WELCOME TO THE LOST PINES OF TEXAS, THE HOME OF BASTROP AND BUESCHER STATE PARKS. THE UNIQUE SETTING OF BOTH PARKS EVOKES A SENSE OF MYSTERY, AS THE ISOLATED FOREST OF LOBLOLLY PINES SEEMS OUT OF PLACE. WHILE GREATLY IMPACTED BY A 2011 WILDFIRE, BASTROP STATE PARK IS RECOVERING WITH POCKETS OF LOBLOLLY PINES SEEN THROUGHOUT THE PARK. BEAUTIFUL STRUCTURES SUCH AS HISTORIC STONE CABINS AND BRIDGES BUILT BY THE CCC DOT THE LANDSCAPE. STUNNING CRAFTSMANSHIP BRINGS THESE HISTORIC TREASURES TO LIFE.

Citizens of Bastrop and Smithville recognized early on that this land was worth protecting. Even before Bastrop State Park existed, a local hunting and fishing club laid the foundation for recreation in the Lost Pines. Bastrop and Smithville, plus local landowners, provided the land that became Bastrop and Buescher State Parks. In the 1930s, the Buescher (pronounced "Bisher") family donated 636 acres for the park. Since its dedication in 1937, Bastrop State Park has grown to over 6,600 acres of rolling hills while Buescher complements this preserve with about 1,000 acres.

Long ago, Native American groups passed through here and relied on game animals, plants, stones for tools, and water. A convenient river crossing made Bastrop County a likely place for early European settlement as well. The vital Spanish travel route known as El Camino Real de los Tejas traversed the area and contributed to the colonization of Texas.

The natural resources of the area were important to regional development. Timber harvest of loblolly pines fueled construction in Austin and San Antonio. The town of Bastrop, known as Mina when established in 1832, is one of the oldest towns in Texas. Bastrop timber was exported as far as northern Mexico.
BASTROP AND BUESCHER STATE PARKS

THE "LOST PINES" ARE NOT LOST

Before the 2011 wildfire, loblolly pines covered most of Bastrop State Park. Because this pine pocket was separated from the East Texas Pineywoods by over 100 miles, this area is known as the "Lost Pines." How did they get here? Pollen records show that pines have persisted in this area for over 18,000 years. They were probably once connected to the Pineywoods region. Over time, the climate became drier and the region covered by pines shrank. The local sandy soils provided conditions for these "Lost Pines" to survive. In fact, the pines have become genetically unique, having adapted to 30% less rainfall than loblollies from East Texas and adjacent states. The Lost Pines loblollies represent the westernmost stand of loblolly pine trees in the United States.

Wildfire!

In 2011, Texas had the warmest summer for any U.S. state since 1895 – it was even warmer than the Dust Bowl years of the 1930s! Bastrop had three months of 100°-plus days, drying the area. On September 4, high winds from Tropical Storm Lee knocked brittle, drought-stressed trees into power lines, igniting the most destructive wildfire in Texas history. The fiery monster burned for days, devouring 32,400 acres in Bastrop County, killing two people and destroying 1,696 houses and commercial structures.

Hundreds of defenders, including more than 140 Texas Parks and Wildlife Department employees, commercial partners and firefighters from all over the country, battled the blaze. The wildfire affected over 90% of Bastrop State Park. But because of the firefighters’ efforts, only five roofs of two CCC overlook structures burned.

The 2011 wildfire came close to Buescher State Park but skirted the park boundary. Just a few years later in 2015, the Hidden Pines fire burned the northern section of Buescher State Park, further impacting the Lost Pines ecosystem.

An Uncertain Future

Bastrop and Buescher state parks lie within the ecological region known as the Post Oak Savannah. The seasonally moist, sandy soils provide critical habitat for the endangered Houston toad. While historic habitat loss due to intensive agriculture severely reduced the Houston toad’s range in Texas, the 2011 wildfire dealt a devastating blow by reducing their habitat even more.

Recovery Efforts

You don’t have to look far to see that the loblolly pines are making a comeback at Bastrop State Park. Even though the wildfire damaged over 90% of the park, only 30% was heavily burned. Recovery and management of the ecosystem will be an active and ongoing process for years to come. One tool TPWD is using to help the landscape recover is prescribed fire. Low-intensity prescribed fire will clear out the dead fuel, keep the growth of oak trees in check, and allow a new pine forest to flourish.

The Lost Pines Today

While it will take decades for significant stands of loblolly pines to regrow, you will see exciting changes each time you visit. This living laboratory is regularly visited by students and scientists as they study fire’s effects on birds, mammals and vegetation. You can make your own discoveries by visiting the park and seeing how the landscape changes over time.