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Texas State Parks Centennial Projects Provide Enhanced Accessibility

Thanks to park lovers from all over the Lone Star State, Texas State Parks now have many new offerings for visitors. In honor of the centennial anniversary of Texas State Parks in 2023, Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF) raised almost \$2 million in private funds to enhance the visitor experience at every state park across Texas. Most of these projects are now in place for visitor use, with several other projects still to come.

“Thanks to private donations from individuals, foundations and corporations across Texas, we have expanded the amenities of our parks while helping to conserve the wild places we all treasure,” said TPWF Executive Director Anne Brown. “Half of the projects have made our parks more accessible to all visitors, and we hope these improvements will be enjoyed by visitors for many years to come.”

The projects were identified by park staff across the state, and many provide additional accessibility options for visitors with disabilities, including all-terrain wheelchairs, wheelchair-accessible kayak launches, viewing scopes with corrective lenses for color blindness, and even a braille trail in East Texas.

“The fact that so many park superintendents picked accessibility-related projects demonstrates the need and our commitment to improving access in our parks,” said Jessica Burke, accessibility manager for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). “About one in four adults in Texas have a disability, and while we are working to ensure our park infrastructure meets ADA requirements, these extra donations provide more thoughtful amenities that enrich a visitor’s experience. We’re very grateful to all who donated to Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation’s Centennial Fundraising Campaign to make these projects possible.”

LOWER TEXAS COAST

Phillips 66, a longtime supporter of TPWF and Texas State Parks, provided funds for ADA-compliant shaded picnic shelters for the beach at Mustang Island State Park (SP). The Earl C. Sams Foundation and many donors also supported this project. Phillips 66 also helped provide kayaks and related equipment at Choke Canyon SP and telescopes for Goliad SP. The Earl C. Sams Foundation and Coastal Bend Community Foundation came together to support Goose Island SP with telescopes, kayaks, mountain bikes, binoculars and field guides.

UPPER TEXAS COAST

Several funders came to the table to bring enhanced visitor amenities to state parks on the upper Texas Coast. At Sea Rim SP, Phillips 66 provided funds for a new pontoon boat to provide better accessibility to the park's signature marsh. ADA campsite improvements and bike repair stations at Brazos Bend SP were made possible in part by The George Foundation and many generous Texans. Thanks to BNSF Railway Foundation, the Harris & Eliza Kempner Fund, and others, anglers at Galveston Island SP will enjoy an improved fish cleaning station. A dual-mounted viewing scope that is wheelchair accessible and has corrective lenses for color blindness will soon be available at Sheldon Lake SP and Environmental Learning Center, courtesy of the Wortham Foundation and other generous supporters.

EAST TEXAS

Thanks in part to Phillips 66 and park-loving Texans, park visitors now have access to an ADA-compliant sidewalk trail at Village Creek SP. Other notable East Texas projects include a braille trail at Caddo Lake SP, all-terrain wheelchairs at Daingerfield SP, scopes with corrective lenses for color blindness at Tyler SP and shade covers for the playgrounds at Lake Bob Sandlin and Cooper Lake state parks.

WEST TEXAS

In West Texas, Texas Pacific Land Corporation helped fund all-terrain wheelchairs at Hueco Tanks State Park (SP) and Historic Site, telescopes and night vision goggles at Lake Colorado City SP, water bottle filling stations at Big Spring SP and Monahans Sandhills SP, and bike repair stations at Franklin Mountains SP. BNSF Railway Foundation helped fund the bike repair stations at Franklin Mountains SP, and they also funded water bottle filling stations at Big Spring SP. Phillips 66 supported the project at Monahans Sandhills. Other West Texas park projects include a search and rescue UTV at Big Bend Ranch SP, astronomy equipment at Davis Mountains SP and Devils River State Natural Area (SNA), and kayaks and related equipment at South Llano River SP.

NORTH TEXAS

BNSF Railway Foundation was a benefactor for several North Texas parks. They helped fund a search and rescue UTV for Cleburne SP, a UTV for natural resource management and prairie restoration at Eisenhower SP, spotting scopes, binoculars and field guides at Lake Arrowhead SP, and viewing scopes with corrective lenses for color blindness at Meridian SP. Other North Texas projects include wheelchair-accessible kayak launches for Lake Mineral Wells SP and Trailway and Possum Kingdom SP.

TEXAS PANHANDLE

Visitors to Palo Duro Canyon SP will have access to bike repair stations thanks to Phillips 66 and BNSF Railway Foundation. Additional rescue gear there will ensure visitor safety, too. Another safety project at Caprock Canyon SP is a rescue UTV for park staff.

CENTRAL TEXAS

Adam R. Scripps Foundation and Enbridge supported several Central Texas park projects. Enbridge's donations funded portable blinds for wildlife viewing at Devil's Sinkhole and astronomy equipment at Kickapoo Cavern SP. Adam R. Scripps Foundation helped support water bottle filling stations at Bastrop and Longhorn Cavern state parks and Lyndon B. Johnson SP and Historic Site, as well as advanced safety

equipment including climbing gear and forward looking infrared (FLIR) night rescue equipment at Enchanted Rock SNA. Colorado Bend SP also received similar enhanced safety equipment. The Austin Chapter of Stewards of the Wild, TPWF's conservation leadership program, helped fund water bottle filling stations at McKinney Falls State Park. And, at Hill Country SNA, there are more troughs in place for thirsty horses utilizing the equestrian trails.

SOUTH TEXAS

Visitors to South Texas parks will soon notice several new amenities to enhance their experience, including water bottle filling stations at Estero Llano Grande and Falcon state parks, and Lake Casa Blanca International State Park. At Falcon SP, there are new kayaks and spotting scopes. At Bentsen-Rio Grande Valley SP, archery equipment is now available, and at Resaca de la Palma SP, park visitors can explore the starry skies above in a portable planetarium.

Besides the generous support of thousands of Texans and the foundations and corporations mentioned above, major support for the centennial fundraising campaign came from the Centennial Champions, a group of Texas philanthropic leaders who understand the enduring significance of our state parks. The Centennial Champions include the Fondren Foundation, The John M. O'Quinn Foundation, The Elkins Foundation, The J.W. Couch Foundation, and The James A. "Buddy" Davidson Charitable Foundation. Thanks to their generous support, all donations were matched dollar-for-dollar, doubling the impact of each and every gift.

"There were so many wonderful moments to cherish from the centennial celebration of our parks, and the many contributors to this campaign exemplify the very best of our park supporters," said Texas State Park Director Rodney Franklin. "The generous support of park lovers who funded these impactful projects will be felt by all who love our parks for years and decades to come."

Since 1991, [Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation](http://www.tpwf.org) has raised and invested more than \$250 million to advance Texas' proud outdoor traditions and conserve our state's lands, waters, and wildlife. Our vision is for all Texans to have access to the wild things and wild places of our state, both now and for generations to come. For more information, please visit www.tpwf.org.