

# Welcome Packet

## Dear Texas Outdoor Family Camper,



We hope you are as excited about participating in our new Texas Outdoor Family program as we are! The activities and programs we offer will enable you and your family to comfortably and safely enjoy your Texas State Parks and provide the skills for a lifetime of rewarding outdoor experiences. Please note this packet includes the following:

- Check list of recommended items you and your family should bring
- Meal ideas for the weekend
- Rules, regulations and expectations of participants attending the workshop
- Waiver for activities and medical information form

Please take a moment to review the suggested **equipment list**. Configure it to your family's needs while considering that the weather can quickly change. Please note we do not provide sleeping bags or blankets. Remember, it is better to have something and not need it than to need an item and not have it! We have planned our activities so that your family will have a memorable time in the park, but we also understand that sharing private time with your family is important. If there is a time when your family would rather go on a hike, go swimming, or even take a nap, then feel free to do so.

The **meal ideas** include common items you may already have in your kitchen or are readily available at your local grocery store. You will need to furnish a cooler and ice to keep the perishables cold. If you discover that you forgot something once you arrive at the park, never fear — a grocery store is only a short drive away. Can you smell the food cooking over the open fire already? Meals undoubtedly taste better outside.

Finally, a reminder — **check-in time is from 9-9:30 a.m. for 1-day workshops and 5:30-6:30 p.m. for 2-day workshops. Please plan to arrive at the park on time as our introductory session will begin promptly.** The sooner we start, the more fun we can have, so please don't be late. We know that traffic, restroom breaks, and packing the vehicle can take longer than expected. **Please plan accordingly by adding 30 minutes to your travel time to be sure you have reached your campsite, not the park entrance, by the start of the program.**

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact us at (512) 389-8903 or [email tofsp@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:tofsp@tpwd.texas.gov).

We look forward to seeing you soon — welcome to our Texas Outdoor Family!

— Texas Outdoor Family State Park Staff

## A Note from your Park Ranger



Welcome! We are pleased that you and your family are participating in the Texas Outdoor Family Program. It is a wonderful opportunity for you to share time together in the outdoors and learn more about Texas State Parks. Please take a few minutes to read some guidelines, rules, and suggestions which are designed for your family's enjoyment and safety.

### Your Safety

#### Be prepared:

Wear appropriate dress and comfortable walking shoes in the outdoors. It is wise to dress in layers so that you may remove or add layers as needed. Know your abilities and physical limits. Before setting out on a hike, become aware of distances and trail conditions.

#### Carry water with you at all times:

We recommend you drink one-half to one full quart of water or sports drink each and every hour you are in the heat. Carry your water bottle, drink small amounts often, and seek shade when you need it. Heat illness can be caused by excessive heat and a lack of fluids. Hike with a buddy and always let someone know where you are going.

#### Avoid harmful wildlife and plants:

Stay in mowed areas and on trails where you can see possible dangers. By traveling where others have traveled before you, you will limit encounters with possible hazards. It is dangerous to eat wild-collected foods as they may cause a harmful reaction.

### Being Kind to the Park

#### Leave what you find:

The collection of plants and animals is illegal in a state park. Help us "Leave No Trace" and preserve the beauty that you have experienced for the next visitor to come along after you.

#### Respect wildlife:

Feeding wildlife causes them to become habituated to interacting with humans. This can be potentially unsafe for wildlife as their natural behavior is altered.

### Dead wood has life, too:

See for yourself by lifting a decaying log and notice all the creatures that call it home. Texas State Parks prohibits firewood gathering. Bring your own kindling and paper, or fire starter.

### Respect your neighbors:

Quiet times enforced 10 p.m. - 6 a.m. for everyone's enjoyment.

### Dispose of waste properly:

Keep this park natural and be a good steward; pick up litter and put it in its place. Don't forget to bring a trash bag from home. It is an often-forgotten item!

### Travel on durable surfaces:

Plants "grow by the inch but die by the foot." Help protect you, the wildlife and the vegetation. You'll also avoid thorny bushes and biting insects!

## What we provide



The Texas Outdoor Family program will provide each group with the basic equipment to enjoy an overnight stay at a state park to include:

- Tent for 6 people
- Lanterns
- Stoves and fuel
- Coffee press
- Pots, fry pan, and cooking utensils
- Equipment necessary for all activities
- Cots and 4 foam pads

# Checklist

Here's a list of recommended items to bring for each family.

## Clothing

- Good walking shoes or boots
- 3 pairs of socks (at least)
- Water shoes (for kayaking, showers)
- Long pants
- Shorts
- Long-sleeved shirt
- Short-sleeved shirt
- Underwear
- Hat
- Pajamas
- Swimsuit (for kayaking)
- Rain jacket

## Personal

- Toothbrush
- Towel
- Wash cloth
- Deodorant
- Sunglasses
- Lip balm
- Soap
- Shampoo
- Water bottle

## Miscellaneous

- Folding camp chairs
- Bicycles and helmets
- Book (optional)
- Flashlight/headlamp (extra batteries)
- Daypack/fanny pack
- Pocket knife (adults only)
- Binoculars

- First aid kit - personal medications properly labeled

## Kitchen items

- Sharp knife
- Resealable plastic bags
- Plates, bowls and cups
- Silverware
- Paper towels
- Charcoal/starter fluid / chimney starter
- Cooler and ice
- Dish soap (preferably biodegradable)
- Can opener
- Aluminum foil
- Marshmallow skewers
- Food items for family
- Cast-iron skillet (basic fry pan will be provided)

## Group items

- Camera with film or memory card
- Extra batteries
- Insect repellent
- Sunscreen
- Trash bags
- Matches or lighter
- Kindling or fire starter

## Bedding/sleeping

- Sleeping bag or blanket
- An extra blanket, just in case
- Twin Sheets for the cot
- Pillow

## Suggestions for Camping with Weather

As with all outdoor activities, we are at the mercy of Mother Nature and the weather that she presents us with. Fear not! Our rangers have camped through it all. From 115 to 15 degrees, our Rangers know how to stay comfortable when sleeping in a tent. Take a few of their tips and tricks to ensure that you have a comfortable overnight stay with the Texas Outdoor Family Program:

### Cold Weather

- A winter cap and wool socks to wear to bed. You will be surprised by the difference it makes! You don't have wool socks? Wear two pairs of normal socks!
- Gloves for those early mornings and late evenings when the sun is hiding.
- Hot chocolate mix
- An extra blanket – it is much easier to have 1 too many than 1 too few.
- Coffee – we do supply French presses for use at your site! Coarse ground coffee is best.
- Hunter's Hand-Warmer Packets – sold at any outdoors store, these one-time use packets begin to heat up when exposed to the air and go great in jacket pockets or in sleeping bags.
- A campfire is often essential to any camping trip. Firewood is available for purchase at nearly every State Park but kindling and tinder are not. Bring your own newspaper and small pieces of wood from home. Collecting firewood at a park, regardless of its size, is illegal and not allowed.

### Other things you might consider:

**Hot Water Bottle:** Heat water on your camp stove, transfer it to a safe and tightly sealable container, and put it in your sleeping bag with you.

**Does your campsite have electricity?** Ask your reservations agent or email [tofsp@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:tofsp@tpwd.texas.gov) about your specific event and we'll be able to tell you. If so, consider an electric blanket for your family. Don't forget the extension cord!

**Space heaters are generally not a good idea.** In close quarters they can be easily tipped over causing injury or damage. **Any heater with a visible red-hot heating element is not allowed inside the tent!**

**Extra Insulation for your cot:** Cots and air mattresses can be very comfortable, but they can also make you very cold. Sleeping on a pillow of cold air makes it hard for your body to stay warm. Put down a blanket or foam pad first, between you and your mattress or cot, for insulation!

## Hot Weather

- **Sunscreen to protect your skin** - You don't need a high SPF, just be sure to reapply as the day goes on.
- **Spray bottle** - One with a "mist" setting is perfect for cooling you off without soaking you.
- **Cold Water** - Freeze a half-full water bottle. Before a hike or activity, top off with liquid water and enjoy.
- **Extra Ice** - Ice will melt fast. Be sure you have enough and use extra to help you cool off.
- **Hat or bandana** – Protecting your head from the rays of the sun is important during the summer time. A wet bandana around the neck will cool the rest of your body down.
- **Folding shade canopy** - Some parks may not have trees or shade structures. A portable folding canopy can be an invaluable tool.
- **A battery powered fan** – Sold at any outdoors store, these are handy for inside the tent as well as outside. Corded fans are okay too, check your site for electrical outlets beforehand.
- **A hammock** - A great piece of gear that keeps your back cool but allows you sit or lie down and relax. Nylon and Brazilian hammocks are great options.
- **Simple Food** - Sandwiches, salad, fruits, and other easy to prepare items that don't require a grill or fire.
- **Hydration packs and water bottles** - Great for water and electrolyte replenishing powders, tablets, and mixes.

### Other things you might consider:

**Does your campsite have electricity?** Ask your reservations agent or [email tofsp@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:tofsp@tpwd.texas.gov) about your specific event and we'll be able to tell you. If so, consider an electric fan for your family. Don't forget the extension cord!

**Take it easy.** In the warmer months, allow some extra time for activities than you normally would. Enjoy the outdoors. Be patient and flexible.

**Drink up!** Know the signs of dehydration and heat stroke. If you're feeling tired or dizzy, take a break, drink some fluids, and find some shade. Keep an eye out on friends and family as well. Fatigue, muscle cramps, and a lack of sweat are some early signs that you need to cool down.

## Rainy Weather

- **A rain jacket and pants** – Keeping your body dry will help you retain heat and be more comfortable.
- **An extra change of clothes** – Being sure that you have something to change into for bed or when the rain stops will help ensure a positive experience.
- **Board and card games** – Your rangers will have a set of nature themed activities to help pass the time but don't forget to bring your favorites from home. These are great for inside your tent.
- **Resealable bags** – Zipper close sandwich bags will help keep small items like phones and wallets from getting wet.
- **A 10'x 10' portable canopy** – Some campsites have shelters over the picnic table, but most do not.
- **Rain boots or extra footwear** – Clean and dry feet make everyone a little happier.
- **A sense of adventure!** – Camping in the rain can be a lot of fun if you are prepared.
- **Dry firewood and kindling** – If rain is threatening, wood might be best kept in the car until it is needed.
- **Be safe about lightning** – Tents are a safe place for most storms. If lightning is a concern, your ranger will have tips to keep you safe.

### Other things you might consider:

**Wildlife relies on rain!** As drought in Texas continues, we need to embrace the rain when it comes. Remember that rain can dampen a weekend, but it gives life to nature around us. Keep your eyes open for more wildlife activity after or during a rain!

**You'll have the park to yourself!** The threat of rain deters many park visitors. Use this to your advantage as lines at the headquarters are shorter and parks are more peaceful!

## Camp Friendly, Family Meal Ideas



For your convenience we have a few camp menu ideas. Please note these are simply recommendations. You're certainly free to bring any of your family favorites. Remember to store all perishables in your iced cooler. Do you have questions regarding campfire cooking? See your ranger about tips for preparing a great meal at your campsite.

### Menu ideas

#### Snacks: Saturday morning, afternoon, Sunday morning

Fruits, trail mix, nuts, energy bars, fruit leather, dry cereal, etc. Water and juice.

#### Saturday lunch: Picnic-style cold lunch, no cooking required

You will likely be busy putting your campsite together during the late morning of Saturday. We suggest a simple lunch to avoid the time required to cook: Wraps, Sandwiches, Vegetable Spears, Pretzels, Salsa, and Hummus are great options.

#### Saturday dinner: Outdoor cooking options are endless

Consider that you will have a stove with pots and pans in addition the charcoal/wood grill provided with each campsite. We like to suggest that folks plan their meal ahead of time to save some prep work at your campsite after a long day of being active in the park. If you can cut your vegetables at home and pre-portion out the additional ingredients, you will save time, packing space, and lighten your load.

#### Dinner favorites include:

Chicken Kabobs, Turkey Burgers, Grilled Meats & Seafood over Salad, Fajitas, Hot Dogs, Grilled Veggies over Pasta, Corn on the Cob, Beans, and Fresh Roasted Veggies in a Foil Pouch. Your rangers are always looking for new recipes, so we look forward to seeing your family favorite!

#### Sunday breakfast:

If you are an early riser, we encourage you to make a fantastic campsite breakfast. Four Grain Pancakes, eggs with avocado, and veggie sausage are always family favorites. If you are looking for something a little simpler, we suggest yogurt, whole grain cereal, granola and fresh fruit to get your day started right. Don't forget the coffee! Your ranger will have a French press for you to use, just ask!

## Camp Cooking

We encourage our families to spend time together and to prepare meals while out camping. We provide gas stoves for cooking over a burner and also encourage families to grill or utilize a campfire for their meals.

### Safety

Remember that cooking requires heat and heat can often cause burns. Be sure to cook on durable surfaces and be aware of the placement of items near stoves or near the fire. Make sure you have a water source near your cooking station in case you need to extinguish a fire or cool a burn.

### Methods of cooking

**Stove top** – Our stoves use propane (provided) and are very user friendly. We provide pots and pans, but they are very basic. If you have a favorite non-stick or cast-iron pan, we encourage you to bring it along!

**Open flame** – Each campsite will have a grill on their campfire ring. Bring charcoal, a wire brush, and a charcoal chimney or lighter fluid to help things get started quick! Search the internet for “campsite foil pack” recipes. This is a great way to a mess free dish outdoors. Prep it at home and freeze it to make it even easier!

**Dutch oven** – The Dutch oven uses coals as a heat source and is a great way to bake outdoors. A popular method of the old west, Dutch oven cooking has been a mainstay at campsites for generations. Let your ranger know, by replying to their email the week before the event, if you'd like to borrow one. Add charcoal to your packing list!

There are many great online resources available for camp cooking recipes. Take some time to explore options and have fun cooking outside!

## Smartphones and Apps!

Many folks consider camping to be exclusive from technology. At the Texas Outdoor Family we want everyone to feel at home, comfortable, and engaged in the outdoors. If this means that you download an app or two to help you identify species of wildlife, find constellations in the night sky, or find hidden treasures called geocaches, then we're all for it! Here is a short list of a few free apps that you might find useful during your adventure at a Texas State Park!

**Geocaching Intro** – allows you to expand on the activity we will introduce at your workshop

**Star Chart** – Turns your phone into a map of constellations and planets when pointed at the sky

**iNaturalist** – Share your nature observations with the iNaturalist community

**MapMyHike** – Keeps track of your distance hiked as a tool for getting physically fit

**Flashlight** – It never hurts to have a backup to your traditional flashlight

**Compass** – Having a compass in your pocket can be a handy tool while spending time outdoors

**Peterson Birds Pocket Edition** – Help ID the birds you might see on your camping trip

## Medical Information

Rangers use this information in the event of an emergency. One form per family.

Family Name: \_\_\_\_\_

In case of emergency, contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Relation: \_\_\_\_\_

List all prescription and non-prescription medicines currently being taken and the family member to whom it applies:

List allergies and the family member to whom it applies (food, medicines, insect stings, etc.):

## Medical History

Check any of the following conditions and list the family member to which it applies:

Asthma: \_\_\_\_\_

Chronic Back Problems or Back Surgery: \_\_\_\_\_

Heart Problems: \_\_\_\_\_

Stroke: \_\_\_\_\_

Migraines: \_\_\_\_\_

Seizures: \_\_\_\_\_

Diabetes: \_\_\_\_\_

If diabetic, is person insulin-dependent?     Yes     No

Describe any physical conditions that will require special assistance during the workshop:

# Release of Liability

**Please print and bring with you!**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ in consideration for participating in the Texas Outdoor Family workshop at \_\_\_\_\_, a unit of the Texas State Park system, do hereby both individually and as the authorized supervising adult of any accompanying minor, personally **Assume All Risks** associated with participating in Texas Outdoor Family, whether foreseen or unforeseen, **And Unconditionally Release And Hold Harmless** the State of Texas, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's commissioners, employees, and volunteers, from and against any and all liabilities, costs, expenses, claims and damages for which they, individually or collectively, might otherwise become liable by reason of any accidents, or injuries to, or death of any persons, or damage to any property, connected with or related to the presence of any such person or property upon the site, regardless of how, where or when such injury, death or damage occurs, even if caused by the negligence of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, or its commissioners, employees, or volunteers.

I understand that the activity involves risk. I agree that I will follow the safety and other rules and instructions of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department at all times while participating in the activity.

I have read this release and understand all its terms, and I execute this release voluntarily with full knowledge of its significance.

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Please list names of all accompanying minors:

