



Texas Wetland News

and WETLAND CONSERVATION PLAN UPDATE

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TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE

JANUARY 2011

Master Naturalist Program Seeks Applicants

Nineteen chapters of the Texas Master Naturalist program are conducting 2011 spring training classes for volunteers wanting to learn about natural resource and conservation management.

The Texas Master Naturalist program, with 42 chapters located across the state, aims to develop a corps of well-informed citizen volunteers who educate their communities about the management of natural resources. The main qualification needed to become a certified Texas Master Naturalist is an interest in learning and playing an active part in conservation. Volunteers will receive a minimum of 40 hours training from educators and specialists from places such as universities, natural resource agencies, nature centers and museums. Training topics include interpretation and management of natural resources, ecological concepts, ecoregions in Texas and natural systems management. Volunteers are expected to give 40 hours of service a year in community education, demonstration and habitat enhancement projects. They are also expected to pursue a minimum of eight hours of advanced training in areas of personal interest.

(Continued on page 7)

East Texas Black Bear Task Force Develops Habitat Through its Hardwood Habitat Cooperative

Ricky Maxey, TPWD Wildlife Diversity Biologist – District 6
Aron Flanders, TPWD Wildlife Diversity Biologist – District 5

The black bear (*Ursus americanus*) is a state-listed threatened species throughout the state of Texas. The Louisiana black bear (*Ursus americanus luteolus*) is federally listed as threatened throughout its former range in the Lower Mississippi Valley, and is also state-listed threatened throughout its range in eastern Texas.

Conservation efforts to restore black bear in the neighboring states of Arkansas and Louisiana have been successful and resulted in significant growth and expansion of black bear populations within those states, and within nearby Oklahoma. As a result, black bears are beginning to move across these state's borders into the forests of East Texas.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has confirmed 110 black bear sightings in East Texas since 1978, with more than half of those occurring since the year 2000. Figure 1 shows the number of confirmed black bear sightings in

(Continued on page 2)



East Texas Black Bear Task Force, continued

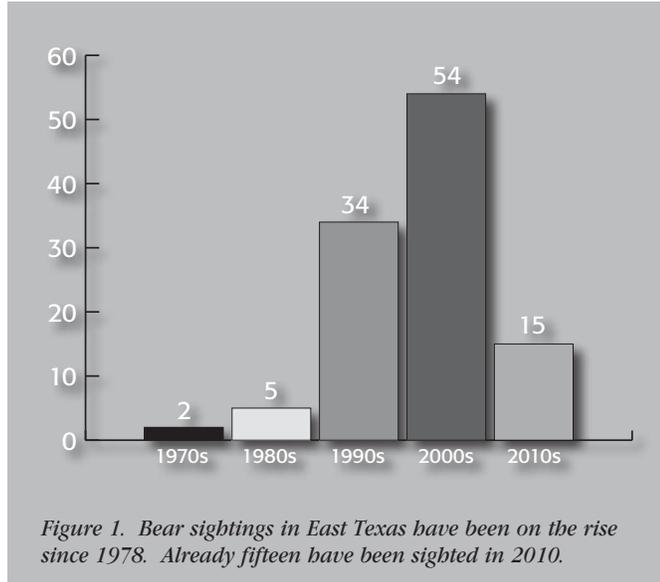


Figure 1. Bear sightings in East Texas have been on the rise since 1978. Already fifteen have been sighted in 2010.

East Texas by decade. Black bear sightings have occurred in 34 East Texas counties, including: Anderson, Angelina, Bowie, Cass, Cherokee, Fannin, Franklin, Grayson, Hardin, Harris, Harrison, Henderson, Hopkins, Jasper, Jefferson, Lamar, Marion, Montgomery, Morris, Nacogdoches, Newton, Orange, Panola, Polk, Red River, Rusk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Smith, Titus, Tyler and Wood.

The majority of sightings have been documented within and adjacent to bottomland hardwood habitats along large river basins and associated tributaries. Additionally, a cluster of sightings have been recorded within the largely forested upland habitats associated with an area in southeast Texas known as Longleaf Ridge.

TPWD and a number of cooperators including state and federal biologists and land managers, corporate forestland biologists and land managers, private landowners, university faculty and staff, non-governmental organizations, citizens, and various other stakeholders have worked together to develop the *East Texas Black Bear Conservation and Management Plan*. When TPWD began to implement this plan in 2005, this diverse group of entities that worked together to develop the plan soon organized as the East Texas Black Bear Task Force (ETBBTF) and became affiliated with the existing Black Bear Conservation Coalition (BBCC). The BBCC has a long history of working for conservation of the Louisiana black bear and its habitat throughout its range. The ETBBTF works with TPWD, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and others to conserve this rare species and its habitat within East Texas.

The Habitat Committee Working Group (work group) of the ETBBTF is focused on identifying areas of existing quality

black bear habitat, establishing conservation priorities for existing habitats, and identifying and implementing cooperative conservation strategies to conserve, enhance and develop quality black bear habitats within East Texas. Figure 2 is a map developed by the work group showing the primary areas to focus efforts for conservation, restoration, and enhancement of black bear habitat in East Texas. The map breaks the focus areas into a North Zone and a South Zone, with additional boundary lines depicting priority areas within these zones. These priority areas contain the largest remaining blocks of largely unbroken black bear habitat, as well as land corridors in need of restoration in order to connect these larger habitat blocks.

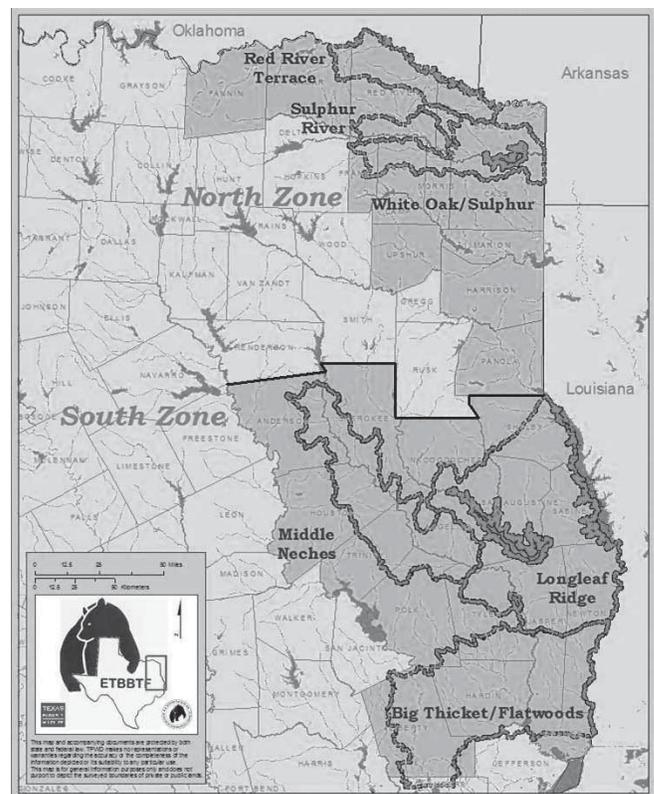


Figure 2. Focus area of the Habitat Committee Working Group, divided into North and South Zones. Within these zones, priority areas for conservation, restoration, and enhancement have been identified and outlined on the map.

With the identification of potential habitat corridors and focus and priority areas completed, the work group is now focused on seeking funding and working with entities within these areas to actually perform “on the ground” conservation work for black bear habitat.

In 2008, the ETBBTF received funding from the USFWS to develop a cooperative effort with the BBCC/ETBBTF, USFWS and TPWD to restore and/or enhance hardwood habitats on private lands in East Texas. This effort is known as the Hardwood Habitat Cooperative (HHC). The HHC is basically

East Texas Black Bear Task Force, continued

a cost-share program between the BBCC and private landowners where the HHC provides up to 75 percent of project costs. The remainder is provided by the landowner. The landowner's match can be monetary, or it can include an equivalent amount of in-kind services or materials.

Projects funded are generally less than \$250.00 per acre in cost. TPWD biologists work with landowners to identify, plan and execute these projects. The HHC provides private landowners with technical and financial assistance to restore and/or enhance hardwood forest habitats. This program is an excellent deal for a landowner with these goals in mind for his/her property.

The HHC's goal is to restore and enhance hard and soft mast producing hardwood habitats in bottomlands, riparian areas, and uplands to benefit the black bear and a myriad of other wildlife species like eastern wild turkeys, neotropical migratory birds and waterfowl that are dependent upon these types of hardwood dominated habitats. Examples of projects funded include: hardwood tree planting, improvement cuts, mechanical and chemical site preparation for hardwood reforestation, invasive plant control, prescribed burning, and fence construction for cattle exclusion from bottomlands and riparian areas.

Landowners enroll into Habitat Agreements with a minimum requirement of 10 years enrollment. While this may seem like a long time, it should not be a problem for a landowner whose goal is to produce hardwood forests, which take a considerably longer time frame for completion. The project site must fall within either the North or South Zone focus area, and projects falling within designated priority areas will generally rank higher for selection.

To date, the HHC has administered the planting of 505 acres of hardwood trees and the enhancement of 1,553 acres of hardwood habitat for a total of 2,058 acres impacted. There are still some tasks remaining on some projects due to interruption by flood events. Projects have been initiated in Bowie,

Franklin, Morris, Newton, Red River and Upshur counties. The majority of these projects have taken place on properties belonging to non-industrial private landowners, but one project has taken place on commercial forestland belonging to the Campbell Group, and another on properties belonging to the Gilmer Independent School District (GISD).

The bulk of the projects are restorations that involve site preparation and reforestation by planting hardwood trees. All of the projects to date have taken place in bottomlands or riparian areas. One project involves prescribed burning of the pine-hardwood terrace adjacent to a bottomland hardwood enhancement area.

The GISD project is taking place on abandoned pastureland adjacent to Little Cypress Bayou across from a 1,000-acre hardwood mitigation bank in Upshur County. This project is part of a land management strategy on the school grounds that combines conservation and education that will teach local and area youth about creative conservation strategies.

The HHC of the ETBBTF and its cooperators is an ideal effort between federal and state agencies, a non-governmental conservation group, and private landowners to conserve, restore and enhance hardwood habitats for black bears and other East Texas plant and animal species in need of conservation. This program is perfect for landowners who want to create hardwood habitats on their properties within and adjacent to areas of existing black bear habitat. These efforts can enhance local wildlife populations, increase property values, and provide opportunities for additional strategies for lands that are of marginal quality for crop, pasture or forest production.

The HHC is looking for landowners who want to take advantage of this opportunity while it is available. For more information you can contact (903) 566-1626, write the ETBBTF at 1910 E SE Loop 323, Box 327, Tyler, TX 75701, or email texasbears@bbcc.org. You can also visit the www.bbcc.org/etbbtf to learn more about the ETBBTF.

*This picture was taken by a game camera in Red River County.
Photo courtesy of Tommy Archer.*



Wetlands Reserve Program Adds Value to Enrolled Acreage

Beverly Moseley – NRCS Public Affairs Specialist

In the East Texas county of Lamar, Darnells have grazed cattle and grown crops for more than 60 years on land that sweeps down from a hilltop to the waters of Pine Creek. Today, through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), a portion of that land now provides the wetland habitat needed for wildlife to thrive.

The Wetlands Reserve Program is one alternative for private landowners who are considering different land uses for traditional agricultural production acres.

"The WRP for what it's intended to be—I think it's a very good project. I know that as time goes by that they're destroying a lot of the wetlands in different places for housing development," said Mike Darnell of Paris.

Darnell knows firsthand the impact urban growth can have. He explained that when water runoff from urban growth was coupled with large amounts of rainfall, more than 150 production acres on his ranch could be underwater.

"It's so wet and as every year went past they built a lot more houses in town and the runoff got worse every year. We came up with the idea of putting it in this WRP," Darnell said.

The wetlands program is administered through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The purpose of the national voluntary program is to restore, protect and enhance wetlands in exchange for private landowners retiring their qualified land from agriculture production.

Wetland functions and value, or benefits, can include improved water quality through filtration of chemicals and sediments, while recharging groundwater or helping reduce flooding. These lands also can protect wildlife habitats, improve aesthetic quality of the land and protect and restore a variety of native plants and flowers.

Under the 2002 Farm Bill, Darnell entered 196 acres into a permanent conservation easement agreement. He has enrolled upwards of 400 acres into the program since that initial application.

There is no minimum acreage requirement to enroll in WRP.

Wetland habitat surrounds Mike Darnell, left, and Steve Smith, a NRCS district conservationist. Darnell of Lamar County initially entered acreage into a permanent conservation easement agreement in the USDA's Wetlands Reserve Program in 2001.



The Wetlands Reserve Program is one alternative for private landowners who are considering different land uses for traditional agricultural production acres.



NRCS personnel such as Steve Smith, a district conservationist in Paris, worked closely with Darnell providing the technical and financial assistance needed to have the wetlands restored and enhanced.

"[Landowners] get a benefit because we as an agency with a permanent easement provide 100 percent of the restoration costs, so the landowner really benefits," Smith said. "What we're doing is we're restoring those wetland functions, we're enhancing the wetland or the hydric soils that are already there so we're actually restoring, enhancing and protecting those wetland functions and values there."

Smith said there are three benefactors to the program: the landowner, the land and the agency.

"I really believe that when you put those factors together, we're doing exactly what the NRCS mission is—helping people help the land," Smith added.

NRCS contracted with Ducks Unlimited to complete a survey of the acreage and to help with the design and layout of the wetland structures. A private contractor built the structures.

Darnell said Ducks Unlimited did a good job of designing the wetlands project.

"Ducks Unlimited has been doing it for many years," he added.

Smith said that NRCS will visit a wetland area once a year after it's completed. The agency also will work to provide technical assistance if a problem arises. Smith views the relationship between the agency and the landowner as a partnership.

PROGRAM BASICS

The program offers three conservation options for enrolled participants.

- A permanent conservation easement which lasts in perpetuity. USDA pays 100 percent of the easement value. The agency also can pay up to 100 percent of restoration costs.
- A 30-year conservation easement. Up to 75 percent of the easement value and restoration costs is paid by the USDA.
- A restoration cost-share agreement. This option does not require an easement on the enrolled property. It's an agreement to restore or enhance wetland functions and values. The

USDA can pay up to 75 percent of the restoration costs. The agreement tends to run 10 years.

Under the 2008 Farm Bill, legislative requirements include payment caps of \$1,200 an acre for enrolled land under an easement option. This is a one-time lump sum payment. If an easement is valued at \$500,000 or more, the total payment or amount due the landowner can be spread out over five years.

Eligible WRP acres are limited to private or tribal lands and easement lands have to be under the same ownership for at least seven years prior to enrollment into the program.

"That's the new requirement in the 2008 Farm Bill that you have to own the land seven years before you can get in the program," Smith said, adding that the ownership requirement used to be 12 months.

There are some use restrictions for enrolled WRP acres.

"You're not allowed to hay it or graze it. You can't run cattle on it or cut timber off the wooded area without some type of compatible use agreement from the agency," Smith said.

Patience and vision are two qualities needed by landowners when entering into a WRP program, Darnell said.

"I would emphasize that it takes a long time and the people need to have some patience," he said.

He said that landowners need to have a clear vision about how the property will look through the restoration process. For example, how the land looks when it is initially cleared for wetland restoration and enhancement to the following regrowth of plants and brush.

Landowners also need to be able to envision the land's visual qualities when planted seedlings of trees become large enough to create canopies which can shade out brush, Darnell said.

LAND USE

Many landowners that take part in WRP share common interests such as hunting or an appreciation of wildlife and habitat conservation.

"I have seen some waterfowl that I haven't seen before such as tree ducks.

I've seen several different species of ducks that you won't see on the creek. We hunted ducks on the creek since I was a kid and you'd see Mallards and wood ducks, but down here you'll see gadwalls, pintails, redheads, widgeon—a lot of teal. It's just a lot of different kinds of waterfowl," Darnell said.

The variety of waterfowl available for hunting helped draw Harry Lawson from Red River Parish in Louisiana to Darnell's land. Landowners can still lease out the enrolled acreage for hunting for extra income.

"I like the location and I like to duck hunt," said Lawson, who runs a commercial cow-calf operation.

When Lawson, an avid duck hunter, was in the position in 2008 to invest in more land, he started looking at WRP acreage. He looked at WRP land in Mississippi that had been enrolled for years and had grown trees on it. This was opposite of Darnell's land which had a more raw, newly restored look.

Lawson said that by seeing the WRP land in Mississippi, he was able to envision how Darnell's land would look years down the road. That same year, Darnell sold his WRP enrolled acreage to Lawson, along with the mineral rights.

Everybody seems to have benefitted from the sale. Darnell continues to look after the WRP land that lays below the hill where his house sits and where he has hunted since he was a child.

Lawson now has wetlands reasonably close to his home that he can carry his grandchildren to for duck hunting. It provides the environmental, entertainment and recreational value he wants for his family.

"My grandson and I were on the property recently and he shot a limit of ducks. I was real tickled about that," Lawson said. "That was something that we were able to experience together."

For more information on the Wetlands Reserve Program contact your local NRCS office or visit www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp

Texas Forest Service Water Resources Program Continues to Promote BMPs New Guidelines Released

*Hughes Simpson, Program Coordinator,
Water Resources – Texas Forest Service*

The Texas Forest Service Water Resources program was established over 20 years ago to develop, promote, and monitor the implementation of environmental practices, or Best Management Practices (BMPs), during silvicultural operations in an effort to prevent nonpoint source pollution. These practices were first developed in 1989 and included guidance for protecting water quality during all phases of forest management. In 1995, BMPs specifically addressing forested wetlands were published to protect these environmentally sensitive areas.

Over the years, these guidelines have been revised to account for new research, technology, and operational methods. The most recent revision, August 2010, included additional information regarding wetland protection. Federal regulations for mechanical site preparation for pine establishment in forested wetlands were included in the manual, along with indicators of established and ongoing forest operations, a critical component of complying with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act.

The indicators included in the manual came from a Southern Group of State Foresters' publication that provided guidance to regulatory agencies when determining if certain land operations

are indeed "ongoing silviculture" or actually a change in land use.

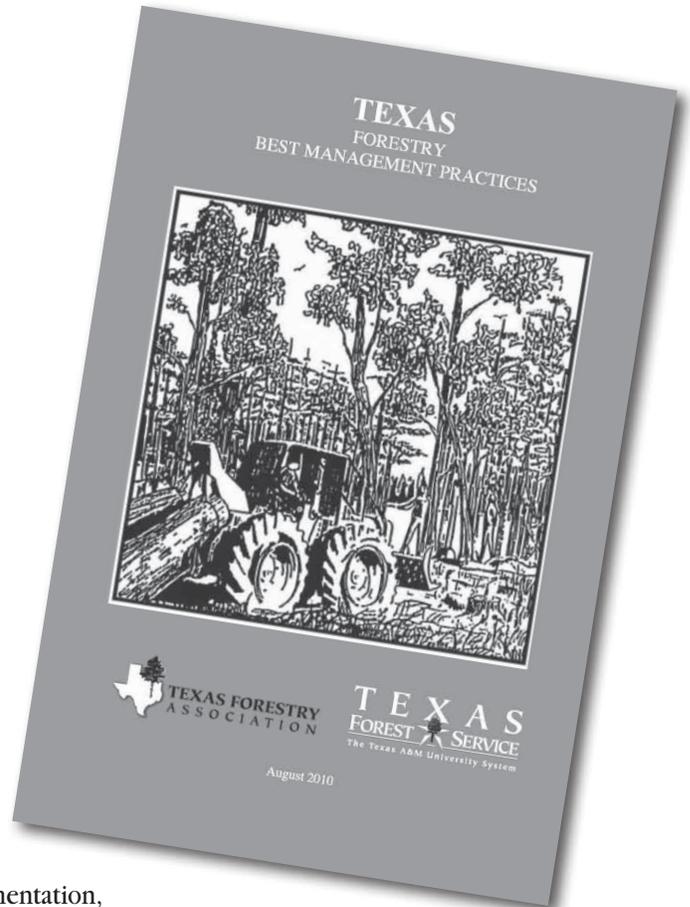
In an effort to promote BMP implementation, Texas Forest Service began conducting formal training for the forest sector in 1995. Since then, over 3,000 individuals have participated in training workshops. These workshops deliver technical information on BMP implementation as well as wetland identification and regulations.

The success of this program is primarily measured through BMP implementation monitoring, a statistically sound, objective method in which personnel evaluate the degree at which BMPs are implemented on forest operations. Monitoring results provide a clear assessment of the effectiveness of the education, technical assistance, and outreach efforts of this program, as well as identify areas that the program needs to target for improvement. Currently, overall BMP implementation is 91.5 percent, representing a 20 percent increase since the monitoring program began in the early 1990s. BMP implementation in wetlands has remained consistently high since 2000, the year these practices were first

evaluated, and is currently at 100 percent.

Partnerships are critical to ensuring continued program success. The Texas Wetland/BMP Coordinating Committee was formed in 1993 to share information and plan efforts and actions that relate to wetlands, water quality, and Texas forests. Committee members represent various state and federal agencies, academia, non-profit organizations and industries in Texas, and meet annually. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for spring 2011.

If you would like to participate in this committee, partner with the Texas Forest Service on future water resource projects, or have any questions, please contact Hughes Simpson, Program Coordinator, at (936) 639-8180 or hsimpson@tfs.tamu.edu. More information on the program and an electronic copy of the most recent guidelines can be found at <http://texasforestservicetamu.edu/bmp>.



Master Naturalist Program Seeks Applicants

Texas Master Naturalist chapters offering volunteer training this spring are listed with contact information. Enrollment is limited in most chapters. Some registration deadlines are fast approaching so contact a chapter near you to see if seating is still available.

ANGLETON—Cradle of Texas Chapter. Training is being planned for a February starting date. Enrollment is open now. Specific information is available from ljb823@comcast.net or call (979) 265-3813.

BASTROP—Lost Pines Chapter. Training begins January 31 and registration is due by January 28. Additional information available at (512) 589-3438 or pboudreaux@eccwireless.com

BRENHAM—Gideon Lincecum Chapter. Classes begin January 29 at the Winedale Historical Center. Registration deadline is January 24 with a class limit of 25 students. For details call (713) 254-6525 or marykelleyjones@hotmail.com

CLARKSVILLE—Red River Chapter. Plans are being made to conduct a class in early 2011. Contact greenwood@1starnet.com or call (903) 966-2722 for more information.

CONROE—Heartwood Chapter. Classes begin March 19 and the registration deadline is March 5. For additional information call (936) 273-2261 (ext 401) or training@heartwoodtmn.org

DALLAS—North Texas Chapter. Registration deadline is January 21. Classes begin February 15. Call (214) 343-0720 or education@ntmn.org for more information.

EL PASO—Trans-Pecos Chapter. Classes start on February 9 and registration is needed by January 31. Contact (575) 644-7478 or decasillas@utep.edu for details.

GEORGETOWN—Good Water Chapter. Training begins March 8 and the registration deadline is set for February 25. More information is available from mgardener@suddenlink.net or call (512) 869-8016.

HOUSTON—Gulf Coast Chapter. Classes begin February 7 and registration is needed no later than January 15. Call (713) 721-7773 or pgcook@gmail.com for specific information.

JEFFERSON—Cypress Basin Chapter. Training begins February 18, 2011 and applications are due January 21. Details are available by calling (903) 777-4664 or bgmorgan46@yahoo.com

LIVINGSTON—Piney Wood Lakes Chapter. Classes begin January 18 and your registration is needed no later than January 6. For details call (281) 216-7495 or skmoran@suddenlink.net

MCKINNEY—Blackland Prairie Chapter. The first class is set for February 9 and applications due by January 25. Call (972) 248-6283 or svevans@sbcglobal.net for information.

SAN ANTONIO—Alamo Area Chapter. Registration will close in early February for the class that begins February 24. Become a member of the state's original chapter by contacting pball@satx.rr.com or call (210) 764-1921.

SAN BENITO—Rio Grande Valley Chapter. Class begins on January 12 and your registration is needed no later than January 5. Call (817) 913-1811 or (956) 532-9789 or rgvctmheduchair@gmail.com for more information.

TEMPLE—Central Texas Chapter. Your registration is needed by February 15 to be included in the class that starts on March 29. Contact trascocoe@hot.rr.com or call (254) 913-1013.

WACO—Heart of Texas Chapter. Classes begin on January 13 and registration is open now. Details are available by contacting meganmi@ci.waco.tx.us or call (254) 751-8538.

WAXAHACHIE—Indian Trail Chapter. Join this chapter that plans to start a class on March 19. Your registration is due by February 15. For details contact egtxranch@msn.com or call (214) 422-5575.

WICHITA FALLS—Rolling Plains Chapter. Class begins on March 22 with your application needed no later than March 11. Contact mark.howell@tpwd.state.tx.us or call (940) 766-2383.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas AgriLife Extension co-sponsor the Texas Master Naturalist program. For more information about existing chapters or forming a new chapter, contact Sonny Arnold, Assistant Program Coordinator, 111 Nagle Hall, 2258, TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-2258. Call (979) 458-1099 or email: sarnold@ag.tamu.edu. Complete information about the Texas Master Naturalist program is available at: <http://txmn.org>

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HAVE AN ARTICLE YOU'D LIKE TO SUBMIT?

If you would like to submit an article or announcement concerning wetland-related activities, initiatives, or workshops* for the next *Texas Wetland News*, please email the editor at: ryan.mcgillicuddy@tpwd.state.tx.us

*Please note that the newsletter cannot include announcements of for-fee seminars or workshops for which Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is not a sponsor.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department conservation staff is responsible for soliciting and editing articles in this newsletter. Inclusion of an article in this newsletter does not imply TPWD's endorsement of a particular project or individual management method. Wetland management methods used depend on the specific goals of the project.



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