

This program runs at 520 am Monday thru Friday

Various days cover topics of Environment, Texas Heritage & History, and Wildlife Conservation.

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Event: Children and Nature Conference

Wednesday, April 1st, 2015

It takes a village to get kids and families outside these days; Jennifer Bristol, coordinator of Texas Children and Nature, is part of the tribe ushering them outdoors.

09— We are a network of organizations around the state of Texas; and we focus on connecting more children and families with the outdoors so they are happier, healthier, and smarter.

Next week, Jennifer tribe and their supporters gather in Bastrop for the **Children in Nature Conference**, to share ideas, successes, and future plans.

08—To really highlight all the issue and all the solutions that surround why it is important for children and families to have access to nature.

The theme of the conference is “Inspiration to Action”.

13— And it centers around our four concentration areas, which is health, education, community and access. So, we have everybody from architects who focus on bringing the outdoors in, to urban planners, to the health community....

In addition, they devote the first day to technology.

17— We know that we can't get away from technology. We used to tell people all the time: unplug and get outdoors and things like that. That's still an important message. But, it's also important to say, 'Hey, you know what? What can we do to let them use that smart phone in their hand or tablet in their hand that builds that confidence in the outdoors, too?'

We'll check in with Jennifer after the conference for an update. Texas Children in Nature is co-hosting the conference with Westcave Outdoor Discovery Center and Children & Nature Network.

Parks: Every Kid in a Park

Thursday, April 2nd, 2015

In February 2015 the White House announced a new initiative called **Every Kid in a Park**.

06— It's a very exciting initiative. It is something that really ties in with what we're working so hard with here in Texas.

Jennifer Bristol coordinates the Texas Children and Nature Program at Parks and Wildlife. The new initiative waives national park entrance fees for every child in the fourth grade. Why fourth grade? Jessica says kids are still willing to spend time with mom and dad, and that it's an impressionable time.

25—It is really the time when children connect probably the most with nature. It's called the age, or development time, of joy and wonder of discovery. And it's when kids really make that connection – especially with wildlife. They care about something; they understand that the actions that they take can have an impact either on the environment; it can have an impact on wildlife. And so, they want to care for it, and they start building up those bonds with it.

Texas currently waives state park entrance fees for children 12 and under, and the new White House initiative dovetails nicely with the Texas program.

06— This is just one more way that families can have those barriers reduced to access to the outdoors.

And as we all know: Life's better outside. Discover ways to engage the outdoors when you visit the [Texas Parks and Wildlife website](#).

Conservation: Wild For Texas License Plates

Friday, April 3rd, 2015

Texas Parks and Wildlife recently launched two new conservation license plates to support native wildlife projects in Texas. Janis Johnson says one features a Lucifer hummingbird, while the other a diamondback rattlesnake.

09—And these two critters, if you will, join our horned lizard license plate. And together, we're calling it the "Wild for Texas" collection. Sounds fun, doesn't it?

Janis is a marketing specialist with Parks and Wildlife. Proceeds from the sale of license plates in the Wild for Texas collection support native wildlife projects.

14—Anything from building out habitat and restoration of the Bracken Cave. Taking care of endangered or threatened species. Finding new habitat that's suitable for our horned lizard. We've got some educational programs, [too].

Since its debut in 1999, the horned lizard plate's raised nearly \$ 4-million dollars for native wildlife. Combined with sales from other plates, that number increases to \$7-million dollars for conservation in Texas. Have a driving passion for conservation?

12—Just go to conservationplate.org, and check out all 7 of our conservation license plates. They're only \$30 and you can put one on your vehicle, trailer or motorcycle.

Twenty-two dollars from every sale goes directly toward conservation projects in Texas.

Wildlife | Event: Learning from Owls

Monday, April 6th, 2015

Owls symbolize wisdom – and we can learn much from them when pick their... pellets.

09— *It's more dignified than digging through poo because you'll be [digging through vomit](#).*

Amy Kocurek and I have different ideas about what's dignified, but this interpretive ranger at [Martin Dies Jr. State Park](#), in East TX does know how to keep visitors engaged.

10—*The kids especially, they love it. Little furry, tin foiled wrapped up presents, that they get to unwrap and see what sort of mysterious surprises await inside.*

Wrapped in foil? Yes, because you can order them online.

11— *Most of them are from barn owls that people will collect from in their barns where owls just hack up these pellets; they'll collect them and sanitize them and sell them for teachers, mostly.*

Whether pellets are fresh or sanitized for your protection, those small, furry capsules have secrets to reveal.

33— *Because it contains these almost perfectly preserved pieces of bones and beaks and different things the owl ate, researchers can see what their main food source is in the area that they're living, if that food source is changing seasonally.... But also, if you're doing population studies on small mammals, that will allow you to see how many different types of mammals are being eaten by owls. So, it can give you an all-round general idea of the population of animals in that ecosystem.*

Dissect owl pellets with Amy Kocurek April 11 at Martin Dies Jr. SP; details on the calendar at texasstateparks.org.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

Parks: Hikes with Homeless Dogs

Tuesday, April 7th, 2015

Every Thursday morning at nine, visitors to Davis Mountains State Park in west Texas meet for a guided [hike...with homeless dogs](#).

10— *We usually have more people than dogs. We usually give one dog to a family and then a third*

of the way through the walk we'll stop and then we'll switch the dogs to different people so everybody has a chance.

Ranger, Tara Poloskey, coordinates and guides the hikes with shelter dogs from the Grand Companions Humane Society in Fort Davis (<http://www.grandcompanions.org/>); both hikers and dogs benefit.

17—The visitors need dogs to walk when they leave their dogs at home and they're missing their dogs. And, also, the dogs at the shelter don't get a lot of socialization and maybe they've had some pretty hard histories. They need to get out and get socialized and learn how to walk on leashes to make them more adoptable.

Tara Poloskey says the program is popular with Davis Mountains SP visitors.

14—Everyone is happy to see the dogs; visitors know they're helping the dogs. And, I do talk some about the park while we're walking, so it's a good mix of interpretation and dog walks. And, for the dogs, it's a wonderful way for them to socialize and get used to different people.

Sometimes hikers even adopt the dogs.

05— In fact, today we had two. A total of five, actually, over the course of a year, but today we had two.

Find details about hikes with homeless dogs in the calendar section of the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

Fish | Cook: Cooking Seafood

Wednesday, April 8th, 2015

Rhonda Cummins, coastal marine resource agent for [Texas AgriLife](#) and [Texas Sea Grant](#), unintentionally became the de facto Seafood Cooking maven for her agencies.

04— I've got to admit: I may be the current maven, but I'm not the first.

She says Annette Hagen out of Rockport was Texas Sea Grant's original seafood consumer educator.

11—And she created thousands of [seafood] recipes and we still pass them out today, They're legendary.

But when Annette retired, they never refilled her position. So, years later, when Rhonda came along with an idea to help promote Texas fishermen by hosting seafood cooking demos, the baton was passed.

09— Now more than ever, we need to educate the consumer on their food choices. Not just know your farmer—it needs to be know our fishermen.

Rhonda teams up with colleagues from Texas Parks and Wildlife, Texas Sea Grant, and members of the community to demo seafood cookery.

22— Because a lot of people are intimidated [by] seafood. They have this impression that it's hard to cook. Some people view it as a little pricey; they think it's only for special occasions; I don't want to mess it up... But if you can master just a couple of quick easy [techniques] in the kitchen, you can cook seafood at home. And it's so much cheaper [than restaurants], so much healthier, and it supports my local fishermen.

Demos are free; we'll tell you more tomorrow. The Sport Fish Restoration supports our series and the work of Sea Center Texas... The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

[Fish | Cook: Learning to Cook Seafood](#)

Thursday, April 9th, 2015

We love seafood, but when it comes to cooking it—most of us leave that to the professionals.

06— Because a lot of people are intimidated [by] seafood. They have this impression that it's hard to cook.

But it's not, says [Rhonda Cummins with Texas AgriLife and Texas Sea Grant](#). Whether you harvest it yourself or pick up fresh fish from a local market, seafood is easier to prepare than you realize.

06— If you can master just a couple of quick easy [techniques] in the kitchen, you can cook seafood at home

The FREE monthly Cooking with Seafood classes [Rhonda](#) coordinates provide attendees the skills they need to prepare fresh seafood at home. Volunteer cooks teach demos, while fisheries biologists and others talk about the resource.

11— Sometimes I have to put the meal on hold because they're still asking questions to the presenter. They're coming to learn. I actually believe that it's become more about interesting topics than about the food.

But there is food. The next FREE Cooking with Seafood class is Monday April 13 at the Calhoun County Fairgrounds outside Port Lavaca, and will include some combination of oysters, crabs, shrimp and fish.

14—The basic concept of the evening is going to be, you've harvested it, or you have bought it in its almost natural state at the fish market—what do you do with it next? So, we want to teach them some basic cleaning techniques and then cooking techniques.

Find out how you can attend at passporttotexas.org (see below).

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series. For Texas Parks and Wildlife...

If you want to attend the April 13, 2015 FREE Cooking with Seafood Demo, RSVP with Rhonda Cummins:

Cooking with Seafood

Free cooking demonstrations and samples using fresh, local seafood.
Calhoun County Fairgrounds, Bauer Exhibit Building
6 p.m.
RSVP to Rhonda Cummins: (361) 552-9747
Email: rcummins@tamu.edu

Gardening with Native Plants

Friday, April 10th, 2015

Everyone loves instant color when planting flowers and shrubs, but plants provide more than just visual appeal.

06—Usually they are producing fruits or nectar, some kind of food source that's desirable.

Botanist, Dana Price, says our choice of plants can affect Texas wildlife that depends on them.

16—A lot of them are host plants for our native butterflies and monarchs; some of them are good hummingbird nectar sources. Many of them have berries that are good for birds. Native trees are hosts for all kinds of insects that are in turn food for our native birds.

Native plants also serve us by providing low-maintenance upkeep, even in the harshest conditions—such as the seemingly ever present heat and drought that afflicts Texas.

07—Our native plants are very well adapted to the climate in Texas, which yes is very extreme a lot of times. We call planting and maintaining native vegetation for wildlife: Wildscaping. The goal: to provide places for birds, small mammals, and other wildlife to feed and drink, and to escape from predators, as well as raise their young.

Find wildscaping information on the [Texas Parks and Wildlife website](#).

TPW Mag: Nature Without Borders

Monday, April 13th, 2015

Men create borders which nature ignores.

07—Down in the Big Bend area there's a heck of a lot of nature and there's a border running right through it and the animals and plants just don't care.

Nature Without Borders is an article by writer Melissa Gaskill for the April issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine. She explores how the US and Mexico coordinate their efforts to preserve our shared flora and fauna.

20—They've actually been collaborating for a really long time in trying to work together. This is really one big ecosystem – the Chihuahuan desert. The way to protect it and effectively manage it, you really have to do that by cooperating on both sides. One side can't be doing half the job and the other side doing a completely different half the job. It just wouldn't work that well.

One of the biggest challenges both sides face is the sheer vastness of the area in question, but that's not all.

20—We're talking about three million acres all told, and that's a lot of ground to cover for anybody. The fact that there's an international border in the middle of it—even when you can cross—it just complicates things. You have two governments; two very different approaches to conservation between the two countries; you have a language issue. And then there are the specific challenges in terms of the types of animals out there.

We'll hear about those tomorrow. The April issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine is available on newsstands and for download on the new Magazine APP. Find download information at tpwmagazine.com.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.

TPW Mag: Sharing Responsibility for Nature

Tuesday, April 14th, 2015

The Chihuahuan desert ecosystem sprawls across Texas and Mexico, making the conservation of its flora and fauna a shared responsibility between the two nations. However, writer Melissa Gaskill says the conservation philosophies of the countries differ.

21—In this country, we form something like Big Bend National Park, and it's just for the recreation and the wildlife, and people don't live there. On the Mexican side, they have more of sort of what we would see as a conservation easement approach. Where an area is protected, but there are still homes and ranches and villages—life goes on—but they behave a little differently toward nature.

Gaskill wrote the article *Nature Without Borders* for the April issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine. Although the US and Mexico share conservation challenges, they also share the successes.

31—One of the successes is black bears. They disappeared on this side back in the 1950s, but given the remoteness of the country on the Mexican side, they remained there, and once they started protecting them actively in Mexico, and we started having all these protected lands on this side that provided good habitat, the bears on their own, crossed the river and repopulated in the Big Bend area. And, they're doing pretty well; they have the potential to spread elsewhere within Texas where there's good habitat.

Learn more about the flora and fauna of this area of Texas when you read Melissa Gaskill's article [**Nature Without Borders**](#) in the April issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

[**Health: Benefits of Time Spent in Nature**](#)

Wednesday, April 15th, 2015

With more than a million acres of public parks and wild spaces in Texas, opportunities to get outside abound, and so do the health benefits of being active outdoors.

Adult men and women should carve out at least 30 minutes a day for some kind of physical activity. For children, that time grows to a full hour. Regular body-moving, heart-pumping movement builds muscle and develops balance and flexibility – among other benefits.

From daytime and guided night hikes, to star gazing, bike and equestrian trails, bird watching, to swimming, rock climbing, paddling, and geocaching – state and local parks offer a chance to get outside no matter your interest or ability. Your imagination is really the only thing standing between you and what you can do outdoors.

Of course, you can always go to the gym to log your 30 minutes of activity a day, but when nature is your fitness center your workouts will all seem like play. Side stepping puddles, leaping up rocks, and traversing up and down hills exercise your balance and stability in addition to the cardiovascular system...not to mention what being in the wide open spaces breathing fresh air can do for your peace of mind.

The outdoor alternative is also more affordable than the gym, as many state parks offer low-cost admission. So go ahead and get out, because life's better outside. Find a park or scenic trail near you at texasstateparks.org.

[**Davis Mountains Mile High Chili Cook-off**](#)

Thursday, April 16th, 2015

The First Annual Mile High Chili Cook-off is a new, CASI sanctioned, competition to take place April 25 at [**Davis Mountains State Park**](#). CASI stands for Chili Appreciation Society International.

13— We are very excited about this. And these are people who have been competing in chili cook-offs throughout the year and they're trying to get points to then go to the international chili cook-off in Terlingua, in November.

Tara Poloskey is an interpretive ranger at the park.

09—They're very competitive; it's pretty serious for some of these chefs. And, CASI does most of the work, but we provide the judges.

Want to put your bowl of red up against serious competitors? Then register quickly. Find information at passporttotexas.org; and if you're going to be camping at the park anyway...

18— We're allowing visitors to the park to pay four dollars, and with their four dollars that goes to the friend's group, they get a cup, a napkin, a bottle of water, and they can go around to all of the different kitchens and try the chili once the chefs have submitted them to the judges.

Davis Mountains SP is giving away prizes to competitors.

11— Gift certificates to the Indian Lodge for hotel rooms overnight. We have gift certificates for camping at Davis Mountains State Park; we have a camp stove that was donated from our local true value.

Find details about the First Annual Mile High Chili Cook-off at Davis Mountains SP at passporttotexas.org.

TPW TV: Whoopers

Friday, April 17th, 2015

The endangered Whooping Crane, one of the rarest birds in North America, makes its home at the [**Aransas National Wildlife Refuge**](#) along the shallow bays of the Texas Gulf.

10— This is a species that almost went extinct. I mean, it was almost gone forever from the face of the earth.

Dr. Felipe Chavez-Ramirez is Director of Conservation Programs at the [**Gulf Coast Bird Observatory**](#). The species has been making a slow comeback from 16 birds in 1941 to 300 today. Watch Dr. Chavez-Ramirez and his colleagues trap adult Whoopers and fit them with GPS tracking devices during a segment of the PBS Texas Parks and Wildlife TV Series. Wade Harrell, with the [**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**](#), is also on the show.

11—We're going to learn a lot in terms of new places that they use that we didn't know about before. So, I think there's going to be a real paradigm shift in how we manage and conserve whooping cranes going forward.

It's no easy task trapping these big birds, yet, once fit with trackers, team members, like Veterinarian Barry Hartup, believe the data returned to them will be eye-opening.

14— What we're doing with capturing adult birds on the Aransas Refuge has never been done before. So, we're learning a lot about these birds in terms of their movements, their survival, their overall health – what we can do to further their protection and conservation into the future.

Watch the segment on Whooping Cranes on the [**PBS Texas Parks and Wildlife TV**](#) series next week. Check your local listings.

The [Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program](#) supports our series and funds diverse conservation projects in Texas.

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[Wildlife: Return of the Bats](#)

Monday, April 20th, 2015

Millions of Mexican Free-tailed bats are returning to Texas where they will bear their young and eat tons of pesky insects. And that makes farmers happy.

05—The Mexican free-tailed bat in particular is really valuable for agricultural purposes.

Meg Goodman is a bat biologist.

13—Current research has shown that these bats can save farmers up to two sprays of pesticides per year because of all the insect pests that they're eating. They're eating things like the corn earworm moth and the cotton boll worm moth, among other crop pest species.

In addition to eating their weight in insects pests each evening, their nightly flights from inside caves and under bridges has become tourist attractions statewide.

14—Just their numbers and nightly emergences bring in a lot of tourist dollars to a lot of small communities and big communities like Austin. It's one of our top tourist destinations right here in Austin. But they do provide a lot of dollars through nature tourism through a lot of our smaller communities throughout the state.

Bridges, like the Ann Richards Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, boasts more than 1.5 million visiting Mexican free-tailed. And tomorrow we meet a man who builds bridges with bats in mind.

07—I would say that the type of bridges we build that would accommodate bats, we probably build about 30 of those statewide every year.

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Wildlife: Bats and Bridges

Tuesday, April 21st, 2015

When it comes to living arrangements, bats are adaptable. In Texas, for example, millions of Mexican free-tailed bats live comfortably in crevices under bridges.

06—We know from our studies of bats that there's a very high percentage, especially in Central Texas that, if you build it they will come.

Mark Blossock, retired from the Texas Department of Transportation as a special projects engineer with the bridge division, and earned the moniker “Batman of TxDOT” due to his passion for the mammals. He said to accommodate bats’ needs he had to “listen” to them.

18—Bats can't speak to us in English, so they can't tell us whether this housing that they find in the made environment – or let's say the man-made environment – is preferred housing or whether it's desperation housing. But when they go in there to raise their young in these nursery colonies, we think that it must be preferred housing.

It generally costs the same to construct bat friendly bridges, yet when bats colonize under these structures, especially in agricultural areas, everyone profits thanks to their voracious appetite for insect pests.

11—And that means the farmers have to spray less insecticides, or they spray significantly less insecticides. It's good for us because we eat food with less use of insecticides and we eat food that's produced cheaper.

You don't have to build a bridge in your backyard to attract bats. Find information on how to build a bat house on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Web site.

Happy Earth Day!

Wednesday, April 22nd, 2015

On April 22, 1970, 20 million Americans took to the streets, parks, and auditoriums to demonstrate for a healthy, sustainable environment...and thus began the annual celebration of the planet called Earth Day.

2015 marks the 45th Anniversary of Earth Day, and millions of people worldwide are gearing up for it. But a once a year celebration is useless if that's where it ends. So I want to challenge everyone listening, to do something every day to care for Mother Earth.

What kinds of things can you do? Perhaps plant native plants that use less water and provide food and shelter for wildlife. That's my plan. Or take a ceramic coffee mug to the office instead of using disposable cups. Perhaps when you're out fishing you could properly dispose of monofilament fishing line so it doesn't harm aquatic life.

In addition, when camping, leave your campsite in better shape than you found it. Or, your stewardship goal might be to spend time with your family outdoors instead of inside with the television—because you're no good to nature with a remote in your hand.

Mix it up, and add new earth friendly activities to your list every month between now and next Earth Day. Challenge your family, friends and neighbors to do the same.

What will you do? Go to passporttotexas.org and let me know in the comments section, and start inspiring others.

Wildlife: The Birds and the Beans

Thursday, April 23rd, 2015

If you're morning ritual includes savoring a cup of coffee, you might want to know what's in your mug, and how it's affecting birds.

04— We're talking about shade grown coffee versus full sun coffee.

Cliff Shackelford is a non-game ornithologist with Parks and Wildlife. Farmers in Mexico, Central and South America who grow coffee in full sun replace migratory bird habitat with coffee shrubs, but not so when its shade grown.

07—They don't eliminate all the native forest. They take out some of the forest, and plant the coffee within the forest.

Shade grown coffee tastes the same as sun grown, but is better for birds. The remnants of native forest that harbor coffee shrubs attract a variety of overwintering species.

13— This is important for us as Americans because a lot of these birds are backyard birds. If there's a complete change of the vegetation that the birds are keying in on, then they are going to have to keep moving.

And that could affect what we end up seeing in our backyards in spring and summer. You can help migratory birds by drinking shade grown coffee.

06—We're also calling it bird friendly coffee. And, even if you drink [bird friendly coffee] part of the time, it's better than none of the time.

Look for the bird friendly seal of approval on bags of coffee, or ask your barista if your hot beverage is made in the shade.

[Great Texas Birding Classic Underway](#)

Friday, April 24th, 2015

Any novice or seasoned birder worth their field guide comes to Texas for the Great Texas Birding Classic – a statewide bird watching tournament, April 15 to May 15.

08— It isn't all about winning, it really is about fun. And I'm really happy to see that people are finally realizing this isn't just for hardcore birders.

Shelly Plante oversees Nature Tourism for Texas Parks and Wildlife. Don't be surprised if during the tournament you see out of town birders roaming your communities.

*38—We do see some traveling. We have a statewide weeklong tournament and there's a statewide big day tournament. So, you can do 24 –hours and go wherever you want – from the Hill Country to the coast; you aren't bounded by regional territory like you are in some of the other big day competitions. The statewide weeklong is six days of birding anywhere in the entire state. And so, we have a lot of teams doing that. Even though it's a huge commitment, it's a lot of fun. A lot of them go from west Texas, all the way down to south Texas, all the way to the upper Texas coast to the Pineywoods. So, they're seeing 350 or more birds in a week; and, you can't do that in a lot of states.
So, Texas is unique.*

Winning teams choose where to direct funds for habitat conservation. Check out what the birders are seeing this year at birdingclassic.org

[Springtime is Watch out for Snakes Time](#)

Monday, April 27th, 2015

Now that spring is here, you know you'll be spending more time outdoors. And, when you do, my advice: watch your step...literally.

07—Probably most people who spend any amount of time hiking in Texas have been within arm's reach of a diamondback and never knew it.

Andy Gluesenkamp is a herpetologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife. Don't let what he just said about the big, scary venomous Western Diamondback Rattlesnake — the deadliest snake in North America — keep you locked up indoors.

07—Diamondbacks would by and large much prefer to avoid contact than get in some sort of fisticuffs with a large animal like a human.

These snakes play defense. They usually hang out in the vicinity of fallen logs, brush piles, and rocks. If they think you don't see them, they'll lie perfectly still and let you proceed on your merry way. They don't court trouble. However...

14—If they feel threatened by you, the first thing that they'll do is buzz that rattle. On rare occasions when somebody reaches their hands into a crevice, or is picking up firewood and grabs a snake or steps on a snake—then they're going to react violently. And that's when people tend to get bitten.

You know what you have to do. Find more information about snakes on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Website.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series and works to restore native habitat in Texas.

[Attracting Hummingbirds](#)

Tuesday, April 28th, 2015

If you've never seen a hummingbird in your part of Texas, it's not because they aren't around.

10—There's not a county in Texas that can't see at least two species of hummingbird. In fact, there's not a state in the United States—with the exception of Hawaii—that cannot expect to find at least two hummingbirds.

Okay, maybe that is not a lot of hummers, but they are out there. Mark Klym coordinates the [Texas Hummingbird Roundup](#) for Texas Parks and Wildlife. He says Texas has 18 species of hummingbirds, and one region boasts the most.

07—Certainly the greatest variety would be in the Davis Mountains area. The Davis Mountains and the Chisos Mountains—out in West Texas.

If you want to attract hummingbirds passing through the area, you could put up feeders, but Klym says there is a better way.

14—That feeder, even in a good garden, is nothing more than a fast food stop. You want to provide plants that these birds can go to for nectar. But also, you want to provide plants that will attract insects, because these birds are heavy insect eaters.

If you do put up a feeder, the nectar recipe is as follows: one part regular table sugar to four parts tap water. Use very warm water (not hot) right out of the tap. Stir briskly to dissolve the sugar and you're done. Let it cool before setting out a feeder. Change the mixture every four days and never use food coloring.

[Texas Hummingbird Roundup](#)

Wednesday, April 29th, 2015

Until recently, I did not know hummingbirds ate insects.

11—Well, if you think about it, an animal that's swinging it's arms at 72 times a second, needs something to rebuild those muscles that it's exercising in there. And, without protein, they're not going to build muscle.

So, if you find insects, such as bees, snacking at your hummingbird feeder, Mark Klym says, don't panic.

09—People get all excited when bees get around their hummingbird feeder. And, bees are a great food for hummingbirds. I've watched them take bees out of the air.

Klym coordinates the **[Texas Hummingbird Roundup](#)**, a citizen science project with **[Texas Nature Trackers](#)** where folks like you help biologists take stock of hummers.

24—We ask people to have a look out in the backyard once a week, about fifteen, twenty minutes a week, and give us a count of what birds [hummingbirds] you're seeing out there. How many? What Species? What are they using? And then, if you see anything unusual—you find a nest, you see mating behavior—we ask you to record it and let us know about it.

[Download a survey kit and forms](#) for the Hummingbird Roundup from the Parks and Wildlife website. While you're there, you'll also discover **[gardening tips for attracting hummers](#)** and a species **[identification guide](#)**.

[TPW TV: All in the Family](#)

Thursday, April 30th, 2015

Since 1885, Albert Giles' descendants have preserved the heritage of Texas through stewardship of his Hillingdon Ranch in Comfort. Biologist, Richard Heilbrun, nominated the site for a Lone Star Land Steward Award.

10— Over 97 percent of Texas is privately owned [and] managed, so without private landowners and good stewards like these folks, we don't stand a chance in making strides toward better wildlife habitat.

Four families, all descendants of original owner, Albert Giles, oversee the property: great grandson, Robin Giles.

08—I actually own 4.8 acres but we run from 14 to 18,000 acres; we have to answer to about 50 family members who are the owners.

In addition to running cattle, goats and sheep on the land, they have a fiber business, and do outreach in the community. Cousin, Myrna Langford, a master naturalist, says habitat for wildlife like deer and turkey is always top of mind.

08—It is our job to see that the habitat continues to be conducive to these particular species.

Giles says balance in all things is critical.

16— I think the most unique thing about the way we produce meat and fiber is also an environment for a tremendous amount of wildlife, too. It can coexist. You can make a living producing, and you can preserve the land and the wildlife.

View a segment on the Giles family next week on a segment of the PBS TV Series. Check your Local listings.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program supports our series and works to increase fishing and boating opportunities in Texas.

Texas Big Game Awards

Friday, May 1st, 2015

2015, marks the 24th year of Texas Big Game Awards.

17-Texas Big Game Awards started in 1991 as a partnership between Texas Wildlife Association and Texas Parks and Wildlife, as a means to document the great, big game resources that we have in the state. And also, to celebrate our hunting heritage and recognize young and new hunters.

Justin Dreibelbis is the new Private Lands and Public Hunting Program Director at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. When we spoke, he was the Hunting Heritage Director at the Texas Wildlife Association. Texas hunters sent in their entries, which trained scorers evaluated using criteria specific to each region.

22- And then, we also have unscored categories, which are our youth division and our first harvest division. A youth division entry is any youth hunter who takes a native big game animal in the state. A first harvest division is for a person who take their first native big game animal in the state of Texas-whether they-re eight years old or 80 years old.

The Texas Big Game Awards recognizes large antlers with the understanding that they are a direct result of well-managed habitat, said Dreibelbis. Winners receive their awards at regional banquets. The first is May 16 for regions 5, 6 & 7 in Lufkin. Find additional information at texasbiggameawards.org

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.

Toyota Texas Bass Classic

Monday, May 4th, 2015

Memorial Day Weekend, Lake Fork Reservoir, 65 miles east of Dallas, is the site of the Ninth Annual Toyota Texas Bass Classic.

08-What it is, is a world class fishing tournament for professional anglers. It's also a benefit event for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Dave Terre, chief of fisheries management and research at Parks and Wildlife, says the event showcases the state's quality fisheries, with Lake Fork being among the best bass fisheries in the country.

18- Last year was just incredible. Two anglers caught over a hundred pounds of bass in three days [and] set all sorts of records for numbers and weights of bass caught. So, this year, the bar has been set very high; and hopefully we'll be able to exceed that. But there's one way to find out, and that's to come to the lake and see it for yourself.

Find ticket information and a schedule of activities at toyotatexasbassclassic.com. Money from the event funds outreach programs.

16-In the eight events that we've had so far, we've raised over two million dollars. And those dollars have been plugged directly back into youth fishing outreach. It's brought new kids and their families [and others] into fishing through the Toyota Texas Bass Classic, by helping to fund our programs.

The Toyota Texas Bass Classic on Memorial Day Weekend offers a stellar country music line-up, food and outdoor adventure activities for the family: find ticket information and other details at toyotatexasbassclassic.com.

Toyota Texas Bass Classic Sets the Standard

Tuesday, May 5th, 2015

The Ninth Annual Toyota Texas Bass Classic returns to [Lake Fork](#) Memorial Day Weekend.

07- It's an event that helps showcase some of our great fisheries across the state—Lake Fork being one of the best bass fisheries.

Dave Terre, with Inland Fisheries, says this professional bass tournament raises the bar with regards to the handling of fish.

27- One thing that's really unique about the Toyota Texas bass Classic is that it employs a totally new tournament format. The format, itself, allows for the fish that are caught during the tournament to actually be weighed in the boat and immediately released, rather than coming to the stage and being weighed in front of an

audience, which puts stress on fish. So, this tournament really revolutionized the way tournaments might be held in the future.

Lake Fork is known for its lunkers—largemouth bass that tip the scales at more than 13 pounds. While the pros have yet to catch one during the 8 years of the tournament, Terre says: this might be their lucky year.

15—I've been promising a lunker for a pretty good number of years right now. But you know what? I think this is the year. We've had numerous fish caught over 10 pounds; we've never broken that 13 pound barrier. But I think Lake Fork—it could happen this year. But you need to be there to witness it yourself.

Go to toyotatexasbassclassic.com for ticket information and a schedule of activities for the Toyota Texas Bass Classic Memorial Day Weekend.

Attending the Toyota Texas Bass Classic

Wednesday, May 6th, 2015

The long Memorial Day weekend is the perfect time to gather the family and head to the Toyota Texas Bass Classic at [Lake Fork](#), 65 miles east of Dallas. It's a professional bass fishing tournament....

11— Fishing is just one part of it. It's an awesome time to bring your family and come listen to country and western music. Also a great opportunity to enjoy the outdoor adventures area supported by Texas Parks and Wildlife.

Dave Terre is with Inland Fisheries.

19— Your kids can meet with some of our fisheries biologists; maybe learn how to cast, how to shoot a bow, how to camp. There are lots of hands on activities for kids and families. Is there a cost to go to the event? There is a small cost to the event, but there is no charge for parking. You can get information at the toyotatexasbassclassic.com website.

If you're looking for more of a hands-on opportunity, the event always needs volunteers.

15— You can register to be a volunteer for the tournament, at toyotatexasbassclassic.com. If you would like to work with Texas Parks and Wildlife specifically, indicate that there on the site. And, as a benefit to that, you'll get into the Toyota Texas Bass Classic for free.

The Toyota Texas bass Classic is Memorial Day Weekend at Lake Fork.

May is a Great Month to Picnic at State Parks

Thursday, May 7th, 2015

May is the start of picnicking season in Texas. Angela Shelf Medearis, an author and cook, whose moniker is The Kitchen Diva, offers tips for [a stress-free picnic](#).

62— Well, let me give you Diva Picnic 101. For one – make foods that you could do in advance. If I was doing a picnic, I would have something like a really good roast chicken; just cut the pieces up and pack those in there. I do a Carolina Cole Slaw; you toss it up, throw it in the refrigerator – it gets better day-by-day. So, if you want to do that ahead you could. You don't have to worry about having to do everything that day. That takes all the fun out of the picnic to me if you're trying to do all the food prep, and pack everything, and get everybody to the

park. So, start your picnic a few days ahead. Use a lot of fresh fruits for dessert. The thing about a picnic that I love is you can totally unplug and really focus on the people you should be paying the most attention to. You can get out in nature; we have some beautiful parks. Some beautiful places to go in Texas. And, it gives you a chance to really focus on the most important things: your family, nature, the beauty of life... So, do a little planning ahead, and pick dishes that will be fine hot or cold, and you can't go wrong for a great picnic.

Remember: always pack out what you pack in, and leave your picnic site in better condition than you found it.

Texas' 12 Most Beautiful Birds

Friday, May 8th, 2015

No parent wants to openly admit they have a favorite child, just as ornithologist, Cliff Shackelford, hesitated to reveal his picks for [Texas' 12 most beautiful birds in an article for Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine's May issue](#). He called it a 639 way tie.

07—The 639 is how many birds are documented in Texas; and to me, they all have some beauty in one form or another.

Cliff said his picks were not the “obvious choices.”

22— I kept out—purposefully—birds that most people would agree are super gorgeous and super obvious; things like: Northern Cardinal, Cedar Waxwing, Painted Bunting... You can't be a 'shoe in'. And I think some of these birds are considers a shoe in, but [sigh] too much bling, too much gaudiness, like in a painted bunting—to me—kept it off the list.

In fact, the color of a bird's plumage had less to do with it making the list of beautiful birds than did its behavior.

20— And I pointed that out in the article. Some birds maybe didn't have the jazziest colors, but they excelled in other ways. Like, the Swallow-tailed Kite is a very simple black and white bird, but the Swallow-tailed Kite makes up for it with its graceful flight—very effortlessly soaring against a blue sky—is just, to me, breathtaking and beautiful.

Which birds made Cliff Shackelford's list for most beautiful? Find out in the May issue of TPW magazine. What's on your list of beautiful Texas birds? Tell us at passporttotexas.org.

Aquatic Invasives

Monday, May 11th, 2015

Giant Salvinia...tilapia...zebra mussels... are just three of the many non-native, invasive aquatic species threatening Texas rivers and lakes.

11-As a whole, anytime you get an invasive species into the state—whether it be a new one or one we are currently dealing with—they certainly cause a lot of economic as well as environmental negative impact.

Brian Van Zee is a TPW Inland Fisheries Regional Director.

15- When an invasive species gets introduced into a new system, they typically have very few predators or

natural control mechanisms in place. So, they are able to take over and dominate those systems; that just creates a lot of problems for a lot of our native species.

Giant salvinia quickly creates huge, thick mats of vegetation on lakes, reducing light penetration that results in oxygen depletion; tilapia outcompete native fishes for food, thus threatening their populations; and zebra mussels adhere to municipal water intake pipes, blocking water flow, and costing cities millions of dollars in repairs and maintenance.

05-We have seven lakes in the state that have confirmed zebra mussels in them.

Brian Van Zee returns tomorrow to talk about the latest zebra mussel infestation and how it happened. Learn more about aquatic invasives at www.texasinvasives.org.

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series and works to increase fishing and boating opportunities in Texas.

Zebra Mussels Come to Lake Waco

Tuesday, May 12th, 2015

Non-native zebra mussels pose potential ecological and economic damage wherever there's an infestation. In September 2014, they showed up in [Lake Waco](#).

06-Unfortunately there was a vessel that was launched on Lake Waco last summer; it had come from [Lake Belton](#).

Brian Van Zee, Texas Parks and Wildlife Inland Fisheries Regional Director, says Lake Belton has an established population of zebra mussels; they hitched a ride to Lake Waco on the vessel in question.

15- It was heavily infested with those individuals when they left Lake Belton. They did not inspect it; they did not clean it. So, they launched on Lake Waco and introduced these mussels to the lake.

The zebra mussel larvae are microscopic, which is why it is imperative boaters [clean, drain and dry their vessels](#) when going from one water body to the next.

24-Texas Parks and Wildlife department enacted the law last year requiring boaters—anytime they leave or approach a freshwater lake or river system in the state—their boats have to be dry. And that's all aimed at preventing the spread of these microscopic organisms. So, take those three simple steps of clean, drain, dry; it doesn't take long. It's very simple to do. It's better for your boat in terms of maintenance, anyway; so go ahead and do it.

What Texas Parks and Wildlife, the City of Waco and Army Corps of Engineers is doing to combat zebra mussels in Lake Waco—that's tomorrow. Learn more about zebra mussels at www.texasinvasives.org.

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

Combating Zebra Mussels in Lake Waco

Wednesday, May 13th, 2015

Before zebra mussels appeared in Lake Waco, Texas Parks and Wildlife, the City of Waco and the Army Corps of Engineers worked on ways to prevent an infestation, which involved close monitoring of arriving vessels.

06—They city hired summer interns to conduct boater education and boater surveys and inspections, in an effort to try and prevent the introduction [of zebra mussels] to Lake Waco.

Brian Van Zee, Texas Parks and Wildlife Inland Fisheries Regional Director, says despite their best efforts, in the summer of 2014, a vessel previously in zebra mussel infested Lake Belton evaded their scrutiny and launched in Lake Waco. In September, City of Waco employees found zebra mussels near the boat ramp. And everyone mobilized.

27— [We thought] if we can act quickly, before the water temperature begins cooling down in the fall again, we might be able to get on top of these things. And, we had heard and seen studies where they had used these big, heavy, thick pond liners and covered an area; and you can suffocate them [zebra mussels]. So, we knew that we could get approval from the Corps of Engineers to install those and get that done pretty quickly, So, the City of Waco ordered up the tarps, they hired commercial divers, set the plan, and last fall we put 'em all in place.

Brian Van Zee shares the results of their efforts tomorrow.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series. Get more information about zebra mussels at texasinvasives.org.

Beating Down Zebra Mussels in Lake Waco

Thursday, May 14th, 2015

In September 2014, when City of Waco employees found zebra mussels near a boat ramp in Lake Waco, Texas Parks and Wildlife, the City of Waco, and Texas Army Corps of Engineers moved quickly to stop this non-native aquatic invasive in its tracks.

06-The City of Waco ordered up tarps, they hired commercial divers, set the plan, and last fall we put 'em all in place.

Brian Van Zee, Inland Fisheries Regional Director, says there wasn't time to obtain permits for chemical treatments, so divers and staff positioned the eight thick, rubber tarps on the lake bottom over the infested area to block sunlight and oxygen below.

15- We just recently pulled those tarps from lake Waco, and it was really looking very good; we could tell by the condition of the tarps— underneath them—that we had reached anoxic conditions. You could smell the hydrogen sulfide smell and these black conditions you typically see when you have anoxic conditions.

Although divers found two live zebra mussels on rocks they brought up, Van Zee is optimistic.

14-Maybe we knocked back the number of zebra mussels that were in that area, far enough to where they cannot create a viable, reproducing population. We don't know if that's the case or not. We really won't know probably until this spring or summer, actually; maybe even next fall.

Until then, all partners will continue to monitor the lake and enforce the clean, drain and dry law for all boaters. Learn more on the TPW website.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series. Learn about combating zebra mussels and other aquatic invasives at texasinvasives.org.

[Art in the Parks](#)

Friday, May 15th, 2015

Texas State Parks can inspire artistic pursuits.

07-Our state parks are such amazing places—for lots of reasons—but one of the reasons is how creative they can make us feel.

Chris Holmes is Director of Interpretation for State Parks, and writes about the Arts in the Parks initiative in the May issue of [Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine](#). The idea for the program came to him after a family art activity.

21- We took an art workshop down at one of the strip malls, and we learned how to make a painting with the whole family—and it was so much fun—but the irony was, we were all doing a picture of the forest, but we were in the middle of Austin. And I thought: ‘Wow. Couldn’t we make this workshop be at a state park and let the family look at the outdoors versus being inside?’

The answer was: of course! While making art in parks is not new; the focus has often been painting and drawing.

14- We’ve really expanded it to writing, poetry, songs and dances, and film-making and blogging—and anything that goes under that whole creative artistic umbrella is what we’re encouraging to happen in our parks.

[Find an art program near you](#) in the calendar section of the Texas Parks and Wildlife website. And learn more about the Arts in the Parks initiative in the May issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine.

[New Red Snapper App](#)

Monday, May 18th, 2015

With a 365 day season and four fish daily bag limit, [red snapper](#) is popular among recreational Gulf anglers in TX. Abundant in Texas waters, Parks and Wildlife employs various tools to monitor snapper populations.

05- We have bag seines, gill nets, and creel surveys—where we interview anglers to look at their catch.

Jeremy Leitz is with Coastal Fisheries. Last year the agency rolled out an online reporting tool for anglers to voluntarily share their snapper landing information.

06- However, in the very near future, there will be a free app coming out along with a new site to report your landings on.

That **FREE** app is iSnapper, developed by the [Harte Research Institute](#). Leitz says iSnapper gives Texas Parks and Wildlife another tool to validate the data collected from current monitoring programs.

26- Anglers will be [voluntarily] inputting very basic information: it’s the date of the trip, how many people were on your trip, the number of fish caught, the number of snapper landed. Just very basic pieces of information—it will take just a few seconds to fill out. I’d like to emphasize only one person needs to report per trip. Our hope with this is that it just gives us another piece of information to help monitor that species, to help

gather information on the population levels of fish that are out there. Also, it's a way for anglers to be more involved in the management of the species.

Download the app from isnapper.org.

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

Possum Kingdom Lake After Golden Algae

Tuesday, May 19th, 2015

Possum Kingdom Lake, approximately 75 miles west of Fort Worth, had a golden algae problem.

10-Golden algae is an algae that gives off a toxin to fish and inhibits their uptake of oxygen by eating away at their gills.

Fisheries biologist Robert Mauk, out of Wichita Falls, says they first noticed fish kills from the algae in 2001. When that happened, it was monitor and wait.

*12- There's nothing we really can do but wait it out. Luckily at **Possum Kingdom**, it seems like the intervals between the blooms have been lengthening, and we haven't had a major fish kill since 2010.*

The jury's still out on what causes golden algae blooms to occur. Meanwhile, according to recently completed gill net surveys by the Wichita Falls Texas Parks and Wildlife fisheries office, fish populations in the reservoir have bounced back since 2010.

19- Since it's been five years, we have five-year-old—especially striped bass—out there. There are a lot of them up in the 30-inch range. So, we're starting to see bigger, heavier fish out there. And, for the angler that likes to catch a big, bragging sized trophy—they're out there now.

Check out fishing conditions and reports for Possum Kingdom on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series, and reminds Texans that Saturday, June 6th, is Free Sport Fishing Day.

Boating Safety Memorial Day and Every Day

Wednesday, May 20th, 2015

Over the past couple of years, low lake levels from the drought kept boats and other watercraft in dry dock most of the summer— but thanks to late winter and early spring rains...

02-We have a lot more water now, so the lakes have changed.

That's good news as we approach Memorial Day weekend—the unofficial start of summer boating season. More water means easier, safer navigation of lakes, says Tim Spice, manager of boater education for Parks and Wildlife. **Being savvy about safety** also keeps everyone protected when on the water.

31-We can identify two major factors that you as a boater can affect in how you operate a vessel, and the things that you do in and around the water. One is wear a life jacket. Eighty percent of those people that die from falling in the water would be alive if they had a life jacket on. And then the second thin you can do is to not

drink alcohol. Alcohol affects your judgment, and you can lose your driver's license—your vehicle driver's license—the court can take that away from you if you are found guilty of boating while intoxicated.

On tomorrow's show the rules of the road as they pertain to boating, and what items you need to have on board before setting sail.

07—The rules on the road are all designed based on the type of vessel and the maneuverability of the vessel.

The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series and works increase fishing and boating opportunities in Texas.

How to Remain Safe While Boating

Thursday, May 21st, 2015

If you plan on operating a boat get to know items important to keep on board for [your safety](#).

13-You should have a sound producing device, and you should have a life jacket for person that's on board. If you're boating at night, you should have the proper lights—that are working—and we suggest a first aid kit.

Tim Spice, manager of boater education for Parks and Wildlife, says anyone born on or after September 1, 1993 is required to take boater education.

21-We cover lots of different things, including safety aspects of boating; the different types of vessel you may have; the rules of the road; the required equipment. Again, everyone on board a vessel needs to have a life jacket that's accessible. We define what accessible means by law so that you don't get in trouble when you're on the water and a game warden stops to give you a boating safety check.

In addition, filing a float plan that tells folks on shore where you'll be and when you plan to return will be vital if an emergency occurs while you're on the water. Operating a boat has a different set of rules than driving a vehicle.

10-There's no lines on the road; there's no speed limits, per se. There are different signs and things you have to look out for that are very different than you would in your car.

By taking a [boating safety course](#)—online or in a classroom—you'll learn those rules.

TPW TV: Bear Creek Ranch

Friday, May 22nd, 2015

Just west of Fort Worth, Bear Creek Ranch employs old school grazing practices.

12-What we do here at Bear Creek Ranch is we have a native prairie, and we apply a process of where we take the cattle, and graze them in a way that mimics the way the bison grazed the prairie.

Robert Potts is President of Dixon Water Foundation, which operates the ranch.

06-[MOO] They go where the grass is fresh, they move, and then they don't come back to the place that they are today for a long time.

This type of management has enhanced wildlife on the ranch. And Texas Parks and Wildlife Wildlife Biologist Nathan Rains says, it is one reason why Bear Creek Ranch is a Lone Star Land Steward Award winner.

18-By allowing rest in these pastures and their unique grazing program you get residual grasses and that provides nesting cover and habitat for species like Bobwhite quail and other grassland birds that are declining.

Texas once had 20 million acres of tall grass prairies; because of development and agricultural uses, less than one percent of the original prairie ecosystem remains.

10-In an area like this, on the periphery of the Dallas Fort Worth Metroplex—in an urbanized environment—it's really neat and encouraging to see ranches like this that are dedicated to preserving tall grass prairies.

Learn more about Bear Creek Ranch in a segment next week on the PBS Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series. Check your local listings.

[The “Cure” for Feral Swine](#)

Monday, May 25th, 2015

It's ironic that sodium nitrite, a preservative used in sausage-making, might one day aid in the control of [feral swine](#) in Texas.

11- Sodium nitrite gives cured meat a red color, improves the flavor; we eat it all the time in bacon, ham and any cured meat.

Biologist Donnie Frels works out of the Kerr Wildlife Management Area. Sodium nitrite can reduce the blood's ability to carry oxygen throughout the body. Humans and most mammals have an enzyme which efficiently reverses this process: swine cannot.

10- We are attempting to take advantage of that and exploit that in order to use sodium nitrite as a possible control measure in feral swine.

Exotic feral hogs compete with native wildlife for food and destroy habitat. Researchers are working with professional chemists to stabilize the sodium nitrite so they can successfully place it into a “bait matrix”.

12- Which can then be used in a specific feeder which only hogs can gain access to. That way we ensure that other non-target animals are not exposed to the toxicant bait.

Researchers at the Kerr have been investigating sodium nitrite as possible control for feral swine since 2010 (in a secure 12 acre research facility); while it looks promising, Frels says it may be several more years before an effective toxic bait is available commercially.

The Wildlife Restoration Program supports our series.

[Turkeys in the Cross-Timbers Eco-region](#)

Tuesday, May 26th, 2015

Texas Parks and Wildlife is into the fifth year of a long-term research project in the [Cross Timbers ecoregion](#)—in North central Texas—that explores habitat needs of Rio Grande Turkey.

15-And the reason we're doing that is because a high priority goal of our division, and a very important part of

our wildlife biologist's jobs in the field, is to work with our landowners who want to manage their property for wildlife.

Wildlife biologist, Kevin Mote, says the Rio Grande is the largest upland game bird in Texas.

17- There's a lot of interest from landowners and definitely sportsmen, so it's a high priority species. And not only that, when you manage for habitat that is good for wild turkeys, it is also managing that habitat for a whole suite of other native species.

Data on this bird exist for the SE US and other areas of Texas, but not for the Cross-Timbers region, says Mote.

21- And so, we were extrapolating concepts, theories, and practices developed in other states, if not other parts of Texas. And so, sometimes, the devil is in the details. We wanted to find out exactly how Rio Grande wild turkeys were making a living on the habitat in the cross timbers.

Biologists have been trapping birds and fitting them with GPS collars.

04-We do have to trap them every winter and fit them with transmitters.

Tomorrow: New radio telemetry technology improves data collection.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.

Radio Telemetry and Wild Turkeys

Wednesday, May 27th, 2015

Biologists knew Texas' historical drought of 2011, in tandem with wildfires at Possum Kingdom SP, affected Rio Grande Wild Turkeys. But how?

06—Our biologists didn't have much to draw on as far as experience in handling these situations.

Biologist, Kevin Mote.

08— None of us had ever lived through that; and there was really nothing even in the textbooks or the literature to tell us how to proceed from there.

These events became the impetus for a research project that traps and fits turkeys with state of the art transmitters before releasing them to monitor their movements and determine habitat preferences and needs.

21—We can put out numerous transmitters, and it sends a signal up to a satellite, and it collects an exact fix within six to ten feet accuracy. And we can collect eight to 10, 15 or 20 locations everyday on multiple birds without any human effort [to manually track them].

Prior to that, it took more manpower for less return. From this data, biologists form a snapshot—over time—of the turkey's actual home range.

13—So, we overlay that over soils maps, highway maps, vegetation maps: all the things that we know affect the behavior and the movements of these birds.

Kevin Mote says biologists use this data to improve their ability to assist private landowners who wish to manage for turkeys.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.

Wild Turkeys in the Cross-timbers Eco-region

Thursday, May 28th, 2015

Using state of the art satellite technology, Texas Parks and Wildlife wildlife biologists—in conjunction with researchers from the Institute of Renewable Natural Resources at TX A&M—collect data from radio collared Rio Grande wild turkeys to develop accurate maps and recommendations for landowners who wish to manage for the species.

18- And so, we can see areas that [turkeys] avoid; we can see areas that they like to spend a lot of time. And, then we can actually take those maps and go out in the field and take pictures and take vegetation measurements on the exact spots where these birds were.

Biologist, Kevin Mote, says the technology can determine a bird's position to within a few feet, which is important to know during nesting season.

13- By following that mother hen around while she has those chicks, and collecting information on the habitat that she used during that time frame, helps us better understand what they need to survive.

What they need to survive is healthy habitat, and landowners remain vital to ensuring its vigor. While the data Mote and his team collect helps, he says there is always more to learn.

12-No matter how much we learn, they're still one of God's creatures and we're just not going to know everything there is to know. We know so much, but they're still a wild animal, and they're still just a wonder.

The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.

The Glory of Rat Snakes

Friday, May 29th, 2015

Texas' state herpetologist loves talking about snakes.

03-Today I'd like to talk to you about the Texas rat snake.

See what I mean? Dr. Andy Gluesenkamp wants to help Texans develop an appreciation for this native reptile.

14- The Texas rat snake is the most commonly encountered snake in Texas, and they occupy a wide range of habitats. This snake is harmless; they're completely non-venomous; they don't attack people—in fact they're major rodent predators; hence, the name: rat snake.

Rat snakes bear an uncanny resemblance to rattlesnakes which, as we know, are venomous.

18-[opens with rattling] Probably the best way to tell a rat snake from a venomous snake in Texas is look at the head shape; pit vipers, which includes copperheads, cottonmouths and rattlesnakes, they tend to have a very chunky head with steep sides to the face. Whereas, if you look at the head of a rat snake, the head tends to be more rounded and less angular.

Andy says rat snakes get a bad rap, but they deserve our appreciation.

08- I'd like to point out their primary diet is mice, rats and other rodents. That's a pretty beneficial snake to have around.

See Andy Gluesenkamp and his pal the rat snake next week on a segment of the PBS Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series. Check your local listings.

National Trails Day

Monday, June 1st, 2015

Saturday June 6th is National Trails Day. And as it happens, hiking is a popular activity at Texas State Parks.

05- Our trails really give people an opportunity to experience everything about state parks.

Thomas Wilhelm works with state parks, and says hikers and walkers of all abilities have the unique opportunity to experience nature up close and personal on the trails during National Trails Day, June 6th and every day.

12- We have hikes from beginner level paved hikes all the way to very difficult hikes. So, regardless of your skills or your interests – there's a trail that's perfect for you [in a state park].

This includes equestrian trails and ADA Accessible trails. The trails in Texas State Parks offer hikers opportunities to experience native flora and fauna, as well as solitude, peace and calm. And, for those who like to exercise their brain along with their bodies...

15-There's also opportunities with interpretive hikes that have panels along the way that explain what's happening. So, you're either learning something about nature or about history — or whatever it may be. So it's both a relaxing experience or an enlightening experience.

Celebrate National Trails Day June 6th by finding a trail that's just right for you at texasstateparks.org.

State Park Hiking Events for National Trails Day

Tuesday, June 2nd, 2015

Saturday, June 6th is National Trails Day—a nationwide event organized by the American Hiking Society to create awareness about the variety of trails across the country.

You can go to any park any time and find a trail to explore, but on National Trails Day parks statewide host special guided hiking events. We'll focus on two events out west.

If you are in the El Paso area, the [Wyler Aerial Tramway](#) at Franklin Mountains State Park hosts a 7 a.m., mile-long hike up Ranger Peak with a short Leave No Trace workshop prior getting underway. At the top of Ranger Peak you can enjoy a 7,000 square mile view of three states and two nations. This hike is moderate to strenuous due to the incline.

[Big Bend Ranch State Park](#) offers a round trip 1.5 mile hike that starts at 9 a.m. June 6th and will take in the spectacular panoramic views from the top of the ridge trail. It's a strenuous 2.5 hour hike; they recommend wearing a long sleeved shirt and long pants, and bringing at least 20 ounces of water with you.

In fact, anytime you go hiking, wear sturdy shoes, a hat, and bring plenty of water, a snack, and a walking stick if you like.

For more information about National Trails Day June 6th and to sign-up for these and other guided hikes, visit the [Texas Parks and Wildlife](#) website, or call the parks directly.

National Free Fishing Day June 6th

Wednesday, June 3rd, 2015

Free Fishing Day is a nationwide event where for one day (sometimes even more), participating states waive the need for fishing licenses. Anyone who wishes to cast a line in fresh or saltwater can do so—freely.

This year it is June 6th.

In Texas, every day is Free Fishing Day at state parks that have fishing opportunities. Once you pay the park entrance fee, you and yours can fish to your heart's content—while following bag limits and other regulations.

If you're not currently an angler, but want to give it a try, some parks have [tackle loaner programs](#). Borrow the tackle to use at the park, but bring your own bait. For very little investment, you can sample a sport that gets you outdoors and has the potential of putting food on the table.

On June 6th in East Texas, the [Texas freshwater Fisheries Center](#) offers a day of free fishing, hot dogs, soft drinks and games. In Central Texas, [LBJ State Park](#) offers its free fishing clinic for children and families. At [Eisenhower](#) SP in North Texas and [Galveston Island State Park](#), on the coast, learn to fish and leave with a fishing fun pack and enter a drawing for door prizes.

Log onto the calendar page of the [Texas Parks and Wildlife website for more angling opportunities](#).

We receive support for our program from the Sport Fish restoration Program- reminding you that Saturday June 6 is Free Fishing Day in Texas.

TPW Magazine: Ready, Aim, Catch

Thursday, June 4th, 2015

David Sikes is the longtime outdoors writer for the Corpus Christi Caller Times. You can call him a multimedia journalist, but just don't call him an expert.

02—I reject this title.

Even so, he's the go-to guy when people in south Texas have questions about the outdoors- including sight casting-the definition of which, says Sikes, elicits broad interpretation.

12-Even a flipping bait fish, or surface bait fish, or a swirl in the water-any of those things that give you an indication through sight that there might be a predator fish down there-is, to me, sight casting.

David Sikes writes about sight casting for redfish in the June issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine.

12-A redfish looks pretty contrasting against a seagrass bed. It does take some adjustment; you have to have a really good pair of polarized lenses-you have to have decent eyesight. You have to have a "practiced" eye.

Sikes' first sight casting attempts were not fruitful.

19- When I first started doing this, I had guides who had been doing it for years who would say: "He's right there, David. It's right...." And I'm saying: tell me how many feet away it is. After a while, you learn what to look for. It's a lot easier to do now than it was before. I may not get an accurate cast to it, but at least I saw it.

Find David Sikes' article on Sight Casting for Redfish in the June issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine. The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

[Sight Casting](#)

Friday, June 5th, 2015

Fishing isn't the passive activity people make it out to be.

09- You know, people picture this guy sitting on a bucket beside a lake or a river, watching a red and white bobber floating in the water. That is so far from the truth. Heh!

David Sikes is the outdoors writer for the Corpus Christi Caller Times, and says he and his coastal compadres prefer sight casting, which is active angling.

03-And we don't cast until we see a fish, oftentimes.

Due to the skill level required, beginners may not catch fish, but then again, said Sikes, they may.

09-I've introduced several of my friends to sight casting. And during the very first trip, they saw—and caught—the fish that they saw. And, it's pretty cool to watch.

When sight casting from a boat, you need at least two people—one to spot the fish and one to catch them. Anglers never sit when sight casting and they use lightweight flies as lures.

15- And I would really recommend that they at least, for the first time, get indoctrinated by going out with an actual, professional guide. I can recommend several down here who are really good. And, it might seem a little pricey at first, but the lessons are very valuable.

David Sikes wrote an article on Sight Casting for Redfish for the June issue of Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine. The Sport Fish Restoration program supports our series.

[Urban Wildlife Biologists](#)

Monday, June 8th, 2015

Wildlife biologists, like Kelly Simon (SEA-mah) specialize in—city critters—and their habitat in Central Texas.

09-I'm a wildlife biologist who happens to work in an urban area; just like all of our biologists, I deal with the issues that are important to their counties and their areas.

Like her rural counterparts, Simon meets with landowners to provide technical guidance regarding land use.

12- I also deal with municipal ordinances, and councils of government, and all the different landowners that have a stake in the wildlife and wildlife habitat for their urbanized area.

Outreach and public meetings round out her work.

05- [I] just try to help folks understand, and enhance the wildlife habitat that they have all around them.

This doesn't mean developing downtown habitat suitable for mountain lions, but it does mean creating a balanced wildlife habitat for appropriate species.

18-So, what I do is I try to help people make decisions that will increase the diversity and balance of wildlife habitat, so that we have things like chickadees and titmice and owls and frogs and toads and lizards—and things that are important for ecological balance and biodiversity—and also appropriate for an urbanized area.

Find [your county's wildlife biologist](#) when you log onto the Texas Parks and Wildlife website. The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.

Funding Conservation in Texas

Tuesday, June 9th, 2015

The turn of the 20th century saw the US population begin its migration from farms and ranches into cities.

05- We've got almost all the people living in cities [now], and very few people living on the land.

Urban Wildlife biologist, Kelly Simon (SEA-mah) says an unintended consequence of the migration was estrangement from the natural world.

Hunters who maintained a close connection with the land witnessed the outcome of unregulated hunting and lack of habitat conservation first hand. At their urging, Congress enacted the [Pittman-Robertson Act of 1937](#), creating a funding stream for conservation.

07- Through the purchase of hunting license fees and hunting equipment—these things help to fund conservation in the state of Texas.

It's a new century, and we're in need of fresh ideas to fund conservation in the 21st Century and beyond. Kelly Simon invites you to take part in the conversation.

12-You can go online, and find Teaming with Wildlife—True to Texas. Texans can get together, just as we did earlier in the last century; we can decide for ourselves in this century how we want to pay for conservation.

The Wildlife Restoration Program supports our series.

TPW TV: Chicken Land

Wednesday, June 10th, 2015

The Lesser Prairie Chicken has declined in Texas. Wildlife biologist Jeff Bonner says the reason: its historic range has dwindled to almost nothing.

07-Here in Donley County they're pretty sparse. And, that's pretty much relative to the quality of the habitat that they have.

Landowners play a crucial role in the restoration of prairie chicken habitat, and hopefully saving the bird; Amarillo Cattleman and landowner, Jay O'Brien.

18- I don't think you'll find a cattleman who's not very interested in the overall ecology of his ranch. That includes wildlife and improving wildlife habitat on his ranch as long as they see that nobody's going to be dictating exactly how they should do their business.

Landowners may request and receive technical guidance from biologists like Gene Miller, about managing their property for a variety of wildlife.

12-The Hallmark of what we do is providing free, confidential, nonbinding assistance to private landowners. We go where we're called, and we offer any level of assistance we're asked to provide.

The future of the Lesser Prairie Chicken is in the hands of private landowners willing to create habitat to keep this iconic species on the landscape for generations to come.

View a segment called Chicken Land, about prairie chicken conservation, on the PBS Texas Parks and Wildlife TV Series the week of June 14. The Wildlife Restoration program supports our series.

Conservation Hero: Bessie Cornelius

Thursday, June 11th, 2015.

When she was alive, **Bessie Cornelius was an avid birder** and staunch conservationist. During an interview with Ms. Cornelius in 1999, she recalled a time when the endangered Brown Pelican was an abundant species along the Gulf Coast.

41-When we first came in fifty-six, you could see the pelicans all lined up on the pilings, right there at the ferry. You could just go anyplace and see them. There were a lot of brown pelicans. They were using DDT then, and before that was banned, brown pelicans began to disappear. And the reason for that, they learned later, was that DDT eventually ran off from the farms into the streams, and streams into the gulf. And the shells of their eggs were very thin and the birds would be killed, you know, before they could hatch.

Cooperation between individuals like Ms. Cornelius, conservation organizations, and government, led to protections being enacted for the Brown Pelican.

During her lifetime Ms. Cornelius helped preserve important bird sanctuaries in the state.

Find more Conservation Heroes at **texaslegacy.org**.

Building a Campfire

Friday, June 12th, 2015

Campfires at state parks enliven your overnight camping experience. Yet, Terry Erwin says before building a blaze—ensure the site is suited for the purpose.

19-When you want to build a fire you certainly have to find a location to build it. You want the ground or the level where you're going to build the fire to be dry. You clear the leaves away and if possible, gather some rocks to make a fire ring that will contain that fire.

Erwin is an avid outdoorsman and former Hunter Education Coordinator for Parks and Wildlife. Unless authorized by the park manager, he says you may not collect firewood at the park. Therefore, campers must pack in what they need.

23-Start with a bird's nest of material so if you put your spark in there, gather some cedar bowls or cedar bark and when you spark it, you can blow on the spark and that will enhance the fire. Start with little sticks and graduate to bigger sticks until you add twigs, grass and bark shavings and things like that on the fire to get it started. Then you can add the larger sticks and get it going at that point.

Extinguish your campfire by drenching it with water, and repeat this step until all embers are dead. Alternatively, cover the embers with a thick layer of soil.

Texas Vultures

Monday, June 15th, 2015

Some people call them buzzards, but Cliff Shackelford says the correct ornithological name for the large black birds that dine on road kill is: vulture.

03-We have the turkey vulture and the black vulture.

Shackelford is a non-game ornithologist with Texas Parks and Wildlife.

11- And the best way to tell them apart when they're perched and sitting on that dead deer carcass on the roadside, is: look at the color of the head on the adults. The black vulture has a gray head and the turkey vulture, a red head.

Vultures circle high above the land in search of a meal.

21- The turkey vulture uses the sense of smell, and they'll smell their prey. The black vulture, though, uses sight, they'll look for prey, but they'll also cheat. They'll also look for where the turkey vultures are circling-[and decide] I'm going to bump in line. And with their numbers, usually the black vulture can overcome the turkey vulture and get the first little bites.

Other interesting facts: vultures defecate on their legs to cool off—using evaporative cooling; and, when threatened, they vomit.

15-This is a defensive mechanism. They don't have fangs like a rattlesnake; they don't have claws like a bobcat. So, their best defense is to throw up what's in their stomach that was lying on the road for the last three days. And guess what? You're going to turn away; it's a great defense.

We learn more about this big bird tomorrow.

Vultures: Nature's Clean Up Crew

Tuesday, June 16th, 2015

Vultures get a bad rap: maybe it's because they aren't "pretty birds", or because they eat road kill. Texas Parks and Wildlife non-game Ornithologist, Cliff Shackelford, says they deserve our respect as they are a helpful, interesting species.

15-Vultures have a role to play, what we call “ecosystem services”. These are benefits to us; it’s unfortunate that our cars hit animals, but think about what’s left behind. The vultures are cleaning up all the mess and we have to commend them for that.

How do vultures eat decaying carcasses and not get sick?

08- Vultures don’t get sick because they have certain bacteria and other flora in their guts that help them break down these carcasses.

Although a migratory species, vultures live year-round in Texas. When road kill freezes up north, those vultures travel south.

10- Because of our location, we not only host a lot more vultures in the winter season, we see a lot more passing through in the spring and fall migration.

Vultures are social birds and roost together, preferring tall structures that allow an easy entrance and exit.

09-They like cell phone towers, rocky outcrops and ridges, an old tree that’s standing up really high. They like the tallest roof in the area.

Yet, they nest on the ground under fallen trees, and are excellent parents. Now that you’re better acquainted, we hope you’ll view vultures in a new light.

Outdoors with Dad on Father’s Day

Wednesday, June 17th, 2015

Spend time with Dad outdoors this Father’s Day, June 21.

03-You never know what’s going to happen outside; it’s the wide open spaces.

Ernie Gammage is former Outreach and Education Director for Parks and Wildlife.

10-One of the things that I remember from my childhood is having the opportunity to fish with my dad. And it’s just such a quiet, special time. I mean, I can still visually see everything that we did back then.

Sharing the outdoors with dad on his special day will make lifelong memories.

08-A lot of the distractions of the work-day world, family obligations, and so forth are put aside and it’s just you and somebody that you love, somebody that you respect.

As we like to say: Life’s Better Outside.

12-I think spending time outdoors with your son or your daughter, or whoever it is, is an opportunity, especially for fathers that already spend time in the outdoors, to pass on some of the things they love and value to their kids.

That's our show, which I dedicate to the memory of my father who during summers when mom worked weeknights, cobbled together picnic meals from leftovers, then loaded his 7 rambunctious kids and a couple of bikes into a station wagon—that had seen better days—and took us to the nearby forest preserve for al fresco dining and exploration. Thanks, Dad.

Is Nature Deficit Disorder a Real Thing?

Thursday, June 18th, 2015

When journalist, Richard Louv, coined the phrase, Nature Deficit Disorder in his book Last Child in the Woods, he intended it to be “tongue-in-cheek. But it struck a nerve.

04-It has entered the language since then. Actually, several languages.

Louv was the keynote speaker at the annual Children in Nature Conference in April.

21- To show you what I know about marketing, I argued with the publisher on whether that should be in the subtitle. But as I thought about it, I thought we're not going to have a big conversation about this issue without that kind of approach. So, it's not a known medical diagnosis; maybe it should be. It is, though, a metaphor for what we've known was going on for a long time.

What was going on for a long time was estrangement of youth from the natural world.

10-The activities that kids considered important—nature was sliding on that scale very quickly, and that started about 30-35 years ago. At an accelerating pace.

Since Last Child in the Woods publication in 2005, the Children in Nature movement has grown around it.

19-If children have less and less experience with nature, who will be the future stewards of the earth. Yes, there will always be environmentalists and conservationists, but increasingly—if we're not careful—they will be carrying nature in their briefcases and not in their hearts. And that's a very different relationship, and I don't think it's sustainable.

Prescription for Nature Deficit Disorder

Friday, June 19th, 2015

A generation ago, we noticed the beginning of what would become a decline in children's contact with nature. Since the publication of Richard Louv's book, Last Child in the Woods, in 2005, unlikely partners have joined forces to ensure future generations have a relationship with the outdoors.

13-People who usually don't want to be in the same room will show up—and even get to the same table. Conservatives, liberals, developers, conservationists, pediatricians, educators... Nobody wants to be in that last generation.

Louv coined a phrase to describe this estrangement: Nature Deficit Disorder.

13- Parents felt it. Kids even felt it. Teachers certainly saw it happening. But, we really didn't know what to call it. So Nature Deficit Disorder is a phrase that is familiar enough to be memorable, and people know it when they see it.

Research reveals time spent outdoors makes children and adults happier, healthier and smarter. Nature is good medicine.

25-There are many pediatricians that are beginning to actually prescribe nature or write a recommendation for it. There's a pediatrician, Robert Zarr, in Washington DC, that's organized pediatricians throughout the Nation's Capital, and they've even done a database of the urban parks in DC, so that when the pediatricians write their prescriptions for nature, they can tell that family exactly which park that they can go to. Those kinds of things are happening all over the country.

Find [ways to engage the outdoors on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website](#).

Hidden Damage from Hurricane Ike

Monday, June 22nd, 2015

Few will forget the images from 2008 of the devastation to Galveston Island by Hurricane Ike. Yet, there is Ike caused damage we cannot see.

06- The losses of some of the invaluable habitat associated with Galveston Bay.

Including submerged oyster habitat. Lance Robinson is with coastal fisheries. The hurricane deposited sediment on top of 8-thousand acres of oyster reefs in Galveston Bay. That's nearly half of the consolidated oyster habitat within the system.

24-That is a huge loss of a valuable resource. Not only from the commercial fishing aspect to it, but for the ecosystem services that they provide that a lot of people don't really recognize or really see. Such as: water filtration, providing habitat for other fish and crabs and other organisms that are associated with structures. Sort of like an oasis in a desert.

A single adult oyster filters water at a rate of about 50 gallons a day, improving ecosystem water quality.

10-The waste water treatment plants within Houston filter the same amount of water as a hundred and thirty acres of oyster reef; we lost 8-thousand acres of those reefs.

Restoring the reefs—that's tomorrow.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration project supports our series, and funds diverse conservation projects in Texas.

Restoring Oyster Habitat After Ike

Tuesday, June 23rd, 2015

Texas lost 8-thousand acres of submerged oyster habitat when Hurricane Ike blew into the gulf in 2008. Some reefs will restore naturally; other will receive some help.

24- We are trying to accelerate that that recovery effort by putting some the materials down to allow new oysters to settle on. We also worked closely with the commercial industry and got them involved in pulling their dredges up with bags off of them across some of these reefs that were marginally covered up, and to pull the shell back to the surface to provide that substrate for young oysters to attach to and start growing.

Lance Robinson is with coastal fisheries. Ike pushed saltwater and debris 15-20 miles inland, which decimated

saltmarsh habitat — habitat that's a marine nursery for sport and commercial species. Restoration work is ongoing.

12-And it took several weeks just for heavy equipment to get into the marshes to remove the mountains of debris before we could get in and assess what the other impacts were. And at that point it was just gut-wrenching.

As bad as the damage after Ike, Robinsons says it could have been worse.

13-Both from a human impact and a natural resource impact had the storm tracked a little bit farther to the north. It would have brought the eye farther into the bay, and we would have seen a much more devastating impact.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration project supports our series.

Revisiting Paddlefish in Big Cypress Bayou

Wednesday, June 24th, 2015

Paddlefish, once abundant in the Big Cypress Bayou and Caddo Lake, started disappearing following construction of a dam at Lake of the Pines in the late 1950s.

07- So, basically, it took away the flows that the paddlefish need, and it took away their spawning substrate; eventually paddlefish just went away.

Inland fisheries' **Tim Bister** says in spring 2014 a broad coalition of non-profits, landowners, and government agencies, reintroduced paddlefish into the system. But they first made improvements to benefit the rare species, including development of natural water releases upstream from Lake of the Pines, and gravel bar spawning areas.

14-We stocked 47 paddlefish, a year and a half old, between two and three feet long. And each were implanted with a radio transmitter, with a specific radio frequency that could be identified by a radio receiver.

Researchers tracked the paddlefish to see whether they would swim downstream over the spillway at Caddo Lake, and into Louisiana.

12-[If they did], they wouldn't be able to swim back upstream because of that barrier. So, we wanted to make sure, by tracking these paddlefish, to see if they're going to stay in the system. And after a year, I'm happy to say, that no fish were seen going over the spillway.

The radio transmitter batteries are fading, but the data collected so far is promising. Until the paddlefish reach reproductive maturity, we won't know if we'll see a self-sustaining population in Big Cypress Bayou and Caddo Lake.

The Wildlife and Sport Fish Supports our series.

Improving River Flows for Paddlefish and Beyond

Thursday, June 25th, 2015

The batteries in the radio transmitters used to track 47 paddlefish reintroduced to Caddo Lake more than a year ago are fading.

06—We're still tracking some paddlefish, but we know this is about the time we're not going to be able to track 'em anymore.

Native to Caddo, paddlefish disappeared following construction of a dam upstream at Lake of the Pines in the late 1950s.

Tim Bister, with Inland Fisheries, says early data suggest changes Texas Parks and Wildlife and partners made to simulate natural river flows and spawning habitat, kept the rare fish in the Big Cypress Bayou and Caddo Lake system.

21—Having the opportunity to restore a native fish into the system, is certainly a good idea. But, to tie it into more of these natural river flows, and the idea that not just paddlefish—but many other species—need natural river flows and appropriate spawning habitat, it's going to benefit those things for rivers in Texas.

Bister says while they'll continue monitoring paddlefish, the ongoing work is more expansive.

12— We will always be trying to do something in the Big Cypress Bayou / Caddo Lake system to maintain quality river flow and quality habitat, and to monitor the fish populations.

The Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program supports our series.

TPW TV: Firearm Safety

Friday, June 26th, 2015

Safety must remain top of mind for anyone who keeps firearms in the home, especially in homes with children.

09-It is unlawful to store, transport or abandon an unsecured loaded firearm where children can obtain unsupervised access to the firearm.

Certified hunter education instructor and former TPW TV producer, Lee Smith, reviews the basics of home firearm safety during a segment of the PBS Texas Parks and Wildlife TV series, which airs the week of June 28.

08- Firearms should not be stored alongside ammunition in an unsecured location. A locking gun cabinet or safe is a much better solution.

How one stores firearms, such as hunting rifles, may affect overall operation and safety of the gun.

10- Many people store them [rifles] with the barrels up. Over time, oils can drip down and clog your actions. It's much better to store [rifles] with the barrels pointed down.

Clogged action can cause a misfire, which in turn can send someone to the emergency room. In addition, ammunition should be stored separately from firearms, under lock and key.

Learn about firearm care and handling in a hunter education class. And view the PBS TPW TV segment on firearm safety the week of June 28. Check your local listings.

Lone Star Land Steward: Rancho ZunZun

Monday, June 29th, 2015

Roxanne and Elvis Hernandez live in Bastrop County and turned their 53 acre Rancho ZunZun into a thriving wildlife habitat with enhanced Houston Toad protection.

10-Roxanne and Elvis, they are so passionate about their land stewardship on their property for all wildlife species—not just the Houston Toad.

Their hard work earned them a Lone Star Land Steward Regional award for the Lost Pines ecosystem. Wildlife biologist, Meredith Longoria, provides the couple with technical assistance.

15-They have taken leaps and bounds since they started through the landowner Incentive Program, including: native grass planting, and pine reforestation, and prescribed burning. They've utilized just about every tool they've learned about on their property.

The Lone Star Land Steward awards honor landowners who preserve our natural heritage. The Hernandez's bought their land in 2004, and began restoration work.

25- We planted 35-hundred trees the year right before the drought. Here, this whole area was filled with cedars—you couldn't even walk through here—and we had that removed and cleared, and did the prescribed burn back in 2012. Yeah, you can still see all the burn scars on the trees. For our wildlife management, we provide supplemental shelter, which are the brush piles; we have five nest boxes, which are frequented by bluebirds. We have a bat box.

They said they've seen all wildlife populations on the ranch flourish. Learn more about the Lone Star Land Steward Program on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Website.

Rules About Fireworks in State Parks

Tuesday, June 30th, 2015

The July fourth holiday is upon us, and with it comes a burning desire for making our own big booms. But, when it comes to celebrating our nation's birthday at Texas state parks, feel free to bring the barbeque, the watermelon and the outdoor games—but leave the fireworks at home.

06-It is illegal in Texas state parks—it is a Class C misdemeanor to possess fireworks in a state park.

We're not trying to put a damper on your Independence Day fun, but Wes Masur, state park law enforcement coordinator at Texas Parks and Wildlife, says parks are no place for fireworks. Even sparklers get two thumbs down.

09-Within the state park system we have different types of wildlife and different types of grasses and we don't want to get any type of forest fire started—people are there to enjoy the state parks.

Devastating wildfires have started for much less. While some state parks do offer organized fireworks displays, not everyone appreciates these holiday pyrotechnics even when allowed.

05-Some people don't like fireworks—the noises that go along with that stuff—we just don't allow it in the state parks.

Find out which state parks offer public fireworks displays, on the Texas Parks and Wildlife website.