



Sheldon Lake provides fine habitat for the American Alligator.

SHELDON LAKE STATE PARK AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER IS A 2,800-ACRE HAVEN FOR WILDLIFE SURROUNDED BY THE HIGHWAYS, RAILROADS, AND INDUSTRY OF HOUSTON. ITS PONDS, WETLANDS, AND PRAIRIE TEEM WITH A WIDE VARIETY OF WILDLIFE. SHELDON LAKE PROVIDES DIVERSE WILDLIFE HABITAT WITH EXCELLENT BIRDWATCHING, KAYAKING, AND FISHING OPPORTUNITIES. A FORMER FISH HATCHERY NOW RECLAIMED BY NATURE FORMS THE CORE OF THE PARK FEATURING ACCESSIBLE TRAILS, BOARDWALKS, DECKS, AND AN OBSERVATION TOWER. THESE AMENITIES ENABLE SCHOOLS, YOUTH GROUPS, AND URBAN TEXANS TO ENJOY AN OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE CLOSE TO HOME.



School groups gather for interpretive programs.

### SHELDON LAKE

You are visiting a nature preserve. Help us protect the plants and animals that live here and ensure your own safety by respecting park rules:

- Stay on designated trails and boardwalks.
- Keep back from the water; no swimming or wading.
- Alligators are present in this park; stay at least 30 feet away from the alligators.

Call park headquarters to schedule your school, scout, or youth group for our exciting hands-on field study activities including wildlife discovery, pond ecology, fishing, and alternative energy.

Join us as a volunteer to share your love of nature with others!

The park is open to the public daily 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., free of charge. The lake is open from sunrise to sunset.

Sheldon Lake State Park and Environmental Learning Center  
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Life's better outside.®



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INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# SHELDON LAKE

## STATE PARK AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER



## A LAND TRANSFORMED

Before the arrival of European and American settlers, a lush tapestry of tall grasses and prairie flowers interwoven with shallow wetlands and marshes covered the land. Thousands of animal and plant species thrived in this diverse habitat. After Texas independence in 1836, farms and ranch land replaced much of this native ecosystem. A century later, the U.S. government built Sheldon Reservoir to provide water for the defense industry during World War II. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department purchased the land in the 1950s and developed it into a refuge for migratory waterfowl, a public fishing lake, and a fish hatchery. When the hatchery closed in 1975, the land began to revert naturally to forest, ponds, and marshes. Over the last few decades, extensive work restored the park's land back to its native prairie ecosystem.

## HABITAT RESTORATION

Land that was farmed for 150 years is being restored to coastal prairie and wetlands. Staff and volunteers plant native grasses and flowers to reestablish the native ecosystem. A combination of seeding and transplanting appropriate plants, invasive species removal, mowing, and controlled burns help restore these habitats over time. Species adapted to life in a pond or prairie form an interdependent food web of plants and animals. When people introduce invasive plant or animal species to these habitats, the invasives disrupt the food web as they displace native plants and animals. At Sheldon Lake, staff and volunteers work to control invasive species such as Chinese Tallow trees, Deep-rooted Sedge, Giant Salvinia, and Water Hyacinth.



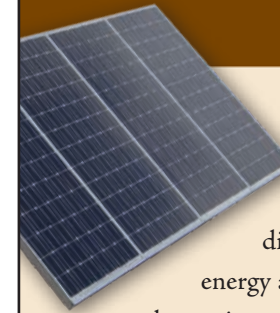
## WETLANDS ARE IMPORTANT

The protection of Sheldon Lake's wetlands is vital to both the park's habitat restoration efforts and its educational mission. Both Sheldon Lake and the hatchery ponds rely on rain and runoff to maintain their water levels. They, along with the prairie wetlands, provide natural storage for floodwaters as well as habitat for native aquatic plants. In turn, these plants act as a natural filter, removing pollutants from the water while providing homes for aquatic invertebrates, fish, birds, and reptiles. Park staff and volunteers work to restore and protect these wetlands so that Sheldon Lake's watershed can remain healthy.

Park staff and volunteers restore wetland habitat at Sheldon Lake.



## ALTERNATIVE ENERGY & GREEN BUILDING



Sheldon Lake State Park's infrastructure demonstrates several different ways that people can save energy and reduce pollution, be it through alternative energy or green building techniques.

The electric power used by the Pond Center pavilion and the John Jacob Observation Tower is supplemented by electricity produced by photovoltaic cells. A geothermal field efficiently regulates the pond center's temperature using the ground's constant 74 degrees Fahrenheit. A solar water heater uses the sun's energy to warm water for handwashing in the restrooms.

The recycled materials composing park structures such as reused oil-field steel pipes and local bricks add to the park's green building practices. This combination of energy-efficient design, recycled materials, water conservation, and other methods to reduce energy consumption lessens the damage to the natural environment here.

