



FRIENDS

OF GUADALUPE RIVER STATE PARK
HONEY CREEK SNA



Fall NEWSLETTER 2026

A Message from the President

by Bob Morris

Howdy Folks,

Well, it looks we are in the “Dog Days of Summer” as of this writing. My observation is that the weather has been a tad cooler than last year but a bit more humid. For me it has been HOT. We are on summer hours for Honey Creek walks, to make it more comfortable for our visitors and guides. August can be temperamental. Sometimes the southeast breezes can become very still in late afternoon and endure all night.

When I was a boy, and the wind was absent coming through widows, my brother and I laid down blankets on the north side of the house and slept outside. We did not have AC at the time. Our Daddy seemed unaffected, but Mama was irritable in the morning. I am most thankful for air conditioning.

The term “dog days” comes from the ancient observation that the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius, part of the constellation Canis Major (the Greater Dog), rises in conjunction with the Sun during midsummer. Ancient Greeks and Romans believed that Sirius added extra heat to the Sun, which they associated with the sweltering summer weather.

The flood in the Park this July was greater than last year’s July 4 flood. The Guadalupe River this year reached within 6’ of the Discovery Center; another 10” in rise would have flooded the Center. Gilbert Martinez, Honey Creek State Natural Area Superintendent, remarked that Honey Creek rose more than 25 feet as water backed up from the river. The Honey Creek picnic table floated upstream and had to be retrieved by Park staff. These mid-summer storms are not unusual for the area but do not often occur back-to-back.

TPWD has given us the all clear to proceed with the Rust House interior renovations. We have ordered about 95 percent of the materials required. Brandon Lopes-Baca, Complex Superintendent, has graciously offered to have his maintenance crew do the installation.

By next spring we shall have a Poetry Table installed by the Discovery Center. Seven National Parks have a Poetry Table, but we will be the only State Park to have such a table. Our Poem was created by former Texas State and San Antonio City poet-laureate, Jenny Browne.

Kind regards, Bob

A Message from the Park Staff

by Brandon Lopes-Baca, Complex Manager

The summer quarter has been filled with meaningful accomplishments, important milestones, and continued resilience across our park complex. We are proud to share that our Friends Group was awarded the “Stars in the Parks: Outstanding Friends Group” award for Fiscal Year 25—an honor reflecting their unwavering dedication and impact on park operations and visitor experiences. Their support continued with the purchase of an Axis Track Chair, a tremendous addition enhancing ADA accessibility and allowing more visitors to experience the park’s trails and natural beauty. Our Friends Group also provided valuable input toward the ongoing Public Use Plan for Honey Creek SNA, including meeting directly with the department’s A&E firm to offer insights that will help shape the future of public access and resource protection.

A major milestone was reached in August with the first phased opening of Honey Creek State Natural Area. The new trailhead off Park Road 31, located just before the main park entrance, is now officially open to the public—marking the first publicly accessible portion of Honey Creek SNA since TPWD acquired the property from The Nature Conservancy in 1985. This is a historic moment for the site and a significant step forward in expanding opportunities for visitors to learn about a uniquely important ecological area in the state.

Additionally, for the second year in a row, the Guadalupe River experienced a major flood event, with water levels surpassing those of the previous year. Despite greater impact, park staff prepared and responded efficiently, working diligently to reopen the river Day-Use Area as soon as conditions allowed. We extend our appreciation to the Friends Group for supporting both staff and volunteers during the recovery effort—hydration supplies were greatly helpful and very much appreciated by everyone involved.

Our complex remains committed to continuous improvement, especially in the areas of ADA access and overall visitor experience. Several exciting projects are already moving through the review and approval process, each promising meaningful upgrades and new opportunities for visitors, volunteers, and staff alike. We have a strong, dedicated team in place that is always searching for ways to improve, even if progress comes one small step at a time. I’m proud to be part of this team and community.

The Opening of Honey Creek State Natural Area – the New Ranch Section

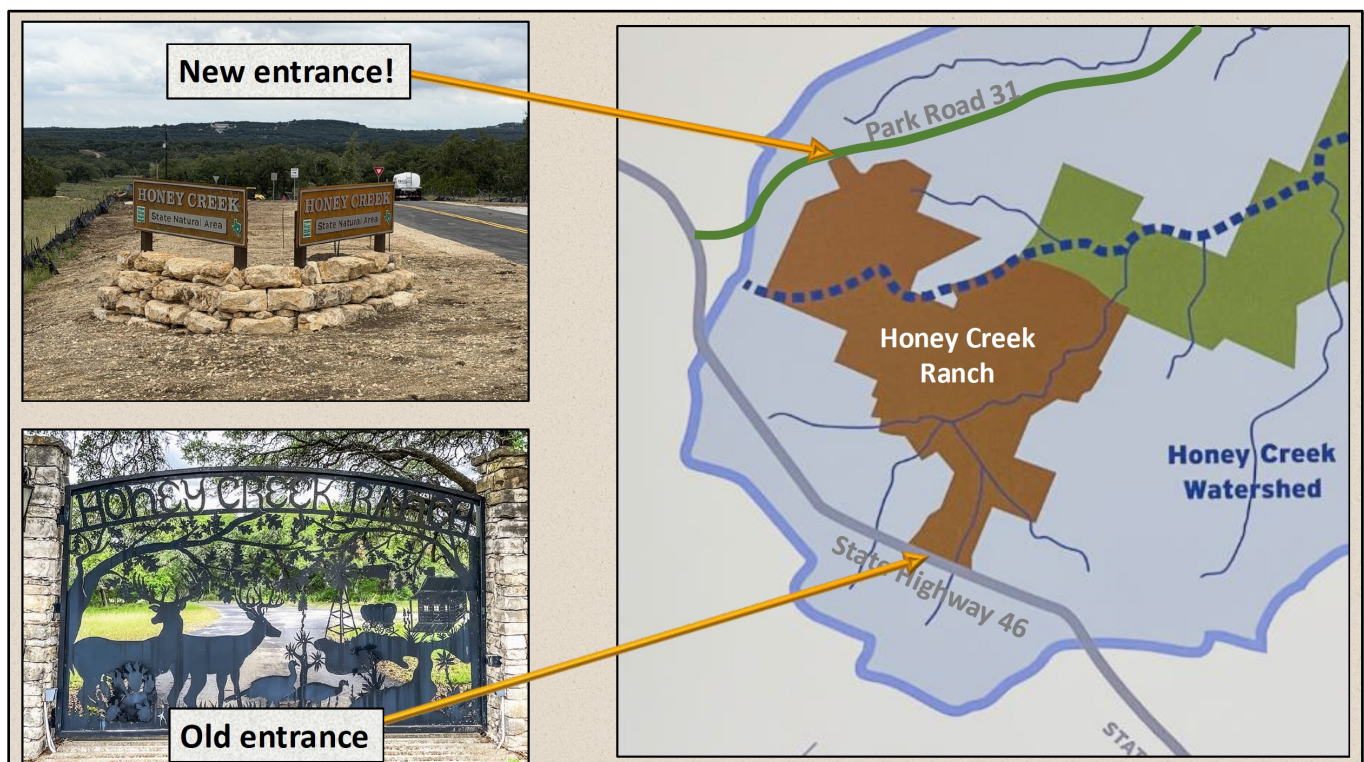
by Mackenzie Brown and Charleen Moore

It took several years of patient negotiations between Terry and Ronnie Urbanczyk, former owners of the Honey Creek Ranch properties, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department working with the Texas Nature Conservancy, for the state to finally purchase those properties. The deal was closed on May 31, 2023. (See the summer Newsletter for 2023 for the story of how the Park acquired the ranch properties, available [here](#).) Those properties consisted of 515 acres in total; rolled together, they became part of the Honey Creek State Natural Area. Then it took another three years of consultations, planning, and implementation by TPWD and the local Park and SNA superintendents and their staff for this new ranch section of the Honey Creek SNA to be ready for the public. The official opening occurred August 8, 2026.

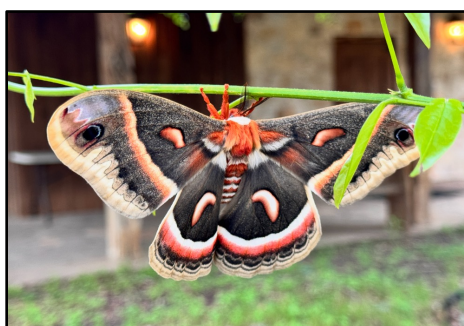
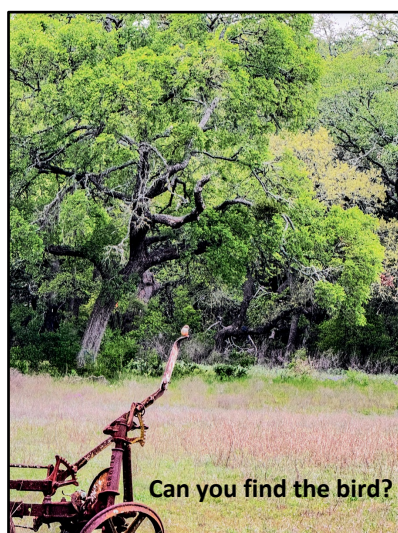
To avoid confusion, we would like to point out that there are now four means of access into the Honey Creek State Natural Area. Two go to the older section of the SNA: 1) entry into the SNA for the long-existing Honey Creek interpretive walks down to Honey Creek itself, via the main park entrance with parking at the Rust House; and 2) entry into the Doeppenschmidt-Weidner farmstead on the southeast side of Honey Creek, via the Spring Branch Road. And two entrances now allow access to the new ranch section of the SNA: 3) the old entrance off Highway 46 with a decorative steel gate installed by the Urbanczyks; and 4) an entirely new entrance off Park Road 31, about one-half mile from Highway 46 (see the old and new entrances to the ranch section in the photo below).

To explore the 3.6 miles of trail in the just-opened section of the State Natural Area, enter through the new paved road off Park Road 31. A map of the new trails is available on the new Honey Creek State Natural Area website, or you can just click [here](#). One trail, the Box Turtle Trail, is considered an "accessible trail," and makes a loop of 0.7 miles starting and ending in the parking lot. The symbol for an accessible trail is indicated by the following icon:  Accessible Trail The trail surface is crushed granite, with mostly level grades. However, pushing a manual wheelchair nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile can be very strenuous work. Instead, you may wish to reserve our newly acquired motorized wheelchair, an Axis Trackchair that the park has received from the Friends of Guadalupe River/ Honey Creek. It should be ready to reserve, free of charge, in early September. The Box Turtle Trail also serves to access the other two trails, the Roadrunner Trail (a loop trail that adds an addition 1.7 miles or so to the Box Turtle Trail), which in turn leads to the Karst Loop Trail (another 1.0 mile).

Dogs are allowed so long as their humans are on a leash (no dogs, except service dogs, are allowed on the interpretive walks down to Honey Creek itself).



The top five pictures were taken in July of this year, showing the trails, trail head, and pond that are now open to the public for self-guided walks. The old entrance to the Honey Creek Ranch buildings, including the homestead of the Scheel family, is currently used only for special events. These events include birding, entomological, and herpetological outings, advertised on the Honey Creek State Natural Area website. The bottom two rows show Site Superintendent Gil Martinez on snakes, along with pictures from a birding event that included the serendipitous sighting of the colorful *Hylaphora cecropia* moth.



Honoring Our Friend John Allen Prentice

by Jessica Bergner, Resource Specialist

Here at Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area, we work with many dedicated volunteers, but some leave an impact so deep that the land itself feels changed by their presence. John Prentice was one of those people. His passing on August 16 has left all of us reflecting on the incredible amount of heart, skill, and kindness he poured into this place.

As a park ranger, I had the privilege of seeing the difference John made firsthand. He was not someone who searched for attention or praise. He simply showed up, quietly and consistently, ready to make the park better for wildlife and for everyone who visits. Alongside his wife, Linda Gindler, John became a cornerstone of our bird blind team. If you have ever watched a goldfinch at the Woodland Blind or enjoyed a peaceful moment inside the Savannah Blind, a space built with care and intention, you've experienced the result of their dedication.

John's work on the blinds was more than just a volunteer project. It was a gift. Every board he measured, every repair he made and every improvement he suggested came from a deep love of nature. Below are photos of him with fellow workers and his wife at the completion of the Savannah Blind in the spring of 2022, his last major accomplishment for the park.

He carried decades of scientific knowledge from his career as a fisheries biologist, but he shared it with a gentle excitement that made people feel welcome rather than intimidated. Whether he was talking about birds or river life, John had a way of helping others see nature with fresh eyes.

His more than 4000 volunteer hours tell only part of the story. John brought a remarkable range of hands-on skills that kept projects moving even when resources were tight or problems popped up unexpectedly. Carpentry, plumbing, masonry, and electrical work were second nature to him, and he used them to lift the entire volunteer community. And he was quite handy with a chain saw. He also served on the Board of the Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek from 2018 to 2021. His steady presence made us all feel more capable.

John's family welcomes everyone to celebrate his life on October 18 at the Cibolo Center for Conservation. For those who feel moved to honor him, donations can be made to the Friends of Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area or to the Cibolo Center for Conservation.

We will miss John deeply. His legacy lives on in the blinds he built, in the wildlife he supported, and in the countless moments of wonder he helped create for visitors. It was an honor to work alongside him. And it will always be an honor to remember him.



For the story of the park's bird blinds, click [here](#).

For photos of the Woodland Bird Blind and the Savannah Bird Blind and the stages of its constructions, click [here](#).



Testing the Limits of the New Axis Trackchair in the Park and State Natural Area

by Nicholas Reves, Maintenance Specialist

Regarding the Axis Trackchair that the Friends group gave to the Park last spring, we are getting ready for public requests for the motorized track chair for a "Reasonable Modification." We are finalizing procedures and determining which trails in the Park and State Natural Area are feasible for the Axis. The machine does not climb stairs, for instance, nor can it cross the Guadalupe (except in severe drought).

To assist staff in determining the limits of the chair, on June 22nd we had an event with the Texas Parasports group, during which we permitted use of the Trackchair. About five people used it throughout the day, and all were very pleased with it. In total they travelled about 2 miles over various terrain, including smooth pavement, chunky-rocky rough trail, mud, and riverbank (see the photos on this page). Normally we will not permit the Axis to go on muddy trails, as it is a bit of a chore to wash the machine afterwards, but mud didn't stop the Axis!

The chair handled it all beautifully and was not stopped by anything, though of note, the rock ledge on one section of the trail behind the Discovery Center did make the chair tip backward rather dramatically and scared us all. As an extra test, Honey Creek guide Charleen Moore used the chair for the entire trek to the creek, including a stop at "Geology Tables" to teach about karst.

All in all, a huge success and we are very excited and eager to get this open to the public.



An “ashen-silver tailed dog,” aka *Urocyon cinereoargenteus*, aka gray fox

by Holly Platz

This quarter’s critter is the beautiful gray fox (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*). These animals are common here in the park but seldom seen and are most active at night. Gray foxes are members of the dog family, and have semi-retractable claws, which enable them to climb trees! They are not large animals, usually weighing only 6-15 pounds.

Gray foxes are omnivores – they eat small mammals, birds, plants, and insects. A favorite food is the cottontail rabbit. And this time of year, their scat (poop!) may have lots of black persimmon fruit in it as well!

Gray foxes are social animals, and during the year the male and female bond remains intact. An average of 4 pups are born after a 53-day gestation period. The young are weaned after about 10 weeks, and after that, the male fox provides solid food for the whole family. They remain together through the fall, but usually each fox is solitary throughout the winter.

The red fox, a relative of the gray fox, can also sometimes be found in our area, but the gray fox is more common. Gray foxes have a black tip on their tail, and yellow or orange underparts and around their white throat. Red foxes tend to be slightly larger, and they have a white tip on their tail, and no orange-ish yellow on their underparts.

Have you spotted a gray fox (or a red fox) before? Remember, like all wildlife, if you are lucky enough to see this animal, please give it the space it deserves and help keep it wild.



We don’t often get snow in the park, but we did in the winter of 2021. That made it much easier to spot this gray fox out looking for a snack. Howell Pugh, Park Operations and Resource Specialist, sent this photo to the Spring Newsletter of 2021, where it appears on p. 5 with the following note (click [here](#) for the full article):

Business as Unusual at the Park

by Howell Pugh

While we were all enjoying the late winter snow from the safety of our homes, our fulltime residents of Guadalupe River SP were going about their usual business, only in a much colder and foreign landscape than their usual Hill Country views. This gray fox was caught on camera out looking for a meal hiding somewhere under the snow. I wonder what little mouse or other small mammal was burrowing under the snow that had caught this fox’s eye, or more likely its nose.



We, the editors, were fortunate to see this little gray fox on a rock bluff overlooking the Guadalupe River, about 12 miles west of the Park. The photo was taken by Mackenzie Brown the evening of September 16, 2019.

**Natural and Cultural Resources Update**

by Jessica Bergner, Resource Specialist

We have an exciting season ahead at Guadalupe River State Park and Honey Creek State Natural Area, and we want to share a few updates on what is happening across our natural and cultural resource programs. Fall is always a busy time for us, and this year is no exception.

Our Explore Bowhunting program will return on Saturday, October 24. This is a hands-on opportunity for visitors to learn the basics of bowhunting, connect with the outdoors, and gain a deeper understanding of wildlife behavior. It is one of our most popular programs, and we are looking forward to another great day in the field.

We also want to remind everyone about our upcoming public hunts. For visitor safety, Guadalupe River State Park, including the Bauer Unit, and Honey Creek State Natural Area will close at 8 pm on Friday, November 20, 2026, and reopen at 12 pm on Tuesday, November 24, 2026. A second closure will take place from 8 pm on Monday, January 11, 2027, through 12 pm on Friday, January 15, 2027.

In addition to these events, we are preparing for our prescribed burn season. The window for potential burns will run from October 2026 through March 2027. Weather conditions will guide our decisions, and we will share updates as burn days approach. Prescribed fire is an important tool that helps us maintain healthy ecosystems, support native species, and reduce wildfire risk.

With all these projects on the horizon, our resource team will be busy out in the field, and we would be grateful for extra hands. If you are interested in joining, please contact Ranger Jessica at jessica.bergner@tpwd.texas.gov. Volunteers play a huge role in keeping our natural areas healthy, and we appreciate everyone who is willing to pitch in.

Thank you for supporting the work that keeps these spaces thriving. We look forward to seeing you out on the trails and in the field this season.

* * * * *

Save The Dates for Presentations at the Mammen Family Public Library Bulverde, Texas

October 10, 2026 – Accessibility in Guadalupe River State Park

Have you seen the Axis Trackchair (a motorized wheelchair) at the Park? The Friends of Guadalupe River/Honey Creek recently purchased one for the Park, and it is being used in several areas of the Park (see page 5 of this issue). A hand-operated wheelchair (the GRIT chair) is also available. In the presentation at the Mammen Family Public Library, you will learn about the Accessibility Plans for Guadalupe River State Park and have a demonstration of both the Axis Trackchair and the GRIT Chair on the library's grounds. You will be welcome to try them out. Further details will be available at the Library's website calendar or contact mbrown@trinity.edu.

October 24, 2026 – Doeppenschmidt-Weidner Homestead Presentation and Tour

The next public tour of the Doeppenschmidt-Weidner Homestead will start with a presentation at the Mammen Family Public Library followed by a field trip to the property off Spring Branch Road in the Honey Creek State Natural Area. We will explore the homestead of the earliest settlers in this area, learn about ranching in the mid 19th century, visit the grave of Jacob Doeppenschmidt (d. 1872), and meet Weidner descendants who will tell tales about their grandparent's ranch. Further details will be available at the Library's website calendar or contact mbrown@trinity.edu.

Friends of Guadalupe River/ Honey Creek, Inc.

3350 Park Road 31
Spring Branch, Texas 78070

Visit us:

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<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.

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