SPECIAL EDITION: HONEY CREEK RANCH ACQUISITION

FRIENDS





SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2023

Reflections on Honey Creek Ranch - Past and Present

by Mackenzie Brown and Charleen Moore

HONEY CREEK RANCH: A SPECTACULAR ACQUISITION!

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) has finally acquired the 515-acre Honey Creek Ranch (Fig.1). This is one of the two most significant happenings of the last three decades impacting Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area ever since the original acquisition of the Park in 1974 and 1975, and the acquisition of the State Natural Area in 1985 and 1988. The sale of the Honey Creek Ranch transferring title from the previous owners Terry and Ronnie Urbanczyk to the State was closed on May 31, 2023, after a five-year struggle to preserve the land from a planned housing development.



Fig. 1. The entrance gate to Honey Creek Ranch off of Highway 46, installed by the Urbanzycks.

Photo by Mackenzie Brown

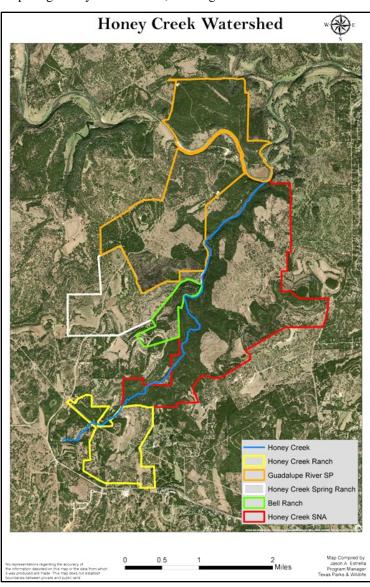
The other significant event concerns the 621-acre Honey Creek Spring Ranch that adjoins both Guadalupe River SP and Honey Creek SNA, and lies about 1 mile north of Honey Creek Ranch (see map on next page). Sisters Cindy Martinez and Joyce Moore own the ranch that has been in their family for six generations. Through the joint efforts of TPWD, the Nature Conservancy in Texas (TNC), and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Honey Creek Spring Ranch, which contains the Honey Creek Cave, became protected from residential or commercial development in February 2022 by gaining a conservation easement. The easement and the acquisition of Honey Creek Ranch are noteworthy achievements, as both are in Comal County. Comal and Hays County (immediately to the northeast) are the two fastest growing counties of over 100,000 population in the United States, having grown by 49% and 53%, respectively, between the 2010 and 2020 censuses.

Page 2 Reflections on Honey Creek Ranch: Past and Present (cont.)

A critical step in the acquisition of Honey Creek Ranch was taken at a Commission Meeting of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department on August 26, 2021. At the meeting the following motion was duly approved: "The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission authorizes the Executive Director to take all necessary steps to acquire approximately 515 acres of land at Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek State Natural Area in Comal County" (a complete transcript of the Commission Meeting is available at: https://tpwd.texas.gov/business/feedback/meetings/2021/0826/transcripts/commission/).

As for the rationale behind the motion, the agenda for the meeting noted in general terms: "Streams and rivers in the Texas Hill Country located near the Edwards Plateau are renowned for their crystal-clear, spring-fed waters. Unfortunately, the iconic streams of the Hill Country, especially in the East Hill Country (west of a line from Killeen to San Antonio) are threatened by groundwater pumping; land fragmentation and urbanization; diversions; nutrient and pollution run-off; and point-source discharges. Many historic springs have dried up, and the conservation community, including Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has focused considerable effort on trying to preserve some of the more pristine streams that remain."

Regarding Honey Creek Ranch, specifically, Ted Hollingsworth, Director of the Land Conservation Program within TPWD, explained at the meeting that San Antonio is just 25 miles south of Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area, and San Antonio's population is growing. Thus, the Park and SNA are increasing in their "value for conservation and recreation." He further observed, "The Honey Creek watershed itself is one of the most pristine systems certainly in the eastern Hill Country. Just a clear water, spring-fed, classic picture-postcard Hill Country stream." In summarizing the argument for acquiring Honey Creek Ranch, Hollingsworth concluded that the tract contains "a variety of indigenous native habitats, includ-



Map of Honey Creek Ranch in relation to Park, SNA, and Honey Creek Spring Ranch

ing Juniper oak forest and Savannah, ... [and] some nice prairie grasslands. The tract we're proposing to acquire is approximately 515 acres, has direct access on Highway 46, which will offer access into the south end of that complex that we just historically have not had. That access will result in the opportunity for some significant recreation development that we just, like I say, simply have not had in that portion of that state park/state natural area complex. And, again, the tract is going to be critical for ... the long-term protection of the water quality and quantity in Honey Creek."

At the meeting, a map of Honey Creek Ranch in relation to Guadalupe River SP, Honey Creek SNA, and Honey Creek Spring Ranch was presented (left). The final boundaries for the State's acquisition of Honey Creek Ranch may not be exactly those indicated in the map.

The one call-in speaker at the meeting, Seth Billingsley, a Conservation Associate for Environment Texas, echoing some of Hollingsworth's comments, pled with the Commission that Texas needs public lands for its growing population, remonstrating, "Like most Texans, I don't have a private ranch to visit or the funds to take a weekend trip to Colorado. As such, my outdoor opportunities are limited to public parks funded by my tax dollars and hunting permit."

Thus, while development of a once-planned subdivision of almost 2,400 units for Honey Creek Ranch (later reduced to around 1640 units) would have given a relatively small number of individuals the opportunity to live in the Hill Country, such development would have done little for the millions of people in San Antonio and surrounding regions who increasingly long for and need access to nature on public lands.

Reflections on Honey Creek Ranch: Past and Present (cont.) Page 3

Much remained to be done after the Commission Meeting, for the TNC at this point had only negotiated an option to purchase the land, and various obstacles remained. Nonetheless, the Commission was optimistic, anticipating that the sale would be closed "on or about November 1, 2021." They were only 18 months too optimistic, but their optimism in the end was justified.

While many dozens of individuals worked tirelessly on all sides to complete the extremely complex transaction, one person in particular is worth singling out. Jeff Francell, Director of Land Protection for the TNC, worked diligently with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission and the Urbanczyks to secure the funds, to cancel or renegotiate the water contract that had been signed early on for the development of the subdivision, and to eliminate any other obstacles for the sale of the property to TPWD. Figure 2 shows Francell presenting a map of the Honey Creek Ranch project to the Board members of the TNC that occurred on November 19, 2021, at the Rust House in Honey Creek SNA.



Fig. 2. Jeff Francell presenting the Honey Creek Ranch project to the NCT Board.

Photo by Mackenzie Brown

A little historical background on Honey Creek Ranch provides a deeper appreciation of this Hill Country gem. The original settlers on the land now known as Honey Creek Ranch were Robert Moos and his family, one of five German immigrant families to homestead in the Honey Creek area in the late 1860s (Bryden Moon, "Gathering in the Past," Summer 2012 Newsletter, Friends of Guadalupe River, Honey Creek, Inc., p. 1). Sometime early in the 1900s, Robert Moos sold the land that was to become Honey Creek Ranch to Fritz Scheel, an ambitious and harddriving rancher and mule trainer, and son of German immigrant Bernhard Joseph Scheel. Bernhard Joseph had received 160 acres free from the State of Texas in the Honey Creek/Anhalt area that included the present site of St. Joseph's Honey Creek Catholic Church. He homesteaded the land in the summer of 1873 (Clarence A. Scheel, Bernhard Joseph Scheel, His Family in Germany and in Texas). Soon after Bernhard settled in Honey Creek, his sons Fritz and Hermann, both trained stone masons, built a family home for their parents, using native limestone, on

the original 160-acre parcel. They also built other similar houses in the immediate area, including one for Fritz and his wife, and another for neighbor Robert Moos. When Moos eventually sold part of his ranch to Fritz, it included the house that Fritz had built, which Fritz's oldest son, Eugen Valentin Scheel, inherited. Eugen's house is the original ranch house on Honey Creek Ranch.

The houses that Fritz and Hermann built were all of native limestone, with high gable roofs, an attic, and a porch extending across the whole of the front. Eugen's house, shown in Figure 3 with snow on the ground and roof, along with most of the 320 acres that Eugen inherited, now constitute much of Honey Creek Ranch. The ranch house in Figure 4 is Eugen's original home today, but remodeled, including the addition of a modern bathroom on the right side of the house, cutting off some of the front porch. It is interesting that Clarence Anthony Scheel, grandson of Eugen Scheel and who attended the celebration of TPWD's acquisition of Honey Creek Ranch with his sister Bernice Friesenhahn, noted in his 2005 family history of the Scheel's in Germany and Texas, that "Fritz would certainly be proud to know that the houses that he built in the 1800's are still in excellent condition and in use after more than 125 years." Eugen sold his ranch in 1950, the last of the Scheels to own land in the Honey Creek area (Scheel, *Bernhard Joseph Scheel*, p. 7.18). The Honey Creek Ranch, in various parcels, was bought by the Urbanzcyks beginning in 1992.



Fig. 3 Eugen V. Scheel's home, with snow. Photo courtesy Clarence A. Scheel



Fig. 4. Eugen V. Scheel's home today, with Terry Urbanczyk.
Photo by Mackenzie Brown

Page 4 Reflections on Honey Creek Ranch: Past and Present (cont.)

Once they had purchased the ranch, Ronnie and Terry added new buildings that complemented the historic house and outbuildings (Figs. 5 and 6). Among the new buildings is the magnificent Party Barn (Fig. 8). It was here on the ranch that they raised their three children. And it was here, in the Party Barn, that all three children were married. Terry and Ronnie are lifetime members of the Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek, and Terry served as secretary from 2004 – 2009 and editor of the newsletter through 2011. By 2018, with children grown and upkeep and management of the ranch "a daunting process," the Urbanczyks felt it was time to sell. Terry recalls that when she first thought her beloved ranch, with countless family memories, was to be subdivided, "it truly broke my heart." Then, she rejoices, the TNC and donors "made it possible to keep the land and its legacy intact for generations to come. For that I am eternally grateful" (personal communication, 06/13/2023).

The benefits of this acquisition for the Honey Creek watershed are nicely summarized by Jeff Francell: "The Honey Creek watershed is somewhere around 8,000 acres. If we include the Urbanczyk property to the Honey Creek Spring Ranch easement with the state natural area, maybe three-fifths of the watershed is protected....And that certainly includes the most important three-fifths" (quoted in John H. Osdick, "HOPE FOR HONEY: The final pieces are falling into place to save Honey Creek, a Hill Country treasure," *Texas Parks and Wildlife Magazine*, August/September 2022).



Fig. 5. Interior of Eugen V. Scheel's home as it is today.

Photo by Mackenzie Brown



Fig. 6. The old windmill, cistern, and tank outside the back of the house.

Photo by Mackenzie Brown

The celebration of the acquisition (see Figs. 7 and 8) took place on June 22, 2023, with approximately 100 persons attending, including GRSP Superintendent Brandon Lopes-Baca, TPWD Commission Vice-Chair Dix Scott, TPWD Executive Director David Yoskowitz, State Senator Donna Campbell, State Director of The Nature Conservancy in Texas Suzanne Scott, and of course the hosts Terry and Ronnie Urbanczyk. Dix Scott noted in his address to attendees: "This is for all the future generations of Texans." Mr. Urbanczyk told the story of how, when he asked his 'Board of Directors,' "Do y'all want to make this [ranch] a park?" they answered, "Yes Grandpa, let's make it a park!" And so it now is.



Fig. 7. Ronnie Urbanczyk with Terry spoke of their love for Honey Creek Ranch.

Photo by Charleen Moore



Fig. 8. Lunch line inside the Party Barn. Photo by Mackenzie Brown

by Bob Morris

Park Celebrations

by Thea Platz and Jessica Bergner

Howdy Folks,

What a difference a little rain makes! The wildflowers are beautiful in the Park and Honey Creek. While we still need a lot more rain to make up for many dry months, we are blessed with what we received in April and May.

The ice storm in February was pretty brutal as the area in general suffered significant tree damage. Trails were blocked

and campgrounds were a bit of a mess. However, Park Staff and a cadre of Volunteers quickly went into action and all trails and campgrounds were accessible within a week or so. A Big Texas Thank You for all the folks that participated. Government



Chipping crew at work. Photo by Brandon Lopes-Baca

Canyon staff and volunteers were a big help as well.

A day's worth of chipping. Photo by Brandon Lopes-Baca

As you may be aware, the Friends Group hired Hill Country Trees to chip woody debris in campgrounds, the trailer dump station and key locations along the main road. Total cost was \$4,284. Brandon Lopes-Baca, Park Superintendent, was pleased with the project. Although much

has been accomplished in the past few months, there is still work to be done.

One final note: current paid members of the Friends Group stands at 43. Our census has been dropping over the last several years and is at a low point. When you have a moment, I encourage you to drop a check in the mail to renew your membership. We need your support to sustain our efforts at Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek State Natural Area. See page 11 for a membership form.

My Best Wishes for a Happy and Safe Summer!







Park Celebrations

This year has seen many celebrations of note for the Park, beginning in March with the annual Pollinator Fiesta, continued in May by making lots of s'mores to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the state park system, followed in June with a Birthday Bash for the 40th anniversary of the opening of Guadalupe River State Park, and finally by celebrating the acquisition of Honey Creek Ranch by TPWD which will increase the Honey Creek State Natural Area by over 500 acres. The acquisition of this ranch was a study in persistence and hard work by The Nature Conservancy in Texas, the

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and many other conservation groups. Each of these events is highlighted in this edition of the Newsletter.

Monarch and Friends Pollinator Fiesta

The Friends of Guadalupe River SP / Honey Creek SNA continued their annual offering of the Monarch and Friends Pollinator Fiesta on March 25th along the trail behind the Discovery Center. This is one of the ways the Friends are able to enrich the visitor experience, organizing exciting events that extend the opportunities for fun and enrichment beyond the river and trails.

With the arrival of spring and the welcome rain the Park was lush with new growth. The plants, having struggled through some serious drought and harsh weather conditions, were now green, blooming, and full of the butterflies and other pollinators that are such a welcome sight and certainly something to be celebrated.

There were many community partners offering activities, information, and presentations. About 300 people took part, visiting the variety of tables set up along the trail by the Discovery Center. Many of the visitors sported a new butterfly or flower on their cheeks and participated in pollinator-related crafts and activities at the tables along the path. See photos from the event on page 6.

100 S'more Years Celebration

The Friends helped the Park celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the establishment of the Texas State Park system by providing the ingredients for tasty and gooey s'mores with marshmallows toasted to perfection on Solo Stoves that will allow the Park to do smokeless and safe outdoor cooking throughout the Park in the upcoming years. The Friends also provided their time to help assemble the perfect campfire treat and photograph it! The weather also cooperated which allowed us to roast 'mallows, sing campfire tunes, play s'mores trivia, craft campfires (supplies provided by Artpace) and create an experience that many families will remember and cherish for their lifetime. See photos from the event on page 7.

GRSP 40th Anniversary Birthday Bash

On June 3rd, Guadalupe River State Park celebrated yet another anniversary! It was not only a celebration of all state parks, but it was also the 40th birthday bash for the Park itself! The Park hosted different divisions and support teams from the agency, as well as external partners with outreach tables and activities. As visitors enjoyed a slice of delicious birthday cake supplied by the Friends group, they were able collectively to reflect on four decades of providing endless joy, relaxation, and unforgettable memories in the Park. We could not have asked for a better birthday celebration! See photos from the event on page 7.

Monarch and Friends Pollinator Fiesta





































100 S'more Years Celebration

















Guadalupe River State Park 40th Anniversary Birthday Bash





























Summer is a great time to visit the Park for a cool dip in the inviting Guadalupe River. Before taking that plunge, take time to explore the Park's woodlands and savannahs because the recent rains mean they are buzzing with activity. Much of the Park's wildlife will be in family groups during the summer months with parenting taking center stage. Parents of all types will be busy fetching the next meal and teaching their young survival skills – including how to watch out for a top park predator – the hawks.

Hawks are part of a larger group of birds called raptors. The word raptor in Latin means to seize or capture and is illustrative of how they hunt. All raptors have strong talons and sharp hooked bills. The word hawk is a common term used to describe small to medium sized daytime raptors with wide rounded wings and hooked bills. Even with that description it can be confusing on which birds to include or not include on a hawk list. Generally, a list includes species with one of the following words in their common name: harrier, kite, osprey, or hawk. Other raptors such as eagles (usually larger), falcons (usually with long pointed wings), vultures (usually eat carrion not live catches) and owls (usually nighttime hunters) are generally not included on a hawk list. Of course, there are always exceptions, but at the Park, the general definition holds true.

At Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area the hawks are well represented with eleven species having been recorded within the two properties. Four of the eleven are present during the summer months as they nest and raise their young. The Red-tailed Hawk is one of the most common hawks at the Park and in North America too. You will most likely see one soaring high or perched on a large tree in the savannah areas where they hunt for their favorite food - small mammals. Look for the characteristic red tail for identification. shouldered Hawk likes tall trees and water, so it is most often found in the wooded areas where it hunts for a variety of prey including small mammals, frogs, snakes, birds, and lizards. You will most likely hear one before you see it so brush up on sound identification before heading out. When you spot one, look for the characteristic red-shoulder patch and narrow white bands on the tail. Both species are from a hawk genus called Buteo. Buteos share common traits including broad wings and an affection for soaring. While these two are fascinating to watch, the other two (Cooper's Hawk and Zone-tail Hawk) are not as common and make for a special treat when you find one.

Cooper's Hawks are a small to medium sized hawk in the genus Accipiter. They are the only Accipiter to call the Park home year-round and the only one to nest within the Park. Cooper's Hawks have a broad range spanning from the Atlantic to the Pacific and north into Canada and are common in woodland habitat. But because they tend not to perch prominently and spend less time soaring than buteos they are often overlooked. They are long-tailed and short-winged making them one of the most skillful agile fliers in the Park, a skill they use to their advantage in pursuit of their favorite food—birds. Generally, very small birds are safe around Cooper's as they prefer to invest their



Cooper's Hawk (photo by John Prentice)

energy in a bigger meal such as doves, jays, robins, or the occasional chicken. At the Park, they are sometimes spotted in the Day-Use Area and Camping Loops. Cooper's Hawks have become common in leafy urban settings too where bird feeders provide easy prey. If you have a Cooper's Hawk staking out your feeder, take it down for a few days to encourage the Cooper's to move along. Males and females are similar in color with the female being 25-30% larger. Adults are blue gray above with reddish bars on the underparts and three wide dark bands on the tail.

A close cousin to the Cooper's is the Sharp-shinned Hawk which you might encounter at the Park in the fall, winter, or spring but it would be rare in the summer. Cooper's and Sharp-shinned hawks are difficult to tell apart even for experts. In general, the Cooper's is larger — the size of a crow—while Sharp-shinned are more the size of a blue jay. Also, the Cooper's has a larger blockish head and rounded tail when fanned out, while the Sharp-shinned has a smallish rounded head and squared tail when fanned.

While Cooper's Hawks are thrilling to see flying through the trees, the Zone-tailed Hawks are a Park rock star because of their limited North America range. Like the Red-tailed and Red-shoulder Hawks, the Zone-tailed is from the genus Buteo. The Zone-tailed hawk's historical range is Mexico, Central America, and South America, but for about three decades, Zone-tails have been expanding their range northward into Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. Today about 2000 birds spend part of the year in these states. The Park has sightings each year from early March through September while they raise young. Most likely you will spot them soaring high where they look very similar to Turkey Vultures so check vulture kettles carefully. Some experts say that their turkey vulture



Zone-tailed Hawk (photo by Ken Butler)

appearance gives them an advantage while hunting as unsuspecting prey overlook the threat, thinking they are harmless vultures. In flight, look for a dark colored bird with a single broad and 1-2 narrow white bands on the tail. Perched birds will be dark all over with yellow legs and bills. Zone-tailed Hawks have a varied diet including small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds. They typically hunt in areas of uneven terrain such as foothills and canyons near gaps in the forest by flying slow and low and then dropping suddenly onto prey. They have elaborate courtship displays where the pair perform loops, rolls, and dives from high in the sky. Courtship displays start upon returning from their wintering grounds and continue into the nesting season.



Zone-tailed Hawk (photo by Ken Butler)

If you would like to learn more about birds, watch the Park's Facebook page and website for upcoming birding programs. Programs vary from month to month and include day as well as evening events. Or take a seat in one of the Park's two bird blinds. With their shaded seating they are a great way to stay cool without getting wet. Go exploring and hit the hiking trails for more varied encounters. So, grab your binoculars or camera and come on out because the birding is GREAT!

In this issue we pay tribute to a long-time friend of Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area, Bill Beach. Bill retired this past March after devoting many years of service to the Park and the Friends. Bill first worked at Park Headquarters for ten years starting in 2002. Upon his retirement, he then became a member of the Friends and was elected to the Board of Directors, serving as Treasurer of the organization from 2014 through this past March.

Bill was not born in Texas but moved here when he was four. He served two tours in Viet Nam, managed a multimedia show and did living history programs. He also worked at a telecom company for 19 years. Bill had a long history as a camper before he worked at Guadalupe River State Park. He even sacrificed his wedding ring to the waters of the Guadalupe River. So, it was only fitting that he would return as an employee in 2002 following his retirement from his regular career. At that time, he joined the staff in Headquarters providing customer service for the many who came for camping, hiking and enjoying the river. The staff personally got to know many of the visitors. Of course, there were those who were confused or dissatisfied and Bill handled them with great diplomacy. He also served as the "go-to" person for the many technical questions that arose from new technology. Bill increasingly took on administrative responsibilities and advanced to Assistant Office Manager working with Office Manager Joan Nitschke. When new registration and reporting systems were implemented, Bill rose to the challenge by learning them and then training the staff (not an easy task). When Joan retired in 2010, Bill became the Office Manager.

Bill has always been extremely helpful to newcomers to the Park, and to new members of the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek SNA, sharing his intimate knowledge of the cultural and natural history of the area, including long-forgotten historical sites that he had discovered in his exploratory hikes. As just one small example, Charleen and Mackenzie had heard from a descendant of one of the pioneering families that settled near Honey Creek that they had raised sugar cane and built a molasses oven out of the native limestone rocks in the area. Anxious to locate that oven, the two queried Bill about it, and he was able to provide sufficient details and landmarks to allow them to locate the oven, now hugely overgrown with Ashe juniper, pictured above right.

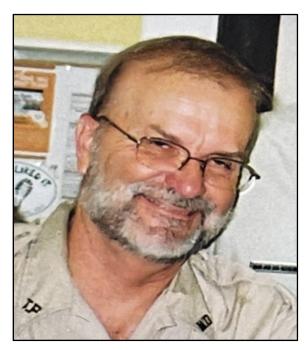
Throughout his life, Bill has been an avid hiker with his wife Pam and an excellent photographer. He has probably covered every inch of Guadalupe River State Park and a great deal of Honey Creek State Natural Area on his hikes,



The old molasses oven in Honey Creek State Natural Area, now almost entirely hidden in a cedar brake. (Photo by Mackenzie Brown)

and he often took his camera with him. Some of Bill's outstanding photographs accompany this article (see next page) and demonstrate the love he has of nature and especially of Guadalupe River and Honey Creek.

Thank you, Bill, for your long-term service and devotion to the Park and Friends. We commend you on a job well done. We look forward to seeing you on the nature trails and wish you all the best in your new adventures.



Bill during his time at Headquarters. Image courtesy of Joan Nitchske.

Photos by William (Bill) Beach



Fall at Honey Creek. ©Bill Beach



Lily Pads on Honey Creek. ©Bill Beach



Fall on the Guadalupe River. ©Bill Beach



Lesser Night Hawk. ©Bill Beach

2023 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 MemberRenewal
Student or Senior (over 62) \$20 Individual \$25
Family \$40, Lifetime \$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.

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Holly Camero

Friends of Guadalupe River and Honey Creek, Inc.

3350 Park Road 31 Spring Branch, Texas 78070



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, usually on the third Thursday at 5:30. Please join us and bring a friend!

For meeting venue and possible change of date or time, contact us at: friendsofgrhc@gmail.com