

# FRIENDS

OF GUADALUPE RIVER STATE PARK  
HONEY CREEK SNA



WINTER NEWSLETTER 2021-22

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

The Board of the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park/HCSNA invites you to the annual holiday gathering. This year the event will be held at the Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne on Friday, 10 December, from 6:30 – 9:00 pm.

A catered BBQ meal, beginning promptly at 7 pm, will be provided this year. Tea and water will also be provided. Guests are asked to bring holiday desserts (individually wrapped if possible) to share. Guests may BYOB, if desired.

Please let us know if you and family members will be able to attend so that food quantities can be determined. RSVP to Dave Kibler at [djkib@gvtc.com](mailto:djkib@gvtc.com) no later than 3 December or email if you have any questions.

Dave Kibler  
830-336-3718

## “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall, That wants it down...” Robert Frost

Participants in the guided interpretive walks in Honey Creek State Natural Area may notice remnants of an old rock wall as they descend on the trail from wooded uplands into the cypress gallery along the creek. The wall, partially obscured by thick bushy mountain cedar trees (actually juniper trees, *Juniperus ashei*, but in this article we shall call them by their common name), contains many tumbled-down sections (see Figure 1). Robert Frost, in his poem, “Mending Wall,” suggests “elves” as the destructive agents of his rock walls, but he then rejects that possibility. Frost favors, rather, “the frozen-ground-swell under it” in the winter. But despite occasional, really cold weather here in the Hill Country such as we experienced in February of 2021, one of the most persistent, seemingly irresistible wall-demolishers in Honey Creek are fast-growing cedar thickets, along with animal activity.<sup>1</sup> Over decades, cedars are undoing—and if that fails, at least hiding—the prodigious efforts of the early German settlers here, as it took, according to an old rule of thumb, one strong, skilled rock-fence builder one day to erect three feet of wall three feet high, not counting the efforts of his children to dig out and haul the one ton or more of rock required for the three feet (see Figure 2).<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 1. Old, crumbling “German” wall on Honey Creek trail.  
Photo by Mackenzie Brown



Fig. 2. Part of wall showing its original 3-foot height.  
Photo by Mackenzie Brown

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Laura Lynne Knott 2004, *The Historic Rock Fences of Blanco County: Their Past, Their Future*, p. 53.

by Mackenzie Brown and Charleen Moore

Visitors to Honey Creek often assume that the German farmers/ranchers built these walls to keep livestock safe in protected enclosures, but more often than not, the opposite was the case: to keep cattle and sheep out of crop fields. That was almost certainly the case here, because livestock, if fenced at all, would have been kept closer to the farmhouse (the Rust House). Further, as visitors will note, much of the terrain they have been walking through is quite rocky with thin soils underlain by limestone beds. But here, behind the rock wall from the trail, were thicker soils making for a suitable crop-growing area, as the underlying geologic unit is Hensell sand and silt. And most importantly, in days before irrigation, successful crop-raising was entirely dependent upon rain (an uncertain prospect in the Hill Country, for sure) and seepage from below. The Hensell formation is a good water-bearing layer, and given the relatively more impervious rock beneath, groundwater is close to the surface. We see evidence of this today on the nearby slopes and in the field itself where we find magnificent Lindheimer Muhly grasses that grow best in damp but well-drained soils (see Figure 3).



Fig. 3 Lindheimer Muhly in open patch of field.  
Photo by Mackenzie Brown

Some visitors suggest that the wall was to prevent erosion. And indeed, erosion is a problem in the Hill Country. Just below the wall, on the down-slope side, where there has been no protective vegetation, soil quickly degrades (washes away) and can only support sparse grass (see Figure 4). While that was not the original intent, the walls on their upslope side can fill to the top with rich silt. The wall on the opposite side of the field from the trail reveals a build-up of soil some 18 inches deep (see Figure 5).



Fig. 4 Eroded soil with sparse grass.  
Photo by Mackenzie Brown



Fig. 5. Soil build-up behind wall.  
Photo by Mackenzie Brown

<sup>2</sup> Mike Cox 2008, “Rock Fences,” available at: <http://www.texasescapes.com/MikeCoxTexasTales/Rock-Fences.htm>. Accessed 11/13/2021.



“Something there is that doesn’t love a wall,  
That wants it down...” Robert Frost

That cedars are wall-demolishers may, in some people’s minds, be just one more reason for hating cedar. Aside from causing cedar fever, cedar is also accused of being non-native, terribly invasive, hogging water, diminishing groundwater recharge, drying up springs, degrading soils, and increasing erosion. Mountain cedar, however, has been in the Hill Country for thousands of years, although there is no doubt that cedar thickets can invade overgrazed pastures as well as abandoned cropland left on its own without its original vegetation cover. An aerial photograph from July of 1975, just 2 years after this farm/ranchland was sold by descendants of the original pioneering settlers to a Corpus Christi investor, shows our field clear of cedar (see Figure 6). An enlargement of the square in the lower left quadrant of Figure 6 is given in Figure 7, in which the rock walls surrounding the field, marked by the small rectangle, are partially indicated only by dark, spotty lines of young cedar trees sprouting along the course of the walls.

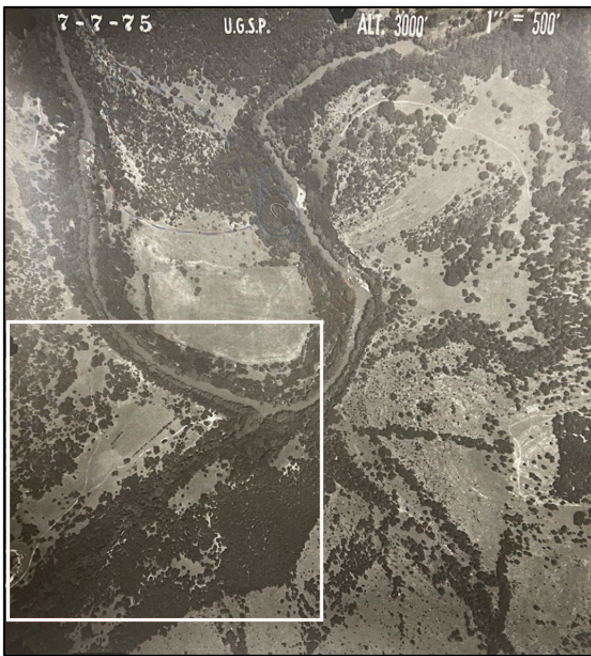


Fig. 6. An aerial photo taken on July 7, 1975, showing the Little Bluestem Field in the Bauer Unit on the north side of the Guadalupe River (the bare, oval-shaped field inside the large bend of the River), and the confluence of the Guadalupe River and Honey Creek (just opposite the Little Bluestem Field on the south side of the River). From the TPWD archives at the Texas State Library and Archives Commission, Austin, Texas.

Forty-six years later, in a satellite photo from Google Maps, the same field, marked by the small rectangle, is scarcely visible, almost entirely obscured by *Juniperus ashei* (see Figure 8). But while it is “invasive,” the cedar is also protecting the soil from further degradation, and one can already see upon close inspection on the ground a buildup of cedar duff and grasses growing under the trees. As cedar expert Elizabeth McGreevy argues, “Mountain Cedars do not cause erosion, nor do they degrade soils....The soil was already degraded and eroded before pioneering thickets of bushy-cedars began to spread.”<sup>3</sup> She concludes that pioneering bushy cedars actually reduce erosion in time, since their “dense canopies increase organic matter, reduce rain impact and shade degraded soils.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth McGreevy 2021, *Wanted: Cedars, Dead and Alive*, p. 251.

by Mackenzie Brown and Charleen Moore

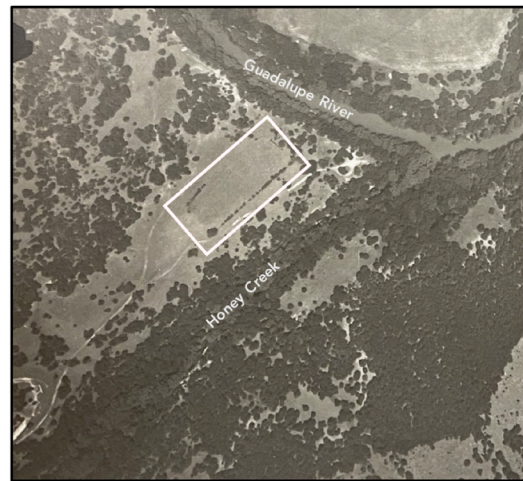


Fig. 7. Detail from Figure 6, with closeup of field in 1975



Fig. 8. Same field as in Figure 7, with field obscured by cedar, fall 2021.

We all probably best remember from Frost’s famous poem the line, “Good fences make good neighbors.” But Frost wondered “Why do they make good neighbors?” He wanted to know what he would be walling in and what walling out. “Cows,” he speculated, but there were no longer cows in Frost’s lands, any more than there are here. Frost was willing to let nature take its course and allow the walls to tumble. But for us, the walls are testimony to the German Hill Country settlers of the 19th and early 20th centuries, a testament to their enterprising spirit against incredible hardships. Thus, it is not just the presence of or absence of cows that may make old walls desirable. As the naturalist, Roy Bedichek, wrote over 70 years ago, “The weathering of stone fences, the look of age, venerable and nerve-quieting, is time-created. Without losing evidence of their human origin, they finally come to harmonize with natural features of the landscape, pleasing also because they are plainly indigenous.”<sup>5</sup> So let us modify Frost’s famous line: “Good fences make good witnesses.” And be sure to stop and admire them the next time you visit Honey Creek.

<sup>4</sup> McGreevy 2021, p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> Roy Bedichek 1961, *Adventures with a Texas Naturalist*, p. 9.

## TROOP 285 30 October Service Project

By David Kibler

On a delightfully cool fall Saturday a group of fifteen eager Scouts and parents arrived at Guadalupe River State Park headquarters to contribute again to the park's maintenance efforts. This was another in a long series of such workdays performed semi-annually at the park, since the first project back in the spring of 2007. Troop 285 was founded in 1954 and is headquartered at the Coker Methodist Church in north San Antonio. In addition, this troop has performed nearly ten Eagle Scout projects of various kinds since 2000 in the park..

The project for this day was performed at the historic Rust House, where a variety of renovations and improvements to this 1917 structure have been accomplished in the past few years. In this case the



work for the day involved preparing a shallow trench, two inches deep and eighteen to twenty-four inches wide around the base of the newly-repainted metal panels, covering the underside of this pier and beam foundation structure. After digging out the trench around the house and moving the dirt recovered to a nearby earthen berm, the Scouts filled the trenches uniformly with



gravel moved in wheelbarrows from a nearby gravel pile. The purpose of the project was to build up this gravel area, at the drip-line from the metal house roof, designed to eliminate the splashing of dirt from rain run-off onto the metal panels.

By 11:30 am the crew had accomplished the work, designed and supervised that day by park employee Howell Pugh. Lunch was provided afterward by Scout Cole Finney, who was the Troop project leader. Now the troop looks forward to continuing its work at the park in the spring of 2022.

We walked toward the rust house on a late October morning. With our tools in hand we marked out where we would begin digging. Starting at the front steps of the house, we worked our way around the perimeter, digging a shallow berm. Once the shallow trench was to Mr Howell's satisfaction, he permitted us to begin filling it with gravel. We worked efficiently, and completed our service project with time to spare.



Come on out – the birding is GREAT

by Linda Gindler

Perhaps the 2021-22 Winter will bring another record snowfall, but either way there will be plenty of mild days throughout the season perfect for exploring the park. Winter tends to be a quieter time with less vegetation making for a great opportunity to tote along a pair of binoculars or camera for a closer look at Mother Nature.

One family to watch for during the winter are the vultures. You might think of them more as an autumn bird because of their Halloween notoriety, but the Park's two vulture species (Black Vulture and Turkey Vulture) are year-round residents and worth watching in the winter. Many people refer to these birds as "buzzards" which is a case of mistaken identity dating back to colonial times. In Europe, "buzzard" refers to a type of hawk not used in falconry. The word derives from the French word busart meaning inferior hawk. European buzzards are medium to large birds of prey (i.e., hawks) in the genus Buteo. They have broad wings allowing them to soar on high thermal currents. Early European colonists saw the large soaring vultures of North America and thought of the flight patterns of the European Honey Buzzard and Common Buzzard and mistakenly called the North American vultures "buzzards". Thus, a mistaken identity was born that persists today. North America does have Buteo species including the Red-tailed Hawk and Broad-wing Hawk. Had the earlier mistake not been made these species would most likely would have been dubbed Red-tailed Buzzard and Broad-wing Buzzard.

There are 23 vulture species around the world. Sadly, they get a bad reputation because of their association with death which comes from their preferred carrion diet. The association with death is so strong that even a group of vultures is called a "wake". In truth, they provide a valuable ecological service that reduces death as they clean away disease spreading carcasses. Vultures have several interesting adaptations including bald featherless heads and necks that keep their heads clean when sticking it inside of a carcasses and extremely strong stomach acid which protects them from diseases found in rotting flesh.

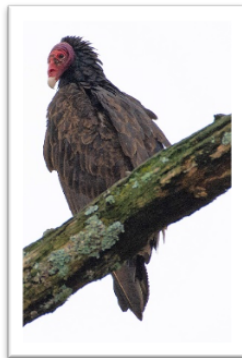
Turkey Vultures get their name because their reddish featherless heads resemble that of a Turkey. To identify one high in the sky, look for a large dark bird with two-toned coloration. The body and leading edge



Turkey Vultures (Photos by Ken Butler)

of the wing will be dark while the trailing edge of the wing and tail lighter. They have a slow deep wingbeat with a bit of a wobble. Turkey Vultures have a keen sense of smell and can find dead animals even below the tree canopy. Turkey Vultures are found throughout North and South America. Birds found in the northern states and Canada will migrate during the winter months to warmer climates in some years swelling the population in the park.

Black Vultures are slightly smaller than their Turkey Vulture cousins. They have black featherless heads and white wingtips.



Turkey Vultures (Photos by Ken Butler)

Identify soaring Black Vultures by watching their wingbeat which is quick and snappy. Black Vultures like to hang out with their Turkey cousins because the Turkey has a keener sense of smell. The Turkey Vulture sniffs out the meal and the Black crashes the party. Black Vultures can be found from Texas east to the Atlantic as well as

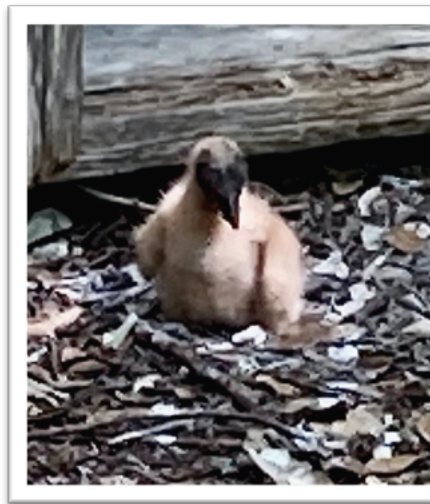
Central and South America.

On any given day you should be able to spot vultures flying high above the park. For a closer look check the trees in the Day Use Area either early or late in the day when you can find them roosting. In late winter, watch for courtship displays including aerial chases and males impressing females with open winged dances on



the ground. Neither the Black nor Turkey are fussy about nest building, instead they spend their time picking the location. They prefer a cave

like structure near or on the ground like a rock crevice, underbrush thicket, rotten log, abandoned building or even an unused doghouse. Eggs are laid directly on the ground. Vulture nestlings are "oh so cute" and worthy of a picture if you encounter one in the spring. But please keep your distance.



Whether you are looking for vultures or other winter birds, head on over to the park where the

birding is great. To learn more about birds in the park, pick up a birding checklist at the entry ranger station or Discovery Center. Watch the park calendar and join in on a birding program. Or take a seat at the Woodland Blind in the Day Use Area for an up-close view. Become a citizen scientist by entering your bird sightings into eBird.org a Cornell Lab of Ornithology's on-line platform for bird sightings. Data within eBird helps the Park's staff understand the avian population so they can better protect and conserve habitats and species. And finally, watch for completion of the new Friends' sponsored Savannah Blind being built along the Painted Bunting Trail. See the Friends website for more information and pictures of progress.

## Interpreter Update

by Holly Platz, Park Interpreter

Winter is on its way! After a mild summer and what seemed like a very reluctant fall, it's great to have cooler temperatures once again. I also love how our south-central Texas fall colors last well into winter – even on the rare days when the sky is gray, we get a pop of color from the trees whose leaves hang on just a bit longer.

We have some fun activities planned at the park this winter, including night hikes, archery, watercolor in the park (a brand new program!), birdwatching, and more.

Make sure to always check our online calendar to get the latest details on park events, including any updates or cancellations. As we all know, things can change quickly, and the health and safety of our visitors, volunteers, and park staff will always be our highest priority.

Check our calendar here: [https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/guadalupe-river/park\\_events](https://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/guadalupe-river/park_events) or just do an online search for “Guadalupe River State Park events”.

### Discovery Center:

Bring your family out and take a closer look at the park's nature through unique interactive exhibits and hands-on displays. Check out a FREE Junior Ranger backpack with tools like magnifying lenses, binoculars, sketchbook, and more to make your own discoveries on the trail! We also have two new Night Sky backpacks, available to overnight campers, for your family to find out all about the moon, stars, constellations, and more! The Discovery Center is open 10 am to 4 pm on Saturdays and Sundays, and open 12 to 4 pm on Fridays. During the week we are often open by appointment as well – text Ranger Holly at 210-549-7103 to check for availability.

### Save the Date!

All our events are posted on our online calendar each month (link above), but here are some of our recurring activities:

**Honey Creek Nature Hike:** Join experienced Honey Creek interpretive guides to discover the nature and history of Honey Creek State Natural Area. This hike is sponsored by the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek State Natural Area. Come experience the beauty of this protected area, and find out why it's important.

- Every Saturday at 9 am, with additional Sunday dates and times posted online – Registration is currently required for this program; check the park online calendar (link above) for details on hike dates and how to sign up.

### Star Parties with San Antonio Astronomical

**Association:** The experienced and knowledgeable members of the San Antonio Astronomical Association come out to the park every month to share their knowledge and their telescopes with park visitors! Join us as we look at the stars, moon, planets, nebulas, and more!

- Saturdays: Usually held on the 2nd Saturday of the month (usually no Star Party in January), but check the online calendar for details. Drop in anytime during the 2-hour star party; no registration needed. Times vary based on sunset; check the online calendar for details!



### Scenic Overlook Nature Hike:

Every Thursday, 10 - 11:30 am --- new later time during these cooler months! Join us every Thursday for an easy walk to the beautiful Scenic Overlook! Along the way we'll discover all types of nature. All ages welcome! Meet in front of the Discovery Center.



### Other ways to connect with the park's nature:

- Make sure to check out the Story Trail, our park's version of a StoryWalk®. The Story Trail starts just behind and to the right of the Discovery Center, and once you walk the short trail and read the whole book it's just 1/4 mile round-trip—perfect for the littles! We change the book out seasonally, so you and your family can enjoy a new book as you walk along the trail this winter. The Friends of Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek SNA sponsor this exciting self-guided program in partnership with Northeast Independent School District. The StoryWalk® Project was created by Anne Ferguson of Montpelier, VT and developed in collaboration with the Kellogg-Hubbard Library. Storywalk® is a registered service mark owned by Ms. Ferguson.



- If you have kids in your family, make sure to pick up their FREE Junior Ranger activity book! This is a great way for your family to explore the nature of the park on your own. Once a child has completed the number of activities based on their age, stop by the Discovery Center and they will earn their Junior Ranger badge! (You can also download the Junior Ranger activity book—just type “TPWD Junior Ranger” into your favorite search engine and you'll find it right away).

- Follow the park's

**Instagram** [Instagram.com/guadalupeiverstatepark](https://www.instagram.com/guadalupeiverstatepark) and

**Facebook** [Facebook.com/guadalupeiverstatepark](https://www.facebook.com/guadalupeiverstatepark)

**Interpreter Update**

by Holly Platz, Park Interpreter

to see park updates and news, as well as fun and educational videos, photos and stories!

**A note to all park volunteers:**

Thanks to all of you, both new volunteers and returning, who do so much for the park. All the work you do, whether it's leading a program, caring for the Habiscape, swearing in brand-new Junior Rangers, or picking up trash to make the park healthier for wildlife and more beautiful for visitors – is so important, and it truly makes a big difference. Thanks for helping make the park better, and for connecting families to the park.

**Looking Forward, Looking Back**

by Thea Platz, Park President

As the year comes to an end it is a traditional time to look back at the year behind us and to look forward to the coming year. For most of us 2021 is a year we will be happy to have behind us. Given the circumstances we were still able to accomplish many things, as we move forward we are looking forward to the ability to accomplish much more in less restrictive circumstances. Let's work together to bring back as much normal as we can safely achieve.

We will once again be celebrating you and the season with our "annual" Christmas party. This year's event will take place on December 10th from 6:30 to 9:00pm and will be held at the Cibolo Center for Conservation (formally Cibolo Nature Center) details can be found elsewhere in the newsletter. Please be sure to RSVP, it is especially important this year in order for us to plan for social distancing or to cancel if there is a not enough people who feel comfortable gathering at this time. This party gives us the opportunity to gather with volunteers working in all areas of the park and visit with each other as we enjoy sharing a meal and meeting families. This is also our annual meeting of Friends members when we vote and welcome in our Friends Board members for the coming year.

We will be bringing back the Monarch and Friends Pollinator Fiesta March 26th. This event celebrates pollinators of all types and the migration of the majestic Monarch. In addition to all of the wonderful presenters and activity providers, we have a lot of folks working behind the scenes before and during the event assuring a successful outcome.

We continue to support the programs offered by the park and to welcome families exploring in the Discovery Center. We were thrilled to be able to resume our Saturday morning nature hikes in Honey Creek State Natural area.

We appreciate all that you do that makes all of this and more possible! Without your volunteer efforts and financial support we would not be able to offer the many things that make Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek State Natural Area (GRSP/HCSNA) the premier park that it is and provide visitors with the best experience possible. If you are interested in volunteering for any of these events or would like more information contact us at friendsogrhc@gmail.com .

Being a member of the Friends group and working closely with the park staff means that we quickly become part of the (GRSP/HCSNA) family and as such it is with mixed feelings when staff moves to new positions. On one hand we are so proud of them and their accomplishments as they make decisions that are best for their careers and families, but we also will miss them and don't want to see them go. There have been many such situations this year, but I would like to extend a special acknowledgement to our former superintendent Barrett Durst. Thank you for your great leadership and support, we wish you the very best in your new superintendent position at Inks Lake. A big thank you goes to Assistant Superintendent Ben Fleury for his interim leadership during the transition period.

It is with excitement and enthusiasm that we extend the warmest of welcomes to our new Park Superintendent Brandon Lopes- Baca, we welcome you to the family and are anxious to achieve great things together.

We have been through a lot of changes in recent times, but are hoping for better times ahead and that with your help we will have the best year ever for 2022!

**\*2022 Membership Dues Are Now Payable\***

**Become A Friend / Renew Your Friendship Today:**

Memberships at all levels directly support Guadalupe River State Park /Honey Creek State Natural Area. You will be kept up to date on all the upcoming programs, events and park news as well as information on volunteer opportunities through our quarterly newsletter and park updates. As a Friends member you and your family will also have access to member only events.

**Fill out the section below and mail to the address below:**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Zip: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Type:** \_\_\_\_\_ New Member \_\_\_\_\_ Renewal

Student or Senior (over 62) Friend \$20.\_\_\_\_, Individual Friend \$25.\_\_\_\_,

Family Friend \$40.\_\_\_\_,

Best Friend Forever (lifetime level) \$1000. +\_\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_\_

If you are also interested in helping the park through volunteering, please tell us your areas of interest: \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to Friends of GR/HC, Inc. Mail to:  
**3350 Park Road 31, Spring Branch, TX 78070**

**Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek, Inc. is a 501(c) 3 organization.**

All donations are tax deductible. Membership dues renew in January.

We will not share your information or clutter your inbox.

**President**

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**Bill Beach**

**Director / Maintenance**

**Dave Kibler**

**Director at Large**

**Anthony Beverley**

**Director / Hikes**

**Nancy Gray**

**Director at Large**

**John Prentice**

**Director / Co-Historian**

**Mackenzie Brown**

**Director at Large**

**Janis Merritt**

**Director / Co-Historian**

**Charleen Moore**

**Director at Large**

**Ryan Bass**

**Friends of Guadalupe River  
and Honey Creek, Inc.**

3350 Park Road 31  
Spring Branch, Texas 78070

**We're on the web!**

**<https://friendsofgrhc.org>**

**The Friends of Guadalupe River and  
Honey Creek, Inc. is a  
non-profit organization working with  
Guadalupe River State Park and  
Honey Creek State Natural Area.**

**The "Friends" meet monthly at the Park.  
Please join us on the first  
Thursday at 5:30 pm.  
And bring a friend!**