

UP THE LADDER

ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES

Sherrie Haddock
Adm. Asst. IV to Purchaser IV

COASTAL FISHERIES

John Perez
Transport Maint. Spec II to Transport Maint. Spec. III

INLAND FISHERIES

Tony Owens
NRS IV to NRS V

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Theresa Carmack
Adm. Asst. III to Adm. Asst. IV

Erin Lewis
Adm. Asst. II to Adm. Asst. III

Patrick Schubert
PCO II to PCO III

Game Warden Trainee to Probationary Game Warden:

Andrew Alexander
John Apgar, Jr.
Robert Apple, Jr.
Benjamin Baker
Dustin Balfanz
Elizabeth Balusek
David Benoit
David Bosecker
Clint Brown
Cody Buckaloo
Joel Campos
Bradley Durst
Michael Dushay
Vance Flowers
Christopher Fried
Logan Griffin
Braxton Harris
William Hellums
Royce Ilse
Morgan Inman
David Johnson
Jason Jones
Daniel Kessel
Joni Kuykendall
Todd Long
Carlos Maldonado III
Joshua McCrary
Lee Morrison
Theron Oatman
Samuel Padgett
Ryan Peacock
Darrin Peeples
David Pellizzari
Jaime Pendlebury
Glenn Raborn
Derek Reeder
Daniel Roraback
Christopher Sanchez
James Schmidt
Michael Serbanic
Samuel Shanafelt
Luis Sosa
Drew Spencer
Brian Srba
Cullen Stakes
Randy Stovall
Chris Swift
Jonathan Taylor
Matthew Waggoner
Lerrin Williams
Nathan Wilson

STATE PARKS

Laurentee Acevedo
Adm. Asst. II to Adm. Asst. III
Jacob Dement
Park Spec. I to Park Spec. III

WILDLIFE

Jodi Swonke
Adm. Asst. II to Adm. Asst. III

SERVICE AWARDS

5 YEARS

Mukhtar Farooqi, IF
Justin Foster, Wild.
Gloria Garcia, LE
Jarrod Jarmon, IT
Jeffrey Kimball, EO
Kevin Kolodziejczyk, IF
Vincent Million, IT
Geoffrey Rabinovich, CF
Michael Ritter, Inf.
Rocky Salazar, SP
Brian Scott, LE
Zoe Stinchcomb, IF
Kevin Wilkinson, Jr., LE

10 YEARS

Jack Burris, SP
Kenneth Joslin, SP
Julia McFerran, SP
Patricia Whittle, AR
Brenda Wyatt, SP

15 YEARS

William Broyles, SP
Michael Little, IF
John Paret, IF
Therese Rodgers, LE
Gary Steinmetz, IF
Michael Wallace, Wild.

20 YEARS

Donald Denson, SP
Lourdes Pena, SP

25 YEARS

Gary Bierschwale, SP
Joanie Herrin, SP
Rebecca McGary, Inf.
Denise Williams, SP

40 YEARS

Antonio Buenano, Jr., CF
Arthur Lawrence, LE

RETIREMENTS

Dorothy Baker
State Parks, 10 years

One year later... *continued from page 1*

Almost all state parks damaged by Ike are now fully operational. San Jacinto has a temporary park store in a modular building until the new visitor center is completed. Sea Rim is mostly cleared of debris, and TPWD is developing a master plan for restoration.

But the remarkable early comeback story is Galveston Island, where the worst-case scenario was the park staying closed for seven years. This spring, 66 campsites reopened, including 36 on the beach side. Regional Director Justin Rhodes credits a strong team effort and community support.

"Not just at Galveston, but at all the parks in our region, staff and volunteer efforts really moved us forward faster than expected," said Rhodes. "Basically, this provided labor that would have cost more than we could afford. It's truly encouraging, when you're down and out, to see everyone step up."

After Ike, Rhodes said TPWD formed a regional hurricane response team. Now, if Galveston Island has to evacuate, crews will haul out materials, giving park staff time to evacuate their families.

"We've got serious work to do still," said Jim Sutherlin, who oversees several WMAs, including the hard-hit J.D. Murphree, where recent alligator surveys show a 90 percent nesting decrease from 2008.

In FY10, Sutherlin says they'll commence levee erosion and water control structure repairs. WMAs will get about \$1.7 million of the \$7 million in NOAA relief funding, the rest going for Galveston Bay oyster reef and boat ramp repairs.

"We've worked really hard at this, and we won't forget about it," Sutherlin said. "It's driven our lives at home and at work, and a lot of people are pretty tired of it. People say 'I guess that's all behind you now,' but it's really not. It'll be years before the community gets back to being itself again in this part of Texas."

— Tom Harvey

Tracks & Trails going paperless

In order to save postage and printing costs and improve content and delivery, *Tracks & Trails* is moving online! Starting with the October issue, you will be able to access the newsletter in printable PDF format at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/tracksandtrails

The September 2009 issue is the last printed version you will receive in the mail. We appreciate your continued interest in agency activities and hope that you'll visit our website to read *Tracks & Trails* online and keep up with what's going on.

TRAINING CALENDAR

Check the current training schedule online at <https://wildnet.tpwd.state.tx.us/ir/cs/train/calendar.phtml> or contact Andra Clark, technical trainer, at (512) 389-4782 for more information.