

STATE OF TEXAS NATURE PRESERVE TECHNICAL ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
COUNTY OF NUECES CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL – 3:00 P.M.
CITY OF PORT ARANSAS MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 2018

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** The Nature Preserve Technical Advisory Board meeting was called to order at 3:00PM, Monday, January 22, 2018, at City Hall, 710 W. Avenue A, Port Aransas, Nueces County, Texas with the following members present; to wit:

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Rick Tinnin
Scott Holt
Cameron Pratt
Katie Swanson
Rae Mooney
Sonia Najera
Jace Tunnell

BOARD MEMBER(S) ABSENT

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT

Colleen Simpson, Nature Preserve Manager
Dana Lown, Receptionist

STAFF MEMBERS ABSENT

2. **CITIZEN COMMENTS AND REPORTS:** *In accordance with the Open Meetings Act, the Board is prohibited from acting or discussing (other than factual responses to specific questions) any items brought before them at this time. Comments will be limited to three (3) minutes or less.*

No citizen comments were given.

3. **WELCOME & INTRODUCE NEW ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS**

4. **NATURE PRESERVE MANAGER'S REPORT**

- A. **BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES:** Assignment and Role of Nature Preserve Technical Advisory Board was reported by Colleen Simpson in the way this is written in the City Ordinance.
- B. **MASTER PLAN:** Draft Master Plan was drawn up before Hurricane Harvey. A lot needs to be adapted post storm. All the damages we are seeing in all five areas of the Nature Preserve are definitely going to alter this document. This is included to show what we are working towards.

Mission Statement of the Nature Preserve is to preserve history, protect habitat, and promote harmony with nature.

- C. **DAMAGE ASSESSMENT:** The nature preserve is made up of five different sites. The Wetland Overlook, Paradise Pond, Turnbelle Birding Center, Charlie's Pasture, and Nature Preserve at Port St.

- 1. **Wetland Overlook (State HWY 361 entrance)** - It has a small short boardwalk and gazebo that were structurally compromised. A section of the boardwalk and railing were blown

out and deck was tilted. A contractor is out there now doing repairs. It is their hope to have it repaired before the Whooping Crane Festival

2. Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center – The boardwalk in the Nature Preserve was blown out and the tower is leaning. Debris removal in that area is expensive because it is marshy. The lowest estimate is \$120,000. Funding to do this has not yet been found. Colleen Simpson applied for some emergency relief funding right after the storm. The boardwalk was insured, but we don't know what we will be getting yet through insurance and FEMA. RFP is drafted up for debris removal. We have not yet solicited proposals yet, (still in draft form).

Last year, it was included in the budget, was applying for Texas Parks & Wildlife Recreational Trail Grant. Colleen was advised to use the grant towards something new as opposed to using it to replace something that we lost. We are moving forward with the idea that we wanted a connection from the birding center to the trails on State HWY 361. There are preliminary sketches from the City Engineers with cost estimates on what that looks like. Phase I of our rebuild is thought that connectivity would not be replacing something we lost, it would be for something new. The intent is to rebuild Phase II that would connect with this.

There are other thoughts on replacing boardwalks with some different products that are out there, like concrete boardwalks. Also, some different types of pilings. Colleen has been talking with a company called Perma Track . They make concrete boardwalks. She has been talking to a salesman from Pearson Pilings. They use materials like what we see used at the ferry landing and their black tubes. There's potential that these materials have the potential to be more storm resistant.

Last year, a study by Hanson showed a concern that the Leonabelle Turnbull Center pond was slowly getting smaller and shallower. We were considering bringing in a company to clean out and remove the cat tails. It was also being looked at to deepen it. Since the Hurricane, this is not as much of a priority because a lot of cat tails blew across Ross Avenue and were stacked three feet deep under the homes in that area. Colleen included this because it was something that was being looked at Pre-Harvey

3. Nature Preserve (Port Ave entrance) the boardwalks lifted up out of the ground, (pilings and all), and blew all over the birding center and around town. The towers are still standing and they seem like their structural integrity was maintained. We won't know until an engineer inspects them.

The entrance to the Nature Preserve, on HWY 361 of Port St, has been blocked. Port Street Road itself suffered some damage. The asphalt shifted and the bulkhead was compromised. It previously had some erosion issues to the bulkhead before the storm. The storm exacerbated them. There is some extreme wash out in areas and their nervous for the safety of folks fishing along the bulkhead. Folks are unable to get to the Nature Preserve Pavilion from the Port St, they are able to access it from the Community Park trail behind the baseball fields. It has the only concrete trail we had and the only trail that survived.

Colleen is collecting estimates for the pavilion and gazebo roof repairs. They are trying to get them repaired before the Whooping Crane Festival. Volunteers have helped to rebuild the structures and are going to redo the railings on the gazebos as well.

The giant cuts - four new cuts through the revetment and bulkhead damage to the Nature Preserve. One of them is about 200 feet wide and in some places were deeper than 12 ft. We are working with the GLO, (they filed the claim through FEMA) so that they can manage the rebuild of the rock revetment. The city is responsible for the bulkhead breach. There is a concern that if it is built back exactly the way it was, we could be dealing with the same issue with the next storm.

As an interesting development, the “Big Cut” is viewed as a new fishing spot and it technically is navigable water you can get a boat in there. There is debris under water and there are swift moving currents from ship wakes. We have very sensitive wild life back there. Colleen is trying to discourage anyone from going in there. She has purchased a buoy to go in the center of the cut to warn people to stay out. She will be working on some signage for the land facing the channel that says “Do No Enter”.

It was stated that now that we have Whooping Cranes which just might give us some “muscle”, Colleen Said, “you are supposed to stay 100 yards away from them and they could check with Refugee to see how they deal with keeping boats out of the navigable waters.”

D. CURRENT PROJECTS:

- ❖ Brazilian Pepper Tree Control Plan implemented by The Texas Gulf Region Cooperative Weed Management Association. Colleen is currently the Co-Chair along with Hans Landel of Ladybird Johnson Wildlife Flower Center. The current status with Pepper Trees is that we have a couple of grants from the CWMA for removal with limited access after the storm to these sights they have had to reevaluate where we want to work. There’s a small area that is going to be treated by a contractor this week. They will be removing trees around Community Park
- ❖ RFP for the grant funding is going to be for the 67 acres along Port St. It is technically not a Nature Preserve property, but it is a huge seed source and is super dense out there. If we can get rid of that we should be able to slow down the spread through the Nature Preserve
- ❖ Prescribed Fire Plan- Hardegee wrote up for us. We conducted a prescribed burn of 40 acres last year in September of 2016 and it went really well. The volunteer fire department here run the show. They have done it a few times so she would like to continue with them. The Fire Chief is our burn boss. One was scheduled for August or September 2017, but it was hindered because of the hurricane. Colleen would prefer to do them in late summer because you can get a hotter burn and it tends to help out with evasive plants. We have Guinea Grass, Blue Stem, Pepper Trees and White Lead Tree. The hotter the fire the more impact to hit those invasive species with. Colleen is asking for funding from the CVVP’s Habitat Living Resource team for the collection of some base line data vegetation surveys are included in that grant proposal that is due February 5, 2018

E. RECREATION FOUNDATION REVIEW

- ❖ Recreation Foundation of Port Aransas Collects donations as a 501C3 on our behalf
- ❖ There had been trail counters at all the sites before they were damaged by the storm. Unfortunately, they were not collected before the Hurricane and lost about 8 months' worth of data.
- ❖ Birding Center had 147 people on a daily average and about 28,206 people on a yearly average. This data is from 2016-2017. We would like to get them back out as soon as possible because it's nice to know our visitor behavior and which sites are getting the most people and when.
- ❖ Have sign in books at Paradise Pond, Birding Center and getting ready to put one out at Charlie's Pasture. Unfortunately, the logs that were not already entered were lost to the storm because they are just paper. Colleen was uncertain if they were destroyed or if they were in storage. They had been at Chamber of Commerce.
- ❖ Recreation Foundation – Collections can be made at www.RecreationPortA.org on the Nature Preserve's behalf. Post Harvey a lot of people want to know how they can donate online. They have an estimated balance of \$2,800. This is nice for smaller project like wildfire seeds used after the burn. It also paid for supplies for a youth birding course and evasive species removal from Native Dave
 - Someone asked what the Annual budget was. Colleen responded \$318,200. Our balance is \$265,291. Salary comes out for Colleen, one groundskeeper and a portion of the Parks and Recreation Director. Nature Preserve is funded through the Hotel/Motel Occupancy Tax. It is separated from the General Fund. Nature Preserve is looked at as a separate entity than the Parks Dept. David Hyde, the Director of the Parks and Recreation Department, who oversees the Pool, the beach, and all the parks and sporting fields.

5. ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- A. The board members discussed and took action to appoint the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Nature Preserve Technical Advisory Board.
 - ❖ Cameron Pratt nominated Scott Holt for Chairman and Katie Swanson seconded the motion.
 - ❖ Scott Holt nominated Rick Tinnin for Vice Chairman and Jace Tunnell seconded that motion.
- B. General discussion on damaged sites and funding opportunities for rebuilding.

Colleen has a grant management schedule of what she has applied for and what she is planning on applying for.

 - ❖ \$120,000 debris removal from emergency funding from NIF WIF – has not given any word back
 - ❖ Texas Ornithological Society awarded \$9,500 for downed tree and brush removal at Paradise Ponds

- ❖ Corpus Christi Audubon, Owen Fitzsimmons, mentioned their group has \$2,500 that they would like to help on a project. Colleen spoke with their group in November, but that has not come to fruition yet. It was mentioned that Owen had moved in December. Not aware of anyone who took over that position yet? Colleen is going to follow up on that.
- ❖ Proposal drawn up for the CBVP HRLT work group due on February 5, 2018. It is \$30,000 for baseline data in the Preserve Vegetation monitoring and Alga sampling.
- ❖ Put in the BP application Health Environmental Benefit Fund that was for bulkhead repair, restoring trail access, habitat restoration invasive species removal. It was huge - \$3.4 million
- ❖ Colleen was asked if she amended any of those – the Noah portal has added it, so she let them know that we have another endangered species
- ❖ Conservation Alliance which is made up of a bunch of different outdoor recreation entities like REI, Cliff Bar, and YETI coolers. Yeti Cooler is a member. Colleen contacted them to ask to be considered for a nomination for the Conservation alliance for \$50,000 restoration efforts. You have to be nominated to apply for the award and so Yeti is working on nominating us and then we can apply for the \$50,000 that is in assistance
- ❖ The Texas Parks & Wildlife Recreational Trail Grant is \$250,000 due on February 1, 2018. Colleen plans to use Urban Engineering drawings
- ❖ We already received a wetland delineation done of that area from Hanson. And so those components together is what she plans to ask for in the Trails Grant.
- ❖ There's a group called "People for Bikes" that is another nomination, you have to have a group recommend you and so the Recreation Foundation of Port Aransas (Sherri) wrote a letter of intent and has submitted that for a \$10,000 award which could be used for the recreational trails.
- ❖ Keep Texas Beautiful Grant for up to \$20,000 that Colleen is hoping to apply to the Paradise Pond Restoration for replanting.

On a side note, Colleen applied for a grant on behalf of the City for trash bins out on the beach because most of them were washed away and not insured.

- ❖ Colleen plans to ask for Match for the Trails Grant that will make our TPWD application stronger.

C. Discuss and take action on meeting frequency and schedule

A motion was put in place to set the frequency and scheduling of the upcoming meetings.

Scott Holt motioned to schedule the next meeting to be on February 28, 2018, and the following meetings to be on March 28th, April 25th, May 23rd and June 27th from 3:00 – 5:00pm

Ray Mooney seconded that motion.

6. BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS AND ITEMS FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION

- Workshops to work on grants
- Workshop to revise the master plan and then the objectives some part of each sight is accessible
- Discussion about education and outreach
- Q. Are there any public programs planned? A. Yes, every Saturday at 8:00am at the Community Park on the cement trail to the Pavilion. There is part time education staff. Leslie Hofstra and her husband Ray Delahanty have been leading those guided tours.

- Julie Findley previously has led youth birding with Joan Holt and Rita Pearson. This semester they skipped it. They were talking about doing a one day special.
- Our Saturday programs are all that we have going on regularly right now.

7. **ADJOURNMENT:** A motion was made to adjourn the meeting by Scott Holt at 4:55pm