

# 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."

December 2009

## Hundreds show up for Big Bend Ranch State Park Fiesta

After two previous attempts—first postponed a year ago because of torrential floods, then again during swine flu caution last spring—Big Bend Ranch State Park was finally able to host its Fiesta, a free, public open house that showcased many of the features, activities and facilities offered by the large remote park in far West Texas.

"This is the biggest event we've had at Big Bend Ranch State Park since the original park opening," said Mike Hill, regional director of state parks in West Texas. "It went extraordinarily well, and lots of people got to experience all of the things that make Big Bend Ranch State Park such an enjoyable destination. Our neighbors now know we're open for business, and they will spread the word."

More than 600 people turned out, many driving and even flying in from hours away, to see much of what makes up one of the largest state parks in the U.S., and to participate in the event's numerous scheduled activities. Those included horseback riding, jeep tours, hiking, birding and nature walks, camping, river rafting and mountain biking. There was also a free barbecue lunch for everyone and a concert by cowboy singer and songwriter Dennis Jay.

In addition, artwork done by students from Presidio High School was on display in the park's original restored ranch house lodge, "The Big House."

"I was really amazed to see how many of the local residents came out and visited. When the local people are informed about what we have, the more they can tell the tourists who come through the region and direct them here," said Rick Thompson, park superintendent of Big Bend Ranch State Park. "I thought the Fiesta was a resounding success, and we achieved what we set out to do. We'll definitely be on a lot more people's radar because of this event."

— Bryan Frazier



Tom Wagner, biologist (left), and Jonnie Yerger, fish and wildlife technician (right), wrestle a bull shark to the measuring board. Both are members of TPWD's Corpus Christi Bay ecosystem sampling team and work out of the Coastal Fisheries Division regional office in Rockport.

## Gill net sampling supports healthy ecosystem

Imagine skimming across a shallow flat in a remote coastal bay on a crisp fall morning, watching the sun rise over the Gulf of Mexico.

Fish dart about as you encroach on their personal space. In the distance you see the floats marking the first of three gill nets you set out the evening before. You imagine what you are going to catch, but you never know. It can take over an hour to process each net, as every fish, crab, jellyfish or other organism caught will be identified, counted and measured.

This is a day in the life of a Coastal Fisheries (CF) Division gill net sampling team. It's a big job, involving many people working together, sampling every bay. But it's the foundation of a multi-decade dataset that forms the scientific basis of coastal fisheries regulations. A little history shows how it came to be.

As conflicts between commercial and recreational anglers came to a head in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it became evident that there was a

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## DIRECTOR'S CORNER



### Dear Colleagues:

**2009** is fast coming to a close, and it sure seems as if time has passed us by in a hurry. So, before the clock strikes midnight and the corks pop on the champagne bottles, I'd like to use this space to express a few words of gratitude for some of the many things you have accomplished in 2009.

1. **Reopening of Galveston Island State Park** – Thanks to the extraordinary dedication of our park staff, the local "Friends" group, and countless volunteers, the park reopened in the spring for limited public use, mere months after the devastation following Hurricane Ike's passage.
2. **Addition of new park land at Village Creek State Park** – Thanks to a partnership with the Conservation Fund and the National Park Service, this East Texas park near Silsbee will double in size and add significant recreational opportunities.
3. **Record numbers of bighorn sheep** – Thanks to the work of our wildlife biologists, private landowners, and partners like the Texas Bighorn Society, bighorn numbers—an estimated 1,500—have reached levels equivalent to their historic highs in the late 1800s.
4. **New conservation measures for flounder and alligator gar** – Regulations to protect coastal flounder stocks and alligator gar were included in the 2009 statewide hunting and fishing regulations package, along with other far-reaching regulations needed to ensure that Texas' fish and wildlife populations continue to flourish.
5. **Completion of new visitor/outreach center at Kerr WMA** – The new center will provide a state-of-the-art facility to enhance public use and outreach events at this research and demonstration area, a premiere destination for learning about wildlife research, habitat management and effective stewardship.
6. **Law Enforcement covert operations** – Highly successful covert operations were completed to help arrest the illegal trade and commerce involving wild deer and the violation of federal rules governing offshore fishing for red snapper.
7. **Approval of Reservoir Habitat Partnership** – Thanks to the leadership of TPWD's Inland Fisheries team, a new national partnership was approved to focus on enhancing reservoir habitats, a significant priority of our fisheries management in Texas.
8. **Welcome of new game wardens and park peace officers** – TPWD law enforcement officers put their lives on the line every day in the service of conservation and recreation related law enforcement. This year, our academies trained and graduated new classes of game wardens and park peace officers, who are proudly serving our state and this agency in their new capacities.
9. **Passage of TPWD's Sunset Bill** – The 81st Legislature reauthorized the continuance of TPWD and placed an emphasis on combating the incursion and spread of exotic aquatic vegetation, reinforcing the agency's role in resource protection and enabling its participation in the Interstate Wildlife Violator Compact.
10. **Completion of the TPWD Land and Water Plan update** – The newly updated plan offers a strategic, streamlined, and compelling vision for the agency's most pressing conservation and outdoor recreation related initiatives. Created with extensive input from both inside and outside the agency, the plan will be distributed to every TPWD staff member in early 2010.

Space prevents me from capturing the many, many other things, big and small, each of you helped accomplished in 2009. Your jobs and efforts are essential ones, and I thank you for the voice you give, and the actions you take, on behalf of our state's wild things and wild places. They need you more than ever.

*Carter Smith*

## TRACKS & TRAILS

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### Editorial Team:

Lydia Saldaña-----Communications Director  
Karen Blizzard-----Editor  
Chase A. Fountain-----Photo Editor

Suzanne Davis-----Design Layout  
Carol Otto-----Proofing/Production  
Coordinator

## KUDOS

**Texas Parks & Wildlife magazine** won seven awards and was a finalist for Magazine of the Year at the 2009 International Regional Magazine Association (IRMA) awards in New Mexico earlier this month.

Public Issues: Gold – Dead Zone – Wendee Holtcamp

Historical Feature: Gold – A Fish Called Ethel – Larry Hodge

Nature Feature: Bronze – Boogie Woogie Bugle Birds – Noreen Damude

Art Direction of a Single Story: Silver – Round 'em Up – Andres Carrasco (photos by Earl Nottingham, Chase Fountain and Andres Carrasco)

Department: Award of Merit – Keep Texas Wild (too many people to name!)

Special Focus: Silver – State of the Gulf of Mexico, July 2008 (entire issue)

Cover: Silver – Cougar Country – Andres Carrasco (photo by Scott Stulberg)

Magazine of the Year: Finalist (they pick four finalists and a winner)



Staff Services Officer **Mary Terrell** (LE) was recognized as the Employee of the Year for TPWD at the Texans Caring for Texans recognition ceremony held on Oct. 23 at the Lubbock-Cooper Performing Arts Center. The ceremony, sponsored by the Lubbock State Director's Roundtable, is held yearly to announce an employee of the year from each state agency in the Lubbock area. Mary was recognized for her diligence in identifying potential problems and streamlining business practices, and for her work last year in overseeing the design and implementation of an electronic reporting system that resulted in more efficient monthly reporting.

## HR POLICY CORNER

### Equal Employment Opportunity

TPWD is an equal opportunity employer. It is a violation of agency policy for any employee or job applicant to be discriminated against on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age or disability status. All personnel decisions concerning terms and conditions of employment, to include hiring, firing, promotion, training, compensation, etc., shall be based on objective, job-related criteria. The Human Resources Director conducts an annual review of all TPWD personnel policies and procedures to ensure compliance with EEO laws, and presents recommendations for changes to the executive director. EEO or sexual harassment complaints can be made without a fear of retaliation to HR, General Counsel or any TPWD manager.





JAMES KITZHABER

## Underwater re-enlistment at Balmorhea State Park

Master Sergeant Jeremy Kitzhaber (right), from the 27 Special Operations Civil Engineer Squadron (SOCES) at Cannon Air Force Base, re-enlisted underwater in full military uniform and full scuba gear on Sept. 26 at Balmorhea SP. First Lieutenant LesLee Roderick (left), also from 27 SOCES, gave the oath of enlistment, and MSgt. Kitzhaber repeated it. Although this ceremony took place underwater, great care was taken with the U.S. flag, which was respectfully displayed in a way to ensure that it was not touching the ground.



PHOTOS BY CHASE A. FOUNTAIN

## Big Bend Ranch Fiesta

For adventurous parkgoers who traveled to remote Big Bend Ranch State Park for the public Fiesta on Saturday, Nov. 14, the experience was well worth the trip! Visitors were treated to a day of activities to familiarize themselves with new recreation opportunities at Texas' premier 300,000-acre wilderness park. Also featured was a complimentary BBQ lunch and tribute to Bob Armstrong and Andy Sansom, who were key players in the establishment of BBRSP over 20 years ago. Guided jeep, mountain-biking, horseback riding and rafting tours were included in the "wilderness experience" offerings on Friday and Sunday.

*Sauceda staff celebrate a successful Fiesta.*

*Before venturing out on the river, participants are briefed on what to expect during the rafting tour.*



ROB MCCORKLE

## At the "Heart" of gill net surveying

From left to right: Heart of the Hills Fisheries Science Center staffers Shane Pavlicek, Chris Bodine and Paul Fleming take stock of freshwater fish caught during a gill net survey conducted in October at Lake Buchanan in order to try to determine which species utilized both Texas Hill Country lake and river habitats. Center research improves fisheries management and explores what is not yet known about fish, their environment, and current and potential anglers.



BRYAN FRAZIER

## Abilene 75th Anniversary

Paul Seals, volunteer park interpreter, shares Native American and frontier stories, artifacts and attire with park visitors as part of the 75th anniversary celebration of Abilene SP on Oct. 24. More than 500 visitors turned out for the day's activities, which included a commemorative ceremony that was accompanied by the Abilene High School Band—just as the original park opening did back in 1934—as well as a history of the Civilian Conservation Corps, which helped construct many of the park's facilities, and a dedication and renaming of the park's Laura Packer Bird Blind. Other activities at the park included archery, fishing, nature hikes, a classic car show, star-gazing party and much more.



# MILESTONES



## NEW EMPLOYEES

### COASTAL FISHERIES

**Brooke Shipley**  
NRS III, Dickinson

### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

**Jason Cox**  
Systems Analyst II,  
Austin  
**John Phillips**  
Programmer IV, Austin

### STATE PARKS

**Daniel Alvarado**  
FSW I, Fort Davis  
**Felipe Camacho**  
Park Rgr. V, Austin  
**Susan Duffy**  
Clerk I, Smithville  
**Sandra Esparza**  
Clerk III, Vanderpool  
**Lorenza Herrera**  
FSW I, Fort Davis  
**Casey Jenkins**  
Park Rgr. II, Tatum  
**Marvin Jones**  
Park Spec. I, Needville  
**Zane Kirsch**  
Park Rgr. II, Smithville  
**Paul Lance**  
Maint. Asst., Jacksboro  
**David Lopez**  
Park Spec. III, Austin  
**David Marquez**  
Park Rgr. II, Presidio  
**Nelson Rodriguez**  
Archeologist II,  
Terlingua  
**Travis Schoppe**  
Park Rgr. III,  
Washington  
**Sonya Woodring**  
Clerk I, Bastrop

### WILDLIFE

**Gregorio Lopez**  
F&WT I, Cotulla

## UP THE LADDER

### COASTAL FISHERIES

**Henry Gonzalez**  
F&WT I to F&WT II  
**Derek York**  
F&WT II to F&WT III

### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Jeffrey Johnson**  
Proj. Mgr. I to  
Proj. Mgr. II

### INLAND FISHERIES

**Daniel Ashe**  
NRS III to NRS IV  
**Beth Bendik**  
NRS II to NRS III

### LAW ENFORCEMENT

**Brandi Dyer**  
Admin. Asst. II to  
Admin. Asst. III

### STATE PARKS

**Kelly Cardona**  
Clerk I to Admin. Asst. I  
**Mark Collins**  
Maint. Asst. to  
Park Rgr. II  
**Gail Miller**  
Admin. Asst. I to  
Admin. Asst. II  
**Julie Miller**  
Admin. Asst. I to  
Admin. Asst. II

### WILDLIFE

**Jessica Alderson**  
NRS I to NRS II  
**Harmony Garcia**  
F&WT I to F&WT II  
**Gloria Garza**  
Admin. Asst. II to  
Admin. Asst. III  
**Daniel Gray**  
F&WT I to F&WT II  
**Leslie Hammond**  
Admin. Asst. II to  
Admin. Asst. III  
**Stephanie McKenzie**  
NRS I to NRS II  
**Matthew Poole**  
NRS I to NRS II  
**Dewey Stockbridge**  
NRS I to NRS II  
**Joshua Turner**  
NRS I to NRS II  
**Clayton Wolf**  
Manager V to  
Division Director III

## SERVICE AWARDS

### 5 YEARS

**Beatrice Blasingame**, SP  
**Elsa Bosque**, Legal  
**Devona Butterworth**, IT  
**Kimberly Carter**, HR  
**Ryan Reitz**, Wild.  
**Joe West III**, SP

### 10 YEARS

**Walter Bailey**, SP  
**Joey Burks**, SP  
**Kevin Cosby**, CF  
**Anthony Jinkins**, SP  
**Brenda Justice**, SP  
**Yanira Lacio**, SP  
**Alejandro Olivarez**, Wild.  
**Steve Stratakos**, Wild.  
**Robert Sweeney**, Legal

### 15 YEARS

**Becky Baker**, SP  
**Richard Knipe**, Wild.  
**Janelle Taylor**, Inf.

### 20 YEARS

**Claressia McKinney**, SP  
**John Rao**, LE

### 25 YEARS

**Vickie Fite**, Wild.  
**Larry Fuentes**, SP  
**Joseph Stengel**, IT  
**William Stilley**, SP

## RETIREMENTS

**Michael Hawes**  
CF, 12 years  
**Socorro Nunez**  
SP, 21 years  
**Kim Ochs**  
SP, 32 years

## Gill net sampling...

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need for better science-based information to support management decisions. In 1975, CF staff began collecting gill net samples in most Texas bays. Eventually, the sampling program would expand to all bays using trawls, bag seines and oyster dredges, and in nearshore Gulf waters with trawls.

Each 600-foot gill net is composed of 150-foot sections of 3-, 4-, 5- and 6-inch mesh tied end to end. Each net "soaks" from dusk to dawn with the smallest mesh anchored nearest shore. Forty-five individual nets over a 10-week period in the spring, and again in the fall, in each of the eight major bay systems—plus additional samples in East Matagorda Bay and Cedar Lakes—account for a total of 780 gill net samples collected annually. Each of the 23,650 nets set since 1975 have been painstakingly constructed and fished the same way, so results from each are directly comparable over time.

Net locations are randomly selected, with the goal to sample the entire ecosystem and all of its organisms, not just those that are recreationally or commercially important. Data collected allow biologists to generate statistics on relative abundance, distribution, seasonality, size, age structure and more. Data from commercial and recreational landings are equally important, but are subject to fishing regulations, angler preferences, and fishing effort and are not necessarily reflective of the entire ecosystem.

Today, gill nets are at the core of what the Coastal Fisheries Division refers to as its Resource Monitoring Program—the longest-running and most comprehensive monitoring program in the world—and are essential in managing the state's finfish resources, such as red drum, spotted seatrout and flounder. Not only are the data used by TPWD biologists, but state and federal agencies, universities and others also utilize the data to help address diverse questions.

Most importantly, the Coastal Fisheries Division uses the data during the annual regulatory proposal process. This past winter, the collective coastwide effort of the nine sampling teams clearly illustrated the long downward trend of southern flounder abundance. Acknowledging confidence with the data, the TPW Commission implemented a November closure for giggering and cut bag limits in half in an attempt to rebuild those populations. Soon, flounder populations should rebound, thanks to regulations based on the gill net sampling program.

— Art Morris

## 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.