

Interpretive Guide to:

GOOSE ISLAND

STATE PARK



The "Big Tree" circa 1935. The current fence design follows the style used by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

THANKS TO THE WORK OF THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS AND STEWARDS THAT FOLLOWED, GOOSE ISLAND STATE PARK ENDURES. TODAY, YOU CAN STILL STAND IN THE SHADE OF THE ANCIENT "BIG TREE," FISH IN SAINT CHARLES OR ARANSAS BAYS, AND WATCH WHOOPING CRANES FEED IN NEARBY MARSHES, ALL OF WHICH HAVE BEEN DONE BY OTHERS FOR CENTURIES.



THINGS TO DO AT GOOSE ISLAND STATE PARK

The coastal beauty of Goose Island State Park awaits you, enjoy your visit!

- Try your luck fishing the waters of St. Charles Bay or Aransas Bay for spotted seatrout, red or black drum, or a myriad of other fish. The 1,620-foot lighted pier offers great access and the best fishing in the park, especially at night. You don't need a license if you stay on the pier or shore of the park.
- Launch your boat or kayak to explore, birdwatch or fish the marsh habitats surrounding the park or in the nearby Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.
- Take your pick of camping in the nearly constant sea breeze on the island itself or under the shelter of the live oak forest nearby. Each offers a unique experience.
- Grab your binoculars and camera to see the hundreds of bird species in the many varied habitats found in and around the park. The oyster reefs and edges of the water are filled with shorebirds at certain times of year, the woodlands are a favorite stopover for migrating warblers in the spring and fall, and the marshes are patrolled by wading herons, egrets and spoonbills all year long.

However you enjoy your state park, please help us care for it by leaving things where you found them and staying out of closed areas. All animals, plants, fossils and artifacts are protected by state law so that everyone can enjoy them.

For more information about programs or volunteering, contact the park or visit our website.

Goose Island State Park
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Civilian Conservation Corps Company 1801 in December 1934

A HISTORY OF CONSERVATION

In 1931, previously donated lands on the Lamar Peninsula were set aside by the Texas Legislature for development as Goose Island State Park. Two years later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a depression-era public works program, and Texans welcomed it as an opportunity to preserve natural resources and develop park lands. CCC Company 1801 arrived at the park the following year and spent 18 months shaping the land into a park.

CCC enrollees were young, unmarried and unemployed men who were supervised by army officers and experienced craftsmen. They received housing, food, wages (most of which went directly to their families back home), and they also learned trades. Companies were up to 200 men strong, and Company 1801 spent its time at Goose Island State Park clearing brush, digging drainage ditches and building



park facilities. The structures were built using local materials including shellcrete blocks which the CCC made on site. Blocks were composed of crushed oyster shell, sand and Portland cement.

THE BIG TREE

One of the things the CCC protected was the “Big Tree.” Having survived many floods, droughts, wildfires, and hurricanes in its lifetime, the exact age is unknown, but it is estimated to be more than 1,000 years old. The tree stands 44 feet tall, has a trunk that is 35 feet in circumference and a crown that is 89 feet across. The height of the tree has been limited by Gulf Coast breezes, but the over 11-foot diameter of the trunk makes it one of the largest live oaks in the United States.

Shown here shortly after completion, the Recreation Hall is the only intact CCC structure that remains at Goose Island State Park. It is made of the shellcrete shown above.



A COASTAL RETREAT

Goose Island State Park is located on the Lamar Peninsula and surrounded by the Mission-Aransas Estuary. Estuaries are bodies of water along the coast where freshwater from rivers meets the ocean. This mix of fresh and saltwater leads to diverse habitat types both on land and in the water.

The primary terrestrial features at the park are live oak/red bay woodlands, unique to the Texas Gulf Coast and pockets of coastal prairie. The live oak/red bay woodlands, which cover about 150 acres of the park, are critical to the survival of neo-tropical migratory birds heading north in the spring and south in the fall. Coastal prairie used to cover about 6.5 million acres of Texas, but now, only about 65,000 acres remain. Thirty acres are maintained within in the park.

Along the shoreline of the park, marshes and mudflats give way to seagrass beds and oyster reefs. Many commercially and recreationally valuable species, like red drum and whooping cranes, depend upon healthy estuaries to live. Species such as blue crab and Carolina wolfberries, a marsh plant with bright red berries, are common in the area and are some of the favorite foods of the majestic Whooping Cranes.

