


FRIENDS



OF GUADALUPE RIVER STATE PARK
HONEY CREEK SNA



SUMMER NEWSLETTER 2026

A Message from the President

by Bob Morris

Howdy Folks,

Your Friends' Board has been busy. The Pollinator Fiesta on March 14 was very successful, with over 20 exhibitors and over 300 participants. Hats off to Doug Starasinic and his committee for creating a wonderful event, with new signage welcoming visitors to the event. (See p. 5 of this Newsletter for more details and photos of the Fiesta.)

Our City Nature Challenge results were impressive. For the second year in a row our "city" (the San Antonio Metro Area) came in first among U.S. cities and second worldwide both for number of observations (102,653) and for number of species reported (4,816).** Our guides were readily available to assist. Gilbert Martinez, Honey Creek SNA Superintendent, led a group of TPWD Aquatic Specialists and volunteers at Honey Creek to examine and report on fauna.

We held several special walks this season, including ones for Texas Master Naturalist classes, the Hiker Babes, San Antonio Newcomer's Club, and our special event, the Mother's Day Walk, in which we had outstanding participation with some 32 participants. This walk was led by Mary Habib, Mackenzie Brown, and Charleen Moore. What I find remarkable was that we had a fair number of repeat participants from last year.

We continue to proceed nicely with the Dark Skies project. We were successful in obtaining a \$5,000 grant.

Okay (drum roll please): the Friends Group presented a high-end Axis Trackchair on May 17 to Guadalupe River State Park that will provide access to designated trails for those with mobility challenges. WOW! (See the story on Trail Accessibility on pp. 2-5.)

We could not have done all of this without your support. Well done folks, well done!

Bob

A Message from the Park Staff

by Benjamin Shook, Asst Park Superintendent

We'd like to extend our sincere appreciation to the Friends Group for your continued support—your dedication truly strengthens the work we do every day. This month, we're excited to welcome back Richard Diaz, an extraordinary Customer Service Representative, to Headquarters. His return is a tremendous asset to our team.

We're also pleased to share that we are finalizing the hiring of a new seasonal Maintenance Ranger and a seasonal Interpretive Ranger who will be joining us very soon. Their support will be invaluable as we prepare for a busy summer season here at Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek State Natural Area. In addition, we have a new Summer Operations Intern, Morgan Sholund (see her introduction below). Thank you for your continued partnership and dedication to TPWD's mission.

My name is Morgan Sholund, and I'm currently a master's student at Sam Houston St. U., studying ecosystem ecology. I am a Spring Branch native, and I grew up going to Guadalupe River SP frequently. One of my favorite things to do is being outside, so if I'm not working, I love going for walks, paddleboarding, kayaking, and hammocking.

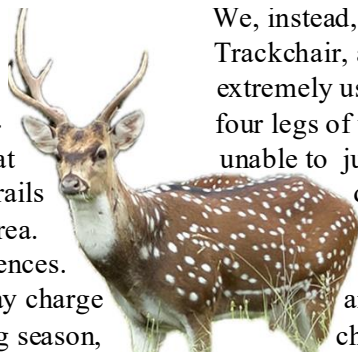


A note from the editors: This is our first digital-only issue of the Friends' newsletter. One new feature that this platform allows is that sources can now be indicated with double asterisks: **. Clicking on the double asterisks in the second paragraph of the President's message, for example, will take you to the source of the CNC results for 2026. Other websites can also be accessed.

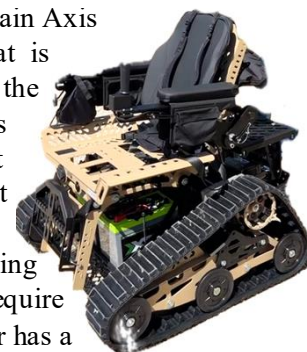
Trail Accessibility in Guadalupe River State Park: Access by Axis

by Mackenzie Brown and Charleen Moore

Access by Axis? What does an Axis have to do with trail accessibility? Not very much if you are thinking of the amazing four-legged mammal from India that has no trouble accessing all the trails in the Park and State Natural Area. And it can easily jump over 6' fences. But it is not user-friendly and may charge anyone if cornered, during rutting season, or to protect its young.



We, instead, are thinking of the all-terrain Axis Trackchair, a motorized wheelchair that is extremely user-friendly. While lacking the four legs of the mammal, and while it is unable to jump over even a 1' fence, it does possess two tracks that deer don't have. And it does not charge people. Being an electric vehicle, it does require charging. And the Trackchair has a lot to do with trail accessibility for the mobility challenged.



According to a 2023 report evaluating general accessibility at Guadalupe River State Park, none of the trails in the Park were deemed accessible for the mobility-challenged at the time of inspection on March 21, 2022. The trails assessed were: four at Cedar Sage, three at Turkey Sink, three at the Day-Use Area, and three in the Bauer Unit (*Guadalupe River State Park Program and Policy Report July 28, 2023, page 7*).^{**} The report was conducted by the WT Group (WTG), an engineering, design, and consultation company, retained by TPWD to assess compliance of Guadalupe River State Park with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The WTG report refers not only to the ADA but also to the Texas Accessibility Standards (TAS) of 2012. The latter addressed accessibility at “parking, entries, restrooms, and other typical building elements,” as well as at “playgrounds, boating and fishing areas, and sports fields and courts.” But the TAS, as the WGT noted, did not address some of the most important assets at Guadalupe River State Park, including campsites, picnic areas, and most relevant to this essay, trails. In other words, the TAS addressed many issues relevant to people with disabilities but focused on “elimination of architectural barriers,” not on trail accessibility (the TAS are available [here](#)).

The WTG report, however, optimistically noted that the lack of attention to outdoor recreational assets at the Park, including campsites, picnic areas, and trails, would “change at the end of 2023 or early 2024. The Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation (TDLR) has signaled its intent to adopt the pending federal guidance for key outdoor assets integral to TPWD sites like Guadalupe River State Park” (page 2). Less optimistically, the WTG report noted that there could exist “Conditions for Exceptions [to requirements of the ADA and TAS] at Certain Outdoor Recreation Assets.” Foremost among these was “impractical terrain.” The WTG report observed: “When locating and designing new trails, making the trail accessible should be a very high priority. **This is especially important at Guadalupe River State Park where none of the 12 existing trails are accessible** [emphasis in the original].” (Elsewhere in the report, 13 trails are listed, as indicated above.)

Digging into the details of the WTG report regarding recommendations, we find the following:

- For the three Bauer Unit trails, each was considered to lack “an accessible surface.” The recommendation: “Leave as is and designate other trails in the park as accessible.” Given the relative remoteness of the Bauer Unit, such a recommendation is reasonable. Now let’s look at the recommendations for park trails on the southside of the Guadalupe River. While the report indicates that parking spaces at some trailheads meet requirements, we are here interested in the trails themselves. The new Persimmon Path to the Savannah Bird Blind was not mentioned.
- For the four Cedar Sage trails, no recommendations were made.
- Regarding the three Day-Use Area trails, (1) the Discovery Center Loop, (2) Cedar Sage River Trail, and (3) River Overlook Trail, all three were deemed “not accessible” and lacking an accessible route. The recommendation for all three was: “Replace surface of trail with one that is firm and stable as a smart practice.”
- As for the three Turkey Sink trails: no recommendations were made.

Recent technological developments have created alternative means to make trails accessible, rather than by replacing trail surfaces with ones that are “firm and stable”—a prohibitively expensive solution. This alternative does not try



to adapt the trails to the disabled but rather to provide the disabled with adaptations for the trails. One of the major adaptive devices for the mobility challenged is the all-terrain motorized wheelchair with tracks, rather than wheels, such as the Axis mentioned earlier. In 2023, as part of the Park’s centennial celebration, a motorized wheelchair was recognized in a TPWD post naming several accessibility projects made possible by 2\$ million in private donations (see the red-circled wheelchair in the TPWD post).



Several Texas state parks now have such chairs, “assistive chairs” or “adaptive loaner devices,” as the Park calls them, although not all are motorized. User-propelled GRIT “Freedom Chairs” are available at 22 State Parks or State Natural Areas, including Guadalupe River SP according to a recent but undated TPWD [website](#). These are suitable on relatively smooth, flat trails, for disabled people wanting an upper-body workout. Also available at some parks are tandem hiking carts, one-wheeled carts that hitch to a human companion who must weigh twice that of the disabled person in the cart, with a recommended limit of a 50-pound person in the cart. These are available at five Parks or SNAs. And finally, among the non-motorized assistive chairs are the Beach Wheelchairs, with very large wheels to navigate sand. These might have been useful at Guadalupe River State Park 112 million years ago when the Gulf shoreline was near the present-day Discovery Center, but those times are long gone. (The “beach” in the Day-Use Area today is mostly gravel interspersed with cypress roots.)

As for motorized wheelchairs, 11 Parks and SNAs are listed on the TPWD website as having such devices. The TPWD website has a [link](#) to the two types (brands) of motorized wheelchairs available at select State Parks. There is the EcoRover, available for instance at nearby Government Canyon SNA. It has a weight capacity of 275 pounds, a range of up to 15 miles with a lithium battery, and a top speed of 3 mph. There is also the Action Trackchair, with a weight capacity of 300 pounds, a range of 15 miles with lithium battery, and a top speed of 3 mph. Guadalupe River State Park is not listed as having any motorized assistive chair. BUT THE LISTING IS NOW OUT-OF-DATE!

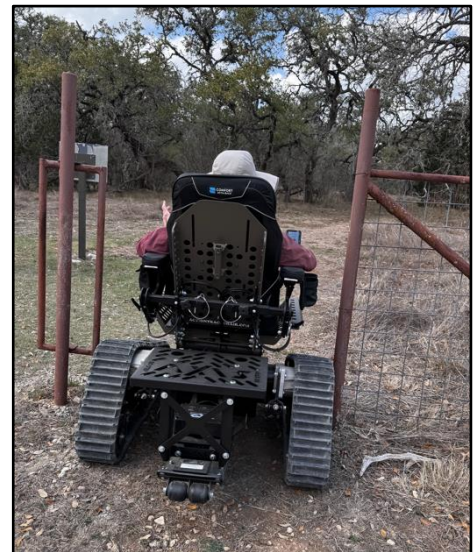
Access to and accessibility within Texas State Parks has been an issue ever since the first state park system began in 1923 with the establishment of the State Parks Board. Looking back over a century of Texas state park history, we quickly realize that from the very beginning down to the present time, two challenges have beleaguered efforts to provide greater access to all Texans: sufficient funding and adequate staffing. Fortunately, Guadalupe River State Park has sufficient staffing and mechanical expertise for taking advantage of new technology and mobility assist devices. And our State Park has a generous Friends group.

Long-time members of the Friends Board, Nancy and Bob Gray, have for years wanted to provide some way for mobility-challenged individuals to visit Honey Creek. When Board members began looking into the possibilities provided by the new assistive technologies, a committee was formed that spent several months researching the various available motorized wheelchairs, tried out several models, and had the Trackchair dealer in Georgetown come down to the Park in March to give a demonstration of the versatility of three of their models (see next page for photos). The Board, in conjunction with the attending Park staff, including Superintendent Brandon Lopes-Baca, unanimously decided on the Axis model with its many accessories. This model came with the best warranties and seemed to offer the greatest user-friendly options and most comfortable ride for the disabled individuals the Park intends to serve. The Trackchair would allow not only mobility-challenged individuals greater access to the trails in the Park, but also their families and friends who accompany them.

These chairs are not inexpensive, but the Board of the Friends group, following the demonstration and with the enthusiastic approval of the Park Superintendent, unanimously decided to provide the Park with a top-of-the-line Axis Trackchair, a quieter, faster (4.5 mph), more comfortable model than the older Standard Trackchair. The Axis is also easier to maintain, to make personal comfort adjustments, and comes with a tethered controller so that a helper companion walking by the chair can control the speed and steering of the chair. It also comes with a sun umbrella and headlights for night driving.



Bob and Nancy Gray and Ed Van Reet demonstrating the ease of travel in a Trackchair.
All photos in this article by Mackenzie Brown and Charleen Moore.



Trackchairs have no problem negotiating the hills on the way to Honey Creek or going through narrow spaces.

On May 14, 2026, Melanie and Dan Carlson of Carlson Mobility delivered the tan-colored Axis to the Park (see next page for photos). Melanie and Dan then provided an hour-long demonstration and instruction on the use and maintenance of the chair. Members of the staff took great delight in testing out the chair in the Maintenance Yard, driving it around, forward and in reverse, left and right, in tight circles, and back into the maintenance building.

The Axis will be ready for public use in early summer. Requests for reserving the chair should be made preferably two weeks in advance of the needed date. To reserve the chair, fill out the TPWD ADA Modification Request form, available [here](#). The Axis and all other adaptive devices are available at no cost.

It is interesting to note that *A Strategic Plan for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department: Natural Agenda – Fiscal Years 2025-2029* (available [here](#)), called for “more than doubling the state parks all-terrain wheelchair fleet” (p. 25). The Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek were glad to have helped Texas State Parks reach this goal.

Delivery of Axis Trackchair to Park, May 14, 2026



Trackchair unloaded from pickup truck.



Melanie and Dan Carlson, Park Superintendents Ben Shook, Brandon Lopes-Baca, and Gilbert Martinez, and the Axis.



Nick Reyes trying out the Axis in the Maintenance Building.



Complex Manager Brandon Lopes-Baca signing for the Axis.



As you drive along Park Rd 31, you will see new signage at the entrance to the recently acquired Honey Creek Ranch property. Hiking trails will be available soon, but the site is still under construction and not yet open to the public. Eds.



A Vocal Virtuoso in the Park: The Northern Mockingbird

by Linda Gindler

The Park welcomed spring rain, and both flora and fauna rejoiced. And as a bonus, rain storage tanks at Woodland and Savannah blinds filled, leaving us in good shape to keep the water features flowing all summer. Even with the upcoming higher temperatures, July and August are good times to explore the Park where you can witness bird parents deep into child rearing duties or youngsters learning new skills. A thrill to see in the wild. One bird to watch and learn about this summer is a year-round resident, our state bird, the Northern Mockingbird.



Northern Mockingbird (photo by John Prentice).

Northern Mockingbirds are medium-sized slender birds with long tails. They are gray above with a paler belly and two white wing bars. They have a long slender black bill with a slight downward curve. You might think of their color as drab, but what they lack in color they have poured into their voice. They are truly one of nature's most fascinating singers. If you have been hearing an endless string of 10 or more bird songs that include whistles, rasps, scolds, and thrills, you probably have a Northern Mockingbird nearby. Many of their songs mimic other birds and hence the name "mocking" and this may make it challenging to identify at first. You can master their song identification with a few helpful tips. First, Northern Mockingbirds like to sit high in a tree or power line when singing and are loud. Second, listen to how a song repeats. Northern Mockingbirds repeat their songs three times (sometimes up to six times) then quickly move to a new one. Northern Mockingbirds continue to add new songs to their repertoire throughout their lives with some males learning as many as 200 over their lifetime. Northern Mockingbirds love open woodlands and forest edges which means you can find one just about anywhere in the Park. While they are common in backyards, they are not seed feeders, preferring insects and fruit. They are known to raid backyard gardens.

Designating wildlife to represent states first began with state flowers in the 1890s, followed by trees in the early 1900s, and then birds in the 1920s. Designations continued with insects, reptiles, fish, shrubs, and many more categories over the years. Mostly states select native species found within their state, but sometimes they deviate from this unofficial rule and base their selection on commercial value or state identity. Such is the case for the chicken becoming the state bird of both Delaware (Blue Hen) and Rhode Island (Rhode Island Red). In Texas though, thanks to the 1927 40th State Legislature, we have a true native wild species in the Northern Mockingbird, a bird found throughout the state. It is even found in both wild and urban landscapes. Its reputation of being a good songster helped to sway any holdout votes back in 1927. Texas was not the only state that valued the Northern Mockingbird; by the time all of the states had designated their state bird, the Northern Mockingbird had been selected in five states (including Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, and Tennessee) and one of only three species to represent five or more states, the Northern Cardinal (7 states) and the Western Meadowlark (6 states) being the other two.



Northern Mockingbird (photo by John Prentice).



By the 1920s, the Northern Mockingbird had made an impact on American culture, having become a popular cage bird valued for its singing dating back to the 1700s and lasting until 1918 when the Migratory Bird Treaty Act outlawed the practice. Keeping pet Northern Mockingbirds was so in vogue during the 1800s it decimated wild populations along the east coast which finally rebounded after the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It was a lucrative business where extraordinary singers fetched as much as \$50 – a handsome sum in the 1800s. Captured birds were taught to mimic popular tunes and instruments and then perform during social gatherings. Even Thomas Jefferson kept pet Northern Mockingbirds, allowing them to perch on his shoulder, to fly around his study and the house at large, and to sing along when he played his violin.



President Jefferson with Dick, his favorite pet Northern Mockingbird. Illustration by Richard J. Adler.**

In addition to its designation as state birds and its period in captivity, the Northern Mockingbird symbolized innocence, creativity, protection, and adaptability deeply rooted in indigenous wisdom and American literature and song. The Cherokee knew it as a teacher and the one who learns languages. The Pueblo saw the Mockingbird as a spirit guide where mimicry is viewed as empathy. In popular culture the species is famously referenced in folk songs of the 1800s such as “Listen to the Mockingbird” and “Hush, Little Baby (don’t you cry, Mama’s going to buy you a mockingbird).” Its most famous literary appearance is Harper Lee’s 1960 novel “To Kill a Mockingbird” where the story theme warns against destroying the innocent. In more recent lore it appears in the 2001 movie “Mockingbird Don’t Sing.”

If you would like to catch a glimpse of a Northern Mockingbird, stop by the Park. In the summer months you will find Northern Mockingbirds most active in the morning and evening. Unmated males are known for singing during nighttime hours, too. Visit either of the wildlife viewing blinds to catch one at the water features. The mulberry tree and American Beauty Berries near the Woodland bird blind are favorites when the fruit is in season. If you want to learn more about Northern Mockingbirds and other birds in the Park, join a ranger-led wildlife program and watch Facebook for wildlife sighting updates. Hope to see you soon with binoculars and camera in hand.



Photo by Doug Starasinic.

The Pollinator and Friends Fiesta of 2026 by Doug Starasinic

The Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek held the annual Pollinator and Friends Fiesta on March 14, 2026. There were well over 300 visitors to the event, almost half being children. It was great seeing the kids outside having a great time. Over 20 exhibitors provided plenty of fun activities for the kids as well as educational information on the natural aspects of the Hill Country.

As has become custom, we had prizes for the kids that visited at least 10 exhibits. The kids loved it! And the binoculars went fast!!

Thanks to the park staff, volunteers, and Friends of Guadalupe/Honey Creek for all their efforts to make this event a success. See you next year!



Photo by Doug Starasinic.

2026 Big Sit

by Holly Platz, Customer Service Representative

Thanks so much to those of you who were able to join us for the Big Sit on Saturday, May 9, at Guadalupe River State Park! And thank you again to the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park / Honey Creek State Natural Area for generously sponsoring the event — this allowed us to have 20 people register (and receive a t-shirt!) for free.

We had 53 participants: 42 adults and 11 kids! We ended up with 39 bird species for the day. Best birds were Magnolia Warbler, Peregrine Falcon (high up in the sky) and 2 Eastern Kingbirds. An additional thanks to volunteer Lucy Spade for keeping track of all our species and submitting the official list! You can view the list of species [here](#).



Participants in Woodland Bird Blind for Big Sit. Photo by Lucy Spade.



Complete list of species. Photo by Holly Platz.



Participants busy with cameras and binoculars. Photo by Aaron O'Neal.

Mother's Day Walk to Honey Creek

by Marv Habib

On May 10, the Friends, together with Guadalupe River SP/Honey Creek SNA Park Leadership, welcomed more than forty guests for a special Mother's Day Walk to Honey Creek. Superintendent Gil Martinez joined the celebration as families, friends, and nature lovers gathered for a morning of fellowship, discovery, and remembrance. Some guests walked beside their mothers, while others walked in honor and memory of the mothers they hold dear, as the group made its way along the beautiful trail from the Rust House to Honey Creek.

Along the route, guests explored the remarkable geology of the area and met its master architect — limestone — through an engaging demonstration showing how aquifers function, recharge, and sustain our precious drinking water. Guides also introduced participants to the region's keystone species and the quiet wonders often overlooked along the trail: lichens, Spanish and ball moss, majestic bald cypress trees, and even the mysterious Nostoc, whose ancient ancestors helped shape Earth's atmosphere billions of years ago.

At the conclusion of the walk, the Friends and Superintendent Martinez treated guests to "Mom-osas" — sparkling grape and orange juice — along with pastries, cookies, dried fruits, and nuts beneath the luxurious shade of the giant live oak trees by the Rust House. The relaxed gathering provided a fitting celebration of mothers everywhere: those walking beside us and those forever treasured in our hearts.



Moms and their families on the trail.



"Mom-osas" in the Rust House



Superintendent Gil Martinez serving guests.



End of the trail with snacks and drinks under the oaks.

Photos by Mackenzie Brown and Charleen Moore.

Newcomers of San Antonio Walk to Honey Creek

by Mary Habib

The Friends were delighted to welcome seventeen members of the Newcomers of San Antonio for a special Honey Creek Walk on May 15. Newcomers of San Antonio is a social organization that welcomes those new to the greater San Antonio area — or those experiencing a significant life transition such as retirement, loss of a spouse, or divorce — helping members build connection, confidence, and community.

Our 9 AM walk began on a cool, sunny Friday morning as we explored Honey Creek's magnificent savannah on the way to the creek itself. Along the trail, we paused to appreciate the limestone bedrock that shaped this remarkable landscape and created the delicate ecosystems and hidden treasures that make Honey Creek so extraordinary.

To conclude our two-hour walk, guests were introduced to the fascinating world of oak galls and the tiny wasps that live in them. Everyone enjoyed making a keepsake of the morning using oak gall ink, dragonfly stamps, and handcrafted bookmarks — a fitting tribute during America's semiquincentennial celebration, using the same traditional ink recipe that Thomas Jefferson likely used when drafting the Declaration of Independence.



Newcomers of San Antonio in the lush riparian area next to Honey Creek. Photo by Mary Habib.

Save The Dates**October 10, 2026 – Accessibility in Guadalupe River State Park**

A presentation of Accessibility Plans for Guadalupe River State Park with demonstration of the GRIT Chair and the Axis Trackchair at the Mammen Family Public Library, Bulverde, Texas.

October 28, 2026 – Doeppenschmidt-Weidner Homestead Presentation and Tour

The next public tour of the Doeppenschmidt-Weidner Homestead will start at the Mammen Family Public Library followed by a field trip to the Doeppenschmidt-Weidner property off Spring Branch Road. Further details will be available at the Library's website calendar.



Friends of Guadalupe River/ Honey Creek, Inc.

3350 Park Road 31
Spring Branch, Texas 78070

Visit us:



Visit us on the web:
<https://friendsofgrhc>

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

The Board Members of the Friends meet monthly, usually on the third Thursday at 2:00 p.m. at Honey Creek Ranch.

To request to attend the Board Meeting, contact us at:
friendsofgrhc@gmail.com

To submit articles for publication in the Friends Newsletter, email them to one of the Co-Editors: Mackenzie Brown, mbrown@trinity.edu
Charleen Moore, mackandchuck@gmail.com
Deadlines are the 20th of Feb, May, Aug, Nov.

2026 Membership Renewal

2026 Membership Dues

Become A Friend of the Friends/Renew Your Friendship Today

Please help support Guadalupe River State Park/Honey Creek State Natural Area. Your membership dues and donations stay within the Park and support its many activities. With your membership, you will be kept up to date on all upcoming programs, events and park news as well information on volunteer opportunities through our quarterly newsletter and park updates. As a member you and your family will also have access to members only events.

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

Name(s): _____

Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Membership Dues: \$25 per year (membership includes all family members). Membership dues renew in January.
Lifetime memberships: \$1,000.

If you are interested in helping the park through volunteering, please let us know your area 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.
We will not share your information or clutter your inbox.

Board of Directors

President Bob Morris	Director/Honey Creek Interpretive Walks Nancy Gray
Vice-President Ed Van Reet	Director at Large Bob Gray
Secretary Lucy Cruz Hudson	Director at Large Wendy Harter
Treasurer Mary Habib	Director at Large John Lack
Director/Co-Historian and Webmaster Mackenzie Brown	Director at Large Pamela Lack
Director/Co-Historian Charleen Moore	Director at Large Dave Kibler
Director/Membership Brady Hansen	Director at Large Doug Starasinic