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At the beginning of the 20th century, Fort Worth’s leaders voted to create a reservoir on the West Fork of the Trinity River to serve as a reliable drinking water supply and recreational area. To protect water quality, they made the farsighted decision to purchase a large portion of the watershed around the new lake. Today, their vision has resulted in the extraordinary community resource that is the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. As a child, I enjoyed visiting the Nature Center with my family. I didn’t dream that one day my life would come full circle and I would have the privilege of joining its staff.

Interpreting and sharing my love for this land with others has been my life’s work for the past 22 years, and I’m humbled by the opportunities that have been given to me. Thank you for your half century of support, and please join me as we journey toward our Centennial Celebration!

Suzanne M. Tittle
Nature Center Manager

I’ve been volunteering for the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge in some capacity for years. It is a great privilege to serve as president during the 50th anniversary. The Friends provides major supplemental support to the City’s budget for the Nature Center, and our support has a large impact on this natural treasure. We are so fortunate to have a place that we call the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge, where we can relax, explore, exercise, enjoy, and soak in nature in all its beauty and mystery, constantly changing and inviting us to spend time there. It is truly a refuge, not only for us humans, but also for all the critters and creatures. I hope to see you there soon.

Marty Leonard
Friends President
Our Mission

To enhance quality of life by enrolling and educating our community in the preservation and protection of natural areas while standing as an example of these same principles and values in North Central Texas.
For half a century, the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge has provided sanctuary for local wildlife, offered educational opportunities for visitors, and protected the integrity of Fort Worth’s native landscape and Lake Worth’s watershed, for which it has earned national acclaim.

The vision began in the spring of 1963 when a group of concerned citizens led by Fort Worth Audubon Society President John Wilson and Field Trip Chair Margaret Parker apprised the Fort Worth Park and Recreation Advisory Board that the city needed a dedicated nature refuge. Such a place would allow birding enthusiasts and all other nature-loving residents of Fort Worth to immerse themselves in the natural world.

In early 1964, the group formally asked for “assistance of the park board in locating... a plot of undeveloped land – say a minimum of 50 acres” to establish a “Community Nature Center.” In February 1964, the park board designated land for the Greer Island Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge, “a wildlife sanctuary and nature preserve.” The area comprised “Greer Island, some 55 acres plus the surrounding water and shoreline, making about 380 acres in all” – and would eventually become the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge.

Margaret Parker and Warren Pulich, renowned birder and University of Dallas science professor, helped mark the first trail on Greer Island in March 1964 – the trail that would earn the Nature Center its first national recognition as a National Recreation Trail in 1971.

The Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge is a gift to our community. More importantly, it’s a gift from all the people who take care of it and preserve it for the benefit of the citizens of Fort Worth.”

Marty Lunnard
FVNC President, 2013-16
The Nature Center soon invited the Children’s Museum – now the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History – to use its acreage as an outdoor laboratory. Building on this foundation, the Nature Center began providing a variety of outdoor educational programs.

FROM OUR BEGINNING

During the first few years, enthusiasts identified “150 species of birds, including phalaropes, herons, reddish, great, and snowy egrets, both bitterns, greese, and 18 species of ducks.” In addition, archivists recorded 55 species of trees and shrubs and 36 species of wildflowers in historical listings. In November 1970, at the request of the Fort Worth Conservation Council, the Fort Worth City Council designated an additional 3,000 acres of formerly leased city land on upper Lake Worth as parkland for the Nature Center. This land had been held in reserve since the expiration of long-term agricultural leases in 1967.

Now, 50 years beyond the vision of those foresighted Nature Center founders, many thousands of visitors have enjoyed the lessons and respite the Nature Center provides, and we celebrate the golden anniversary of one of the largest, most outstanding urban nature centers in the United States.

Here’s to another 50 years of success.

“We are a landscape that’s native to North Texas and the Fort Worth area, and people can get in touch here with that sense of place and gain knowledge of what makes our area a special landscape in which to live.”

— Suzanne Tutt
FWNCRB Manager, 30+ years
(FWNCRB Staff Member since 1985)
In the early 1970s, grant funding from the National Bureau of Outdoor Recreation allowed construction of a new interpretive center, which was named after Robert E. Hardwicke, who had been active in conservation work and in legislation to protect park areas. The building provided an indoor option for meeting tour groups with educational displays and full-service restrooms. September 17, 1971, marked the official dedication of the Hardwicke Interpretive Center.

The surrounding area’s long-term agricultural leases expired in 1967, and in the 1970s, the land’s management was formally conveyed to the Park Department and the name updated to the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. At the same time, an advisory board was developed to assist with input from various groups interested in planning for future developments. As a result of efforts by the Meadowbrook Garden Club, the Junior League, and a gift from Mrs. Harry Wallenburg, the boardwalk over the Lotus Marsh was completed in 1974. In 1976, the area officially became part of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge.

By 1980, FWNC&R leadership recognized the need for additional space in the Interpretive Center, and construction for an auditorium, library, and offices began with an official dedication in February 1981. In 1986, Women in Construction renovated an old home site near the Boardwalk, complete with a windmill, as a shelter house for programs and groups, which is now known as the Alice Ashley Shelter. The Ashley Shelter serves as another “base camp” option for staff and organized groups to explore and enjoy the FWNC&R.

“The Nature Center is a welcoming place with a tremendous staff. People can do everything from bird watching to participating in daytime or nighttime hikes led by naturalists.”

— Rick Shepard, FWNC President, 2012-14
1914 - The land was purchased by the City of Fort Worth to protect the watershed of the planned Lake Worth. The land was leased back to original owners and others. Land use was primarily agricultural.

1914 - 1964

Mid 1950's - The land was transferred to the State of Texas to build State Park #1. Civilian Conservation Corps established Camp #1836 on Lake Worth to build the park. The Camp was composed of approximately 200 members who built shelters, roads, bridges, and picnic areas around Lake Worth including many structures within the future FWNCR.

1957 - The land was returned to City ownership and considered parkland. Land use was primarily agricultural, with light recreational use such as picnicking and fishing.

1958 - The Fort Worth Rehabilitation Farm was begun with 109 acres on Broadview Drive leased to Liberty Mission. Several facilities were built to house and feed the inhabitants of the Rehabilitation Farm. It ceased operations in 1984.

1961 - J.D. Teague, a home builder, bought the 24 acres that is now called Lakeside Addition. Thirty-two houses were built in that property over time.

1964 - The land was taken for construction of the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History.

1967 - The City of Fort Worth took advantage of the expiration of leases in the area to hold that land in reserve.

1967 - 1977

November 1970 - At the request of the Fort Worth Conservation Council, the Fort Worth City Council designated an additional 3,000 acres of formerly leased city land on upper Lake Worth as parkland for the Nature Center.

1971 - The Hardwick Interpretive Center was dedicated. The Fort Worth Nature Center Advisory Board was formed to guide future development. Steps were taken to begin fundraising the Nature Center. Staff increased to two naturalists. Greer Island’s trail was designated a National Recreation Trail.

1972 - A master development plan was produced by the Nature Center Planning Division of the National Audubon Society. The Sid Richardson Foundation provided funds to support the cost of plan development. Staff was increased to three, with addition of a clerk.

1973 - Bison Range was “staked” with three bison from Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma.

April 4, 1964 - Greer Island Nature Center and Wildlife Refuge became established. At the request of the Fort Worth Audubon Society, a 250-acre tract including Greer Island on upper Lake Worth was set aside to be “retained in as nearly its natural state as possible… [and] the Fort Worth Audubon Society is granted permission to develop this area as a wildlife sanctuary and Preserve…with the general oversight of the Lake Officer and Director of Parks.”

1974 - The Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge, a non-profit, 501(c) 3 organization, was formed. As a result of efforts by the Meadowbrook Garden Club, the Junior League, and a gift from Mrs. Harry Wallenberg, the Boardwalk over the Lotus Marsh was completed in 1974.

1975 - With expansion well beyond the confines of Greer Island the park’s name was formally changed to Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge.

1977 - A prairie dog town was developed. Other wildlife “restocking” continued, including the release of wild turkeys, Caprock, Prairie, Grosbeakers, and Equinette trails were built. Hardwick Interpretive Center exhibits were built.
1980 - The Nature Center was designated a National Natural Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior through the efforts of Dr. Warren Pulich.

1981 - Hardwick Interpretive Center was expanded (auditorium, offices, animal rehabilitation facilities).

1983 - Outreach program began, with the staff position funded by a grant from the Annis Carter Foundation. Women in Construction renovated an old homestead site, complete with a windmill, as a shelter house for programs and groups, which is known as the Alice Ashley Shelter.

1985 - 1991 - Emphasis on managing land for natural goals emerged. Our naturalist assumed the unofficial Refuge Land Manager position. Natural Guard trail and Nature Center volunteer crews formed. Trail system doubled in length and more intensive land management was conducted. Volunteer programs were more professionally organized, making use of descents and recruitment to expand productivity. Large annual special events began (Snakes of Tarrant County, Birds of Prey Weekend). An endowment fund was initiated by Advisory Board to support educational outreach.

1992 - Friends took steps to increase fund raising: nearly doubling previous annual contributions to the Nature Center.

1995 - Visitors and Friends study conducted to determine demographics, program, and facility preferences. Nature Center Study Teams met and assessed the Nature Center's situation and possible futures. Natural History Common tour program debuted. The Refuge Service Center on Broadview Drive was dedicated upon completion of the remodeling of one of the old Fort Worth Rehabilitation Farm structures.

1998 - 1997 - Strategic Planning Team developed a new strategic plan. City Council adopted this new five-year plan in August 1996. Staff began operational planning. Focus groups for input to recreation and education planning began.

1999 - The City of Fort Worth purchased a 150-acre tract on the western side of Buffalo Road to protect the Nature Center from commercial development. Half of the $500,000 purchase price was raised by the Friends in just a few weeks.

Fall 1999 - The inaugural class of the Cross Timbers Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist program was held at the Hardwick Interpretive Center.

2000 - 2004 - A new Master Plan was created to establish the future vision for the Nature Center.

April 1, 2006 - With the recommendation of the 2003 Master Plan and support of the Nature Center Conservancy, the Nature Center implemented an entry gate program with entrance fee.

January 2007 - The Nature Center increased the size of the bison herd from eight to 22 animals. Bisons were acquired from the Fort Worth Zoo, Saginaw, and Peaster.

2008 - Introduction of two new birds of prey exhibits to the Hardwick Interpretive Center with funds raised by the Friends.

2009 - With funds from the 2004 City of Fort Worth bond sale and a design from local engineering firm Trussear Nall & Perkins, improvements were made to the Hardwick Interpretive Center parking lot, the sidewalks around the building, and the Limestone Lodge Trail. New interpretive signs were also constructed.

The Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge received the Lone Star Land Steward Award from Texas Parks and Wildlife in the Corporate/Public category.

The first Monster Bash was held in October in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the Lake Worth Monster sightings.

2012 - The Nature Center Conservancy merged with the Friends of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge as part of a research process into contract management of the Nature Center & Refuge by a private entity. In response to the City of Fort Worth Fire Department's plan to create a Wildland Fire Unit, the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge entered into a mutually beneficial agreement wherein prescribed burns of Nature Center prairie remnants were initiated as training activities for the Fire Department.

2014 - The Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge celebrates its 50th anniversary. The Friends and Nature Center staff members host "Fort Worth Wild," an outdoor fundraising event and "Broadview: A Spectrum of Nature," the Nature Center's first juried art show held at the Fort Worth Community Arts Center.
The Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge has been fortunate over the past 50 years to be led by people of great passion and integrity. Thanks to their vision and commitment, the Nature Center has touched the lives and hearts of thousands in our community and continues to offer education and respite for the next generation.

The Nature Center’s first site supervisors were Bill Spalding, who served from 1964 to 1967, Mike Ross, who served from 1967 to 1968 and Harold Arnold, who served from 1971 to 1977. Historical archives yield little biographical information on these three leaders, however, it was due to their successful early management that the Nature Center continued. The following list includes supervisors serving after 1968:

Rick Pratt (1968-1971)
Rick Pratt had been a “teacher’s aide” at the Fort Worth Children’s Museum and had gained a considerable amount of natural history before attending the University of Texas at Arlington. During his tenure at the FWNCR, he mentored numerous young naturalists and students in addition to setting the philosophy and direction of the institution for decades to come. In 1974, he left to develop and become director of the Houston Armand Bayou Nature Center, where he continued to influence and guide another generation of naturalists, some of whom have come back to the FWNCR as employees. He became the caretaker of the Fort Isabel Lighthouse and lived near the lighthouse for 19 years. He now lives in Fort Aransas, Texas, and is director of the Fort Aransas Museum.

Tom Wood (1977-1983)
Tom Wood started as a summer worker at the Nature Center after graduating from Stephen F. Austin University in 1972. After working for the Fort Worth Independent School District at the Outdoor Learning Center, he joined the Nature Center as an assistant naturalist in 1974. In 1976, he became director and guided the expansion of the Hardwick Interpretive Center. After 14 years, he left to work for The Nature Conservancy at Ramsey Canyon Preserve in southeastern Arizona. He and his wife, Sheri Williamson, now live in Bisbee, Arizona.

The prairies west of Fort Worth, Lake Worth, and the soon-to-be Nature Center were Wayne Clark’s playgrounds through the teen years. Clark graduated from Texas A&M with a degree in Wildlife Science and also attended the University of Texas at Arlington and the University of Houston Close Lake for graduate work in freshwater and estuarine biology. He was interested in all wild living organisms, especially invertebrates, plants, and soils. Clark spent more than 32 years working at nature centers. Restoration of natural landscapes was a passion. He was the Nature Center’s supervisor during these years and also from 1990 until 2005, when he retired.

Ray Wilson earned a bachelor of science degree from Tennessee State University and completed the Management Excellence Program at Weldons Cooper Center for Public Service in Virginia. He currently serves as the director of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Affairs for DeKalb County in Georgia. Prior to that position, he was deputy and acting Director for the City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department. Other positions took him to Norfolk, Virginia, and Cleveland, Ohio.

Suzanne Tuttle (2000-present)
When Suzanne Tuttle was seven, she received her first pair of binoculars as a gift, which launched her career as a naturalist. After receiving a degree in biology from UT Arlington in 1980, she spent 11 years working as a medical technologist in various local hospital labs. The lure of a life outdoors proved too strong, so she began volunteering at the Nature Center in 1991. In 1995, she was hired as a full-time staff member and has spent the last 22 years sharing her love of the natural North Central Texas landscape with thousands of friends and visitors.
Since the beginning, the Friends have been instrumental in developing and supporting numerous Nature Center programs and other efforts that today help ensure its success. To find out more about the Friends, visit naturecenterfriends.org.

**Contributions of the Friends**

- Pasture, feed, hay, and veterinary services for the bison herd and all other ambassador animals
- Purchase of the herd bull and development of the west pasture well and the Birds of Prey Exhibit—all driven by special Friends’ fundraisers
- Funding for staff and intern positions
- Publication of *Bluestem Now*, Summer Natural History Adventures, Spring Break brochures, and trail maps
- Purchase and maintenance of canoes, kayaks, rafts, and equipment. City staff currently operate the monthly Canoe Fest
- Renovation and design plans for a picnic area at Broadview Park and docks at both Greer Island and the Big River Parking Lot
- Buffalo Boogiet: an annual 5K/10K competitive run and one-mile fun walk

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**The Friends’ Mission**

To **Preserve, Protect, and Conserve** in perpetuity the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge.
As the population of Fort Worth inches closer to one million people, adults and children alike continue to turn to the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge as a respite from the rigors of urban life. The FWNC&R serves as a reminder of humanity’s connection to the natural world. The Nature Center offers a variety of educational programs and hikes for individuals, schools, and families, while the staff remains heavily involved in land management techniques to ensure that the natural history of North Central Texas is preserved.

With continued public awareness and educational outreach, future generations can learn of the Nature Center’s existence and its historical and natural significance, all of which will ensure the attainment of our preservation mission.

**Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge**

**BY THE NUMBERS**

- The FWNC&R comprises 3,621 acres located 10 miles northwest of downtown Fort Worth.
- Currently a permanent herd of 15 bison roam approximately 210 acres of land.
- Features more than 650 plant species.
- One of the Top 10 birding sites in Texas, with more than 200 species of birds.
- More than 20 miles of hiking trails.
- Ancient Cross Timbers forest on the Cross Timbers Trail contains trees that are 200-300 years old and is designated a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service.
- More than 10,000 historical artifacts have been found throughout the Nature Center at registered archeological sites.
- More than 50,000 park visitors each year.
- Visitors to the Hardwick Interpretive Center each year.
- More than 25,000 visitors to the Hardwick Interpretive Center each year.
- 8 different soil associations occur in Tarrant County, and they all converge at the Nature Center.
- Prairie dog town.

ELEVATION CHANGE across the site is over 100 FT. 2 natural springs 10 full-time staff members.
The Marsh Boardwalk

The Marsh Boardwalk was developed in two phases – the first began in 1973, which included only the shelter structure and connecting upper run. In 1980, the Youth Conservation Corps completed a second phase, which included the lower run and platform. The Boardwalk provides visitors the ability to explore a natural, marshy area of a former oxbow of the Trinity River, surrounded by canopy trees and water plants. The marsh is an ideal spot to view egrets, blue herons, and other aquatic wildlife thriving in its rich habitat and has offered visitors a one-of-a-kind experience for decades.

The Boardwalk area features a number of significant habitats within a close proximity that are important to both scientists and Nature Center visitors. In addition, the Marsh contains healthy faunal and emergent wetland plant communities. Seasonal changes in water levels result in noticeable aquatic-terrestrial habitat changes and successional changes in plant communities.

As testament to the area’s ecological significance, educational topics of interest found in the marsh range from animal identification and species management to water quality and nutrient recycling, flood dynamics and successional plant communities, upland plant communities, wetland and riparian edges, aquatic terrestrial habitat transects, and wildlife corridors.

Because loose and missing planks, unstable handrails, and other issues had rendered the Boardwalk a potential safety hazard, the FWNC&RR closed public access in 2014. However, thanks to the vision and tireless efforts of Nature Center staffers, Friends board members, and Fort Worth City Council members, plans are currently under way for a complete Boardwalk redevelopment.

NATURE CENTER POINTS OF INTEREST

- GREEN ISLAND AND CANOE LAUNCH
- MAJOR CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS-DEVELOPED SITES AT BROADVIEW PARK, LONG POINT, AND RIVERGARDEN
- DOUG RAMS
- HARDWARE INTERPRETIVE CENTER
- PRAIRIE DOG TOWN
- TALL GRASS PRAIRIE
- WESTERN CROSS TIMBERS SAVANNA
- ALICE ASHLEY SHELTER
- BOTTOMLAND HARDWOODS
- TODD ISLAND AND CROSS TIMBERS FOREST
- MARSH EXHIBIT (BOARDWALK)
Education Programs

at the NATURE CENTER

The Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge places a strong focus on education by making the environment itself – as well as its plant and animal inhabitants – as accessible as possible to those interested in learning about it.

Since its inception, the Nature Center has been a resource for preschools, universities, and everything in between. Naturalist-led hikes and field trips are popular with school groups, informative distance learning classes are offered, and graduate students from Texas Christian University, the University of Texas at Arlington, University of North Texas, and other major universities conduct their thesis and dissertation research on-site.

Those who have participated in the Nature Center’s hands-on internship program have gone on to work for state and federal agencies such as the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and the U.S. Forest Service. As more interns pass through the program each year, the Nature Center staff continues to do their part to help train the next generation of conservationists.

“It is a unique island, if you will, that provides not only an opportunity to view birds and wildlife and be in nature, but there’s a certain tranquility about it, and I think there’s a certain peace that comes from being there.”

– Bill Meadows, former FOFC Board Member
WHY A BISON HERD?

- Education: Our bison herd provides education opportunities for many students from kindergarten to college level and may be the only bison many people ever see in person.

- Keystone Species: Bison are a keystone species – their presence in an area plays an important role in the ecology of the land and the other species present. For example, prairie dogs at the Nature Center benefit from the bison’s grazing and wallowing activities.

- Research: The FWNCRR partners with Texas A&M University, University of Texas at Arlington, and Texas Christian University researchers to conduct studies using the bison herd, all with the goal of better managing the bison and the Nature Center. Texas A&M researchers have added the genetic profiles of our herd members to their nationwide database (see conservation bullet below) and make recommendations to our herd manager when we acquire or deacquisition animals. UTA and TCU graduate students have conducted studies on the ecological impacts of bison on their habitat.

- Conservation: A Texas A&M study centers on bison genetics. We are ready to assist with improving the genetics of bison throughout the nation. At the turn of the 20th century, experiments were conducted to crossbreed the few remaining bison with cattle. Although these experiments were considered a failure, they had the unintended consequence of polluting the bison genome. The FWNCRR’s bison herd has been genetically tested by researchers at Texas A&M and, subject to the sensitivity limits of current testing capability, all of our breeding animals are free of cattle genes. Our herd therefore serves as a resource for current and future bison conservation efforts in Texas and beyond.

“A bison is a large part of our interpretive program, where the herd acts as a living visual aid for people to learn about animal adaptations, land management programs, prairie ecology, and more.”

Rob Dobkins, FWNCRR herd manager

**About Our Herd**

- The herd started with a donation of three bison from the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge in 1973.
- The Friends currently owns and provides feed and veterinary support for the herd.
- More than 65 percent of the Nature Center’s calves are born in April and May.
- The bison range consists of five pastures totaling 210 acres.
- As of August 31, 2015, the herd numbered 25.

**Bison Facts**
Looking Ahead

“The Nature Center is a true gem for the city of Fort Worth. As it celebrates its 50th anniversary, I hope that more and more citizens will get out and discover the treasure that it is.”

— Scott Frey, Mayor of Fort Worth

The Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge belongs to everyone in our community. As the Nature Center continues to evolve, the focus must remain on actions that support conservation and increase visitors’ social interaction with its natural and cultural resources. The current master plan makes specific recommendations for the development of amenities that support educational opportunities, nature-based recreational experiences, and community-based activities.

OVERALL MASTER PLAN GOALS

Protect the natural and cultural resources from destructive intervention.

Welcome visitors and offer educational resources.

Expand the understanding of regional natural processes and their long-term management.

Develop means of financial independence by increasing support from visitors and the community.

Continue to be a noteworthy Fort Worth institution that participates and partners with other cultural and recreational elements within the city.
Thank You

To our generous contributors and sponsors

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