ENJOY THE PARK

We hope you enjoy your visit to Cedar Hill State Park. Here are some things to do at the park:

• Take a hike on the Talala Trail or Duck Pond Trail.
• Learn more about the plants and wildlife in the park by attending an interpretive program.
• Ask for the “Birds of Cedar Hill State Park” field checklist and go birding.
• Tour historic Penn Farm. Check the event calendar for guided tours or explore on your own with a self-guided brochure.
• Go fishing in Joe Pool Lake or at Perch Pond in the park.
• Attend events hosted by the park, such as the Caroling at Penn Farm in December. Check the Calendar of Events on the website.

You can be a partner in conserving the natural and cultural resources of the Cedar Hill State Park by:

• Leaving no trace as you camp or recreate. If you pack it in, pack it out!
• Staying on established trails while hiking, biking or riding to prevent soil erosion and damage to the prairie grasses; and staying off the trails when they are closed after a rain.
• Helping create and maintain trails by volunteering for a group such as the Dallas Off-Road Bicycle Association (D.O.R.B.A.); visit www.dorba.org to find out more.
• Volunteering as a park host. Hosts are needed to help in the campgrounds or with office duties, interpretation or maintenance.

Cedar Hill State Park
1570 F.M. 1382, Cedar Hill, TX 75104
(972) 291-3900 • www.tpwd.texas.gov/cedarhill/

RICH IN DIVERSITY

Today many acres of prairie grasslands lie beneath the surface of Joe Pool Lake as it captures the waters of Mountain Creek and Walnut Creek. The creation of the lake inundated a number of small family farms. However, the farmstead established by John Wesley Penn in 1859 is preserved within the park, a reminder of the agricultural legacy of early Dallas County.

The park is biologically diverse due to the convergence of two ecosystems. The grasslands of the Texas Blackland Prairie and the upland forests of the White Rock Limestone Escarpment create a transitional habitat zone, supporting plants and animals commonly found in North Central Texas, East Texas, or the Texas Hill Country.

A rich combination of grassland and forest provides an ideal habitat for migratory birds. The park’s bird list includes almost 200 species, including year-round residents such as the eastern bluebird and great-horned owl, and seasonal favorites such as the colorful painted bunting.

THIS AREA IS NAMED FOR ITS RUGGED LIMESTONE BLUFFS COVERED WITH FORESTS OF DARK GREEN CEDARS. SETTLERS CAME HERE FOR THE RICH SOILS AND ABUNDANT GRASSES OF THE TALLGRASS BLACKLAND PRAIRIE. THE PARK HARBORS ENDANGERED PRAIRIE REMNANTS, SMALL PIECES OF THE TALLGRASS PRAIRIE THAT ONCE STRETCHED ALL THE WAY TO CANADA.

Red-tailed hawks are among the many species that rely on the grasslands.
The Penn family owned this farm for over a century. It is representative of the small, middle-class farmsteads that once occupied this margin of Dallas County. The site shows an evolution of structures constructed or adapted by the Penn family as needs changed and modern conveniences were added. It also serves as a reminder that humans made the greatest impact on the tallgrass prairie. Farmers such as John Wesley Penn utilized the rich natural resources of the land to build farms and provide shelter for their families. The Penn family grazed cattle and horses on the native prairie grasses for over a hundred years. Over time, most of the tallgrass prairie in Dallas County vanished—plowed under and replaced with crops of wheat or cotton. Perhaps because of the rocky surface and the hilly terrain of the "cedar mountains," prairie remnants at Penn Farm survived. The continued survival of these prairie remnants depends on our efforts to conserve them by managing, appreciating and protecting them from encroaching development.

The fertile, dark clay soils of the Blackland Prairies are some of the richest soils in the world. This attracted early settlers who replaced much of the native tallgrass prairie with cropland. Some of the richest soils in the world, this area was transformed into farmland. Today urban development consumes the vanishing prairie landscape. Most remnant prairies like those preserved in the park survived because farmers used them as hay meadows or because the land was too rocky for plowing.

In the early 1800s a vast tallgrass prairie stretched from Texas to Canada, covering the continent like an ocean. Today, less than 1 percent of the tallgrass prairies survive, mostly in isolated patches resembling scattered islands in a great sea. In Texas, less than 5,000 acres remain today. The first wave of destruction came in the 1800s as farmers converted the prairie to farmland. Today urban development consumes the vanishing prairie landscape.

Fire, an essential element in maintaining a healthy prairie ecosystem, sparks increased plant diversity and growth and flowering of plants. Fire prevents invasive woody species such as mesquite and cedar elm from transforming a prairie into a woodland. Native Americans used fire as a tool to create islands of fresh grass to attract bison. TPWD conducts prescribed burns to recreate the beneficial effects of fire.

Prairies may contain more than 250 different plant species. Grasses such as Big bluestem, Little bluestem, Indiangrass and Switchgrass dominate the Texas Blackland Prairie. The relict prairies in the park present excellent stands of Indiangrass and Big bluestem, also known as "turkeyfoot" for the shape of its seedhead. A wide variety of wildflowers burst into color during spring and summer, including the Purple coneflower, Maximilian sunflower and Celestial ghost iris. Deep rooted grasses and wildflowers survive cold winters, hot summers, drought and erosion.

Maximilian sunflower and Celestial ghost iris. Deep rooted grasses and wildflowers survive cold winters, hot summers, drought and erosion.

...the black prairie soil was built by the prairie plants, a hundred distinctive species of grasses, herbs, and shrubs; by the prairie fungi, insects and bacteria; by the prairie mammals and birds, all interlocked in one humungous community of cooperation and competition, one biota. This biota, through ten thousand years of living and dying, burning and growing, preying and fleeing, freezing and thawing, built the dark and bloody ground we call prairie."

Aldo Leopold, Round River, 1953

The topography of the Cedar Hill area is the result of the geologic interplay of rugged Clay soils collected water in slick muddy pits like those created by wild hogs. (Trails in the park are closed after a rain to prevent traffic from turning them into a series of "hogwallows.")

The word prairie comes from the simple French word for meadow. However, prairies represent complex ecosystems composed of a multitude of plants providing sustenance and shelter for a variety of living organisms, from large mammals to songbirds to small insects. Due to this complexity, not all prairies are alike. The eastern tallgrass prairies receive more rain than do the western shortgrass prairies. The soil type, the absence or presence of fire and rain; all contribute to the character of a prairie.

Sometimes they were called "hogwallow" prairies because the clay soils collected water in slick muddy pits like those created by wild hogs. (Trails in the park are closed after a rain to prevent traffic from turning them into a series of "hogwallows.")

The continued survival of these prairie remnants depends on our efforts to conserve them by managing, appreciating and protecting them from encroaching development.