

WRL-The Natural Side

Background

In 1939 Hare and Hare consultants advised the Dallas Parks Board that White Rock Lake Park should be a natural park, to which the Board agreed to.

L B Houston's wife (Director of DPARD), Florence Conway Houston , drew the first flora and fauna map of the lake in 1942 for her SMU biology class. Refer to the book White Rock Lake by Sally Rodriguez, pg. 98-99.

In the 1950's the last of the fishing and summer shacks were removed from the lake.

In the 1960-1970's The Trailside Museum, focusing on the local wildlife at the lake was supported by the Dallas Museum of Natural History and volunteers from the Dallas Audubon chapter.

During the 1980's- 1990's Pat Hoyt and Jim Apken, members of the Dallas Audubon chapter, began conducting neighborhood walks through the wildflowers each spring.

In 2005, the Dallas Parks and Recreation Department received the first corporate recognition for the prestigious TPWD Lone Star Land Steward Award.

Value

Previous DPARD personnel have recognized the immense value of the park as a natural setting and had dedicated themselves to manage it for that purpose.

Value for an important location on the Central Flyway for migratory birds

An economic incentive for the area as part of the \$6,000,000,000 wildlife industry in Texas as an active birding, wildlife viewing/photography and fishing location.

A tourist value for those visitors that come here from all over the country and world for the opportunity to see migratory birds in an easy to visit location. Recently a group from Japan was visiting the lake for that purpose.

Documentation of the lake began with the photo catalog established by neighbor George Boyd who has amassed thousands of photos of lake flora and fauna which he has taken throughout a period of 20 years.

Other wildlife photographers have come to recognize the uniqueness of the lake for attracting wildlife and spend hundreds of hours at the lake looking for that next prize winning photograph, whether it is the wildlife or one of the beautiful sunsets.

Postings of photographs and videos of the lake and its diverse wildlife are well known on social media sites

Value in the educational and research opportunities for universities and local schools for student study of the prairie, wildlife, soils, ecology, aquatic plants, etc. which have all been conducted, and continue to be, at the lake.

Also used locally by Boy Scouts to earn merit badges through day long programs with scientists, Game Wardens and others at the lake.

Research and flora identification by botanists from BRIT have occurred at the lake

Local Master Naturalist Chapter has renewed the Prairie Day event at the lake in the spring providing continued education for local residents and visitors.

Real value is the location away from the rest of the city, separated from buildings and busy highways, a place for relaxation, to un-wind and reflect on the day.

Richard Louv's books, Last Child in the Woods, which introduces the concept of nature deficit disorder and offers practical actions for families and communities and The Nature Principle, which extends the issue to adults and reports the restorative power of the natural world, have created a recognition of the value of nature in our lives.

Children and Nature Network , <http://www.childrenandnature.org/>, is the website developed for this, now world-wide movement, where the research from medical professionals and numerous scientists can be found.

Habitat

Once the Blackland Prairie dominated the area, with settlement came farming and ranching, now an urban environment with little of the original ecosystem left.

An urban environment has been created providing food, water, shelter and a safe place for wildlife to raise their young.

This urban environment consists of a diverse community of bottomland hardwood forests, edge habitat, and prairie remnants that exist nowhere else.

Audubon members have recorded over 300 species of birds, over 300 species of plants have been documented by scientists, 20 plus different species of mammals, and then there are the butterflies, dragonflies, reptiles and amphibians and fish. All need this habitat to continue to survive.

Proper management for this diversity needs to continue, not be ignored for supposed favorable endeavors that would in fact harm what others now enjoy.

Destruction of habitat, especially during the critical breeding and nesting season, should cease immediately.

Ignorance of Federal and state laws protecting wildlife should not be tolerated. Many species of birds are protected and wantonly destroying the active nesting areas is a federal offense.

Management of invasive plant species needs to be considered very carefully due to the fact that urban wildlife has adapted to those plants which provides habitat for them.

Removal of trees for the sole purpose of a potential danger is not feasible. Any tree can drop limbs or fall over at any time. Something the insurance industry considers an Act of God. There have been several deaths at the park due to drowning, bike/car accidents and murder. At last count there has never been a victim of a killer tree.

Plans

Future plans for the park seem to have been in the works for at least the last two years and have just recently been brought to light in the community.

Development of the east side is being pushed by the Mayor, DPARD, and City Council representative.

Is another bar/restaurant really needed? There are many well recognized places in the community already.

Destruction of Park land for a private endeavor is not suitable at this park.

Is it only coincidence that this restaurant development proposal occurred after the City Council approval of the former Highland Park Rowing Club now known as Dallas United Crew? Does this group really need a drinking/eating facility in close proximity to their new rowing location? Time to explore the neighborhood, there are already plenty of great places nearby.

Conclusion

White Rock Lake Park is a unique, diverse natural habitat in the middle of the city, a haven for wildlife and people. Let's keep it that way.