



VISIONS

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ARKANSAS • KANSAS • LOUISIANA • MISSOURI • OKLAHOMA • TEXAS



Director's Report: Amazing Austin

John Miller

One of the rewarding opportunities as Region Director is helping members to make new connections at our Region Workshops. Whether your background includes being a volunteer, seasonal interpreter, student, or veteran interpreter, these workshops give one of the greatest networking events of the year. Needless to say, the recent workshop in Austin, TX exceeded all expectations.

Two of the biggest sources of this success came from both the Workshop Committee and the workshop attendees. The Workshop Committee created a wonderful atmosphere with a great venue, excellent concurrent sessions, good food, enthusiastic vendors, cowboy stories, wonderful field trips, longhorn rides, and of course signature Austin music. It was evident that the efforts of all the committee members were focused on maximizing member participation and networking. Likewise, the diversity of attendees added to the flavor and personality of the workshop. It was great to see the wonderful participation in all the concurrent sessions and special events. More important, it was refreshing to have a record 199 attendees despite limited travel budgets.

Each year I look forward to honoring our outstanding members at the awards ceremony and at special presentations. This year was special for several reasons. First, several of the BEST interpreters in our profession were honored that night. I was shocked and humbled to be included among these award winners. A complete listing of the award winners appears later in the newsletter. The real heroes of this year's workshop were the six individuals who committed to become new Life Members via the Enos Mills Fund. Theresa Coble and I challenged workshop attendees to become lifetime members with the chance that one of the memberships would be FREE. A huge thanks to Jayson May (TX), Hollie Lisk (AR), Beth Wargo (TX), Janette Larson (AR), Lari Jo Johnston (TX), and Dana Hoisington (MO) for stepping up and showing their commitment to NAI by becoming new Life Members. Hollie Lisk (Arkansas Game and Fish Commission) won the drawing for the free lifetime membership courtesy of Theresa and myself. NAI continues to be strong and vibrant with members like these.

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So what does this mean if you did not get the opportunity to attend this year's workshop? Here are my suggestions for you or anyone wanting to attend next year:

- Even if you could not attend, talk to someone who did. They will share their experiences and the energy level that they replenished at this event.
- Get a copy of the proceedings and use the fantastic information that was shared at the workshop. This information makes a great selling point to administrators and managers of the quality of these workshops. This information may also help justify budgeting for you to attend.
- Ask your manager or administrator to budget and allow you or other interpreters in your area to attend next year's Region Six Workshop in Manhattan, KS. It never hurts to ask for the funds to attend. Sometimes all you have to do is ask and show your interest.
- Submit a presentation proposal. Your organization may reward your commitment with your sharing of your knowledge.
- Submit an award nomination ...by November 15. Your nomination may ensure that a deserving interpreter gets to attend next year.

The workshop in Austin was indeed amazing. Everyone involved in the planning and operation deserves credit for its success. Let's all hook up again next year in Manhattan.



PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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Summer 2012: May 20	Winter 2012: November 20
Fall 2012: August 20	Spring 2013: February 20

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A Few Memories From Austin

David Owens shared an evening of cowboy poetry



Participants in Kelly Farrell's "Focus on Fun" session found lots of opportunities for creative collaboration.



Robyn Dabney leading the "Dinosaur Valley—Is There an App For That?" session



Brent Leisure, Director of Texas State Parks, delivered an inspiring keynote address.



Interpreters roamed among the silent auction tables, bidding on treasures.



The Interpreters' Quiz, prepared this year by David Owens and Leigh Spencer, was fun and challenging.

Visits to Bamberger Ranch and other sites on Tuesday offered welcome opportunities for exploration.



Le'Ann Pigg and Tanya Petrunev presented "An Excavation of Awareness," which highlighted some possibilities of archaeology programming.

Pam Tooley and new friend, Oreo the longhorn steer



2011 Region Six Awards

Laura Motley, Awards Chair

This year, the Awards Committee received 27 nominations, which was outstanding. Thanks to the seven-member committee, representing every state; Mary Anne Parker, AR; Pat Silvosky, KS; Judy Sneed, LA; Chanda Williams, MO; Amy Morris Marcoux, OK; Tara Humphreys, TX; and myself as committee chair. Next year we hope to have as many nominations. The 2012 Award guidelines will be on the Region Six website very soon.

On a personal note, I was so overwhelmed by the care packages and emails I received while I was deployed. They were so appreciated and made me cry at times. It was nice when sorting and doing mail routes to receive some mail myself.

And the winners are...



Outstanding Workshop Presentation: Kelly Farrell (Arkansas State Parks) for her program *Focus on Fun: Make Your Interpretation Magnificently Memorable*.

Outstanding Multimedia: Prairie State Park Exhibits, Arkansas

Renovation of the Prairie Grove Battlefield took a new, thematic approach to old materials. To reach multiple audiences, the exhibits make use of multiple senses and learning styles. Included are several short videos, computer-generated graphics, large display graphics and murals, plus artifacts to illustrate points about the battle, troop movement, equipment, etc. Visitors were eager to leave positive comments, saying they wished they had more time to spend in the exhibit area.



Jay Miller accepts the award on behalf of Arkansas State Parks. Laura Motley (left) and Amy Stephens presented the award.



Jay Miller accepts the award on behalf of Arkansas State Parks. Janet Price (left) and Laura Motley presented the award.

Outstanding Interpretive Site Publication: Arkansas State Parks Explorer Field Guide

This update of the 40-year old Junior Naturalist program keeps the heart of the original requirements, but goes more in-depth, promoting deeper intellectual and emotional connections with the State Parks. Questions and activities are designed to introduce participants to the park system and cultivate future generations of park stewards. The theme of the Explorer Program is "Kids who discover, prepare, connect, and share become State Park Explorers who show they care."



Don Simons and Lori Spencer accepted the award, presented by Tara Humphreys and Laura Motley.

Outstanding Interpretive Program: Hobbs State Park-Conservation Area (Arkansas)

In a partnership between the state park and Monitor Elementary School, fifth-graders participated in a year-long science program at the park. Working with the teachers, the park interpreters integrated the science curriculum areas and national standards into interpretive activities for monthly field trips. With this program in place and the excitement of the students, teachers, and park interpreters, science became real, creating a 19-point increase in science benchmark scores.



Rachel Diersen accepted the award on behalf of Hobbs State Park. Laura Motley (left) and Pam Tooley presented the award.



John Miller with Laura Motley (left) and Kelly Farrell.

Bob Jennings Meritorious Service Award: John Miller (Shepherd of the Hills Hatchery, Missouri)

Our fearless leader, Director and all-around good guy, John Miller, has been an active member and leader in NAI at the chapter, regional, and national levels. Serving as our Regional Director for the past three years and as the Awards Chair at the national level, he is an inspiration and constant model for interpretation. In addition to his board activities, he is the archivist of regional and chapter activities, hurrying around to sessions to photograph everyone during meetings.

Outstanding New Interpreter: Heather Runyan (Crowley's Ridge State Park, Arkansas)

For the past six years, Heather has been a full-time, front-line interpreter at Crowley's Ridge State Park. As the sole interpreter in the park, she offers regularly scheduled programming during peak seasons, plus school programs and more. The park calendar is packed with a healthy list of special events, camps, and workshops. Heather truly grasps what interpretation is about, showing her passion through her quiet, methodical, organized efforts.



Heather Runyan accepted the award, presented by Laura Motley (left) and Katie Raney (right).

Region Six Awards (continued)

Distinguished Professional Interpreter-Robin Gabe-AR
Robin fell in love with interpretation as a seasonal at Lake Poinsett State Park in 2001 and has since become a full-time, frontline park interpreter. Now at Toltec Mounds Archeological State Park, she uses modern-day references, analogies, and stories to bring the site to life. She is a fine example of a professional park interpreter, one who has become a content expert at her site, and an expert at interpretive delivery.



Left to right: Robin Gabe, Cindy Ford, and Pat Silovsky



All the recipients of the Region Six Fellows award (thus far), a distinguished group: left to right, George Kastler, Pam Tooley, Jay Miller, and Neil Garrison.

Fellow/Lifetime Achievement Award- Pam Tooley-TX

Evidence of Pam's contributions is obvious to longtime NAI members, who have witnessed her professional work and dedication to AIN/NAI for three decades. Newer/younger members of NAI may not realize the ways in which Pam has contributed, but everywhere they look they will see the evidence—from financial support to inspiring the leaders of today's NAI. Pam is connected to the success of our profession in this region, and to the success of NAI. If we had to boil it down to a few words, we would use these: service, leadership, inspiration, dedication, donor, and friend. Pam is at the heart of our Region.



Dennis Allen received the Outstanding Written Article award for his essay, "Sips of the Sand County Almanac," published in the Summer 2011 issue of *Visions*. The award was presented by Sarah Keating.



John Miller with the 2011 scholarship recipients, left to right: Jeane Rezniecek, Jeanne Spencer, and Lauren McGee. Scholarship Chair Leigh Spencer is at the far right.



2012 Brian Barnette All-American Interpreters' Quiz

Overall winner: Donna Horton (OK)

Other State Champions

AR = Don Simons

KS = Mary Green

LA = Rusty Scarborough

MO = Eugene Vale

TX = Anna Malcom

Donna Horton was the overall winner of this year's Interpreter's Quiz. The plaque was presented by David Owens.

NAI Hands Us the Seeds

Sarah Keating, Lake Dardanelle State Park, Russellville, AR

In our profession we often find ourselves competing with Hollywood. But every once in a while they do something that supports and reinforces our efforts and missions and makes our work more apparent to the rest of the world. With the recent release of *The Lorax* movie we were all reminded of the great message that Dr. Seuss brought to us in 1971, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it's not." In this famous tale the Once-ler passed on the seed for us to take and make a difference.

In our profession, NAI holds out that seed to us for the taking. Our organization offers workshops, publications, certifications, and a vast network of professionals to interact with. Coming to an NAI workshop, especially in Region Six, is like taking that seed and gathering the tools so that we can make a difference. Each workshop session I attended in Austin gave me some seeds. I learned about the life of one of my heroes, Enos Mills, and how his cut, color, clarity and carat shaped who he became and how I can shine like a diamond just like he has for so many of us. I learned how to design and promote school curriculum-based programming to cause measurable change in my area schools. I learned how a courtroom drama can teach audiences about invasive species in our parks. I learned the ABC's of preschoolers and how to design my programs to better meet this audience's needs. I learned how to develop graphic interpretation to meet the needs of English speaking and non-English speaking audiences. And I learned about two highly successful Texas outdoor programs that are bringing new audiences to parks. I felt these seeds drop into my hands as if the Once-ler was dropping them from the upper floor of his shack. I carefully tucked them in my pocket and brought them home with me so that I could make a difference. As I share my new knowledge with coworkers, develop new programs and events and continue to train new interpreters I am planting those seeds. Seeds that will grow into connections with audiences, experiences for visitors and lasting memories of my park. Eventually the seeds I gathered from the 2012 NAI Region Six Workshop will all be planted and I will gather seeds from other places, but these seeds will continue to grow and continue to spread and bring enjoyment to others for years to come.

The values and benefits from my attendance at the NAI Region Six workshop in Austin would not have been possible without the generosity of Region Six members, the Region Board members, and the workshop committee. Because without them I would not have been able to attend. The workshop registration scholarships that are offered by our Region allow members like myself the opportunity to attend the workshop when other funding is not available. I would like to say thank you to all of Region Six for caring a "whole awful lot" and helping me plant the seeds of interpretation.

Stipend Was a Real Boost to Me

Kathy Miller, Butterfly Palace and Rainforest Adventure, Branson, MO

Receiving the NAI Region Six stipend was a real boost to me in several ways. The increasing cost of living is hitting us. Our incomes remain the same, yet we're seeing the dollar not go as far. We carpool to and from work every day that we both work. We've virtually eliminated eating out. We plan our menus and groceries much tighter than we ever did. I am spending close to \$0 on art and crafting supplies, but being more proactive in finding venues for my arts and crafts. But money remains tight. This brought us to the realization that I was probably not going to be able to attend the Region Six conference in Austin. So I applied for a stipend for the first time.

I felt honored to be chosen by paid professionals. This validation of my status as an interpreter is meaningful. I went through 32 hours of training to become a "Volunteer Naturalist" about 16 years ago for the Missouri Department of Conservation. I started at the Busch Conservation Area in St. Charles County, Missouri, and then transferred down to the Shepherd of the Hills Fish Hatchery in Branson, MO. My duties are varied. I have been quite active from day one, giving programs and also working as a roving interpreter. My longevity as a volunteer leads others to me for guidance and leadership. I take the lead in a high percentage of our site's public programs. I know that I am valued locally. But I have sometimes felt that others don't see a volunteer as the professional that some of us are. Being honored with this stipend boosts my professional status.

The Missouri Department of Conservation sometimes financially assists employees for workshops, but not volunteers. I have attended Region Six workshops for several years with my own money. When I go to an NAI Region Six conference, I feel that I'm not going just for myself, but for those back at brought home at my volunteer site and at my work, bringing home valuable contacts and program information. I always want to attend every concurrent session! I'm so glad they have the published proceedings! I'll give you a few examples of what I rushed back and acted upon immediately.

One program I attended and particularly valued was "The ABC's of Preschool Programs," by Heather Runyan on working with preschoolers. I am not a parent, and have not formally studied preschoolers. But the session helped me better understand the preschooler's brain function, physical abilities, and emotions. At the Conservation Department, we do few preschool programs. I have wanted to do a program for preschoolers using puppets representing Missouri native animals, which the kids would use to talk to each other about how they would interact in nature. At the Butterfly Palace, Head Start groups attend free, and we are involved with many. Also, homeschoolers and other families come with many children in this age range. Attending Heather's program helped me understand this audience much better. I have already made some changes in my interaction with them at work.

For the past few years, I have been working with our conservation site to increase service to those of other cultures. In Branson, we receive visitors from all over the world. But of course, we have Spanish-speaking people living in our area but few who are using the Conservation Department. I would like to assist with that endeavor. Julie Galbraith's "¡FIESTA!" program was valuable.

I brought "It's not Jekyll and Hyde--Sales is Not the Evil Twin of Interpretation," by Jeanette Larson, straight back to the manager at the Butterfly Palace, who is quite gift shop savvy and, after my five-year employment, much more understanding of the value of interpretation. We're considering specifics staff could add to their visitor discussions which would benefit the gift shop, AND the idea of all of us discussing season tickets! Simple but what a WOW! I also brought back one of the best signage contacts we all know, iZone!

I am also grateful for receiving a stipend to attend because this also allowed me to set up a vendor booth. Interpreter workshops are my best vending sites, because "nature, history, culture, heritage, recycling" is what all my creations are, just what NAI attendees like.

I again added several wonderful people, family, to my network. I only wish more individuals who were back at home could receive a stipend to benefit in the way that I did. My life and my career were greatly enhanced by this experience. I cannot be more grateful. Thank you to all who made the decisions, and to the NAI members who so extend the scholarship auctions that stipends are even an option. Thank you to all.

NAI Stipend Thank You

Cyndi Cogbill, Missouri Dept. of Conservation, Joplin, MO

I find myself in an unusual situation these days. In the past, I tried to help other interpreters in lots of ways including attendance at NAI Region Six conferences, and it is so weird to desire assistance for myself. For a variety of reasons, I now work part-time as a Public Service Assistant for the Missouri Department of Conservation and the agency doesn't cover my expenses. Interpretation is not recognized as a part of my job, either. We know better—when you work with the public by answering questions, identifying the creatures and plants in their yards, explaining hunting and fishing regulations, and so on, interpretation principles help you do a better job.

I was born to be an interpreter, so no matter what my official job may be, I will continue to interpret natural and cultural history. Attending our regional conferences allows me the opportunity to present sessions, renews my dedication to interpretation, inspires me to do better, provides lots of new ideas, and more. By receiving the recent stipend to cover the registration:

- I was able to attend the conference in Austin, Texas;
- I was able to give a presentation with my co-presenter, Tiffani Martin;
- I was able to use at least some of the money I saved to provide craft materials for our session, “Jewels of Interpretation;”
- I was able to network with many other Region Six interpreters; and
- I was able to share ideas and session handouts with my co-workers and I plan to share some of that same information with our local Master Naturalists and Missouri State Park seasonal employees at their spring training.

Thank you Region Six members. I am very grateful to be a stipend recipient. I plan to continue to use this opportunity well.

Just What the Doctor Ordered

Debbie Van Winkle, Tulsa, OK

Sometimes things are fabulous. I have a wonderful recurring gig as a seasonal interpretive park ranger at Yellowstone National Park. I have elk on my lawn, hot springs in which to soak, and housing in a National Historic District. When people at the NAI Region Six Workshop found out about my job, I was the subject of much envy.

Sometimes things are tough. While I adore my job and its enviable location, I only have work six months of the year. With no benefits, I squeeze by each year to make those paychecks last. Fortunately, I have an amazing family that knows how much interpretation means to me, and they aid and abet my nomadic lifestyle.

Unfortunately, this year I have come to rely entirely on that assistance. I have been dealing with long-term illness and the costs are well beyond any money I have been able to save. I am doing much better now and hope to be 100% soon. But, as I am sure any of you who have dealt with extended illness know, it is hard to stay positive month after month. You are worn out, broke, and frustrated in addition to being sick.

Getting the stipend and being able to attend the NAI Region Six Workshop in Austin was a big, bright, shiny jolt of joy at a time when I needed it. The camaraderie of friends, the inspiration from presenters, and the generosity that allowed me to attend helped me feel even better than normal and renewed my spirit.

I believe that interpreters are some of the most giving, caring, passionate, and fun folks in the world. Thank you for helping me and the other stipend winners join you at the workshop! You were just what the doctor ordered.



ARKANSAS State Report

Jay Miller

The winter was warm and wonderful and the parks have been busy. Browns have been biting well on the White River near **Bull-Shoals –White River State Park** and ‘winter’ camping is at an all time high. Eagle programs have drawn large crowds at Bull Shoals and **DeGray**, and **Megan Bradshaw** reports that **Lake Catherine State Park** held its first eagle event to great success. **Lake Ouachita** now runs eagle watching cruises all winter.

We are sad to say goodbye to **Brad Holleman**, longtime interpreter extraordinaire at Queen Wilhelmina State Park, who retired in December. We welcome NAI scholarship winner and recent Arkansas Tech graduate **Yvonne Duvall** to that position. We also welcome **Elizabeth Bittner** as one of our interpreters at DeGray Lake Resort State Park, **Ryan Smith** and **Mel Harvey** at Parkin Archeological State Park, and **Richard Spilman** and **MaryAnne Standsbury** at Pinnacle Mountain.

John Morrow is pleased that he just received approval to proceed with exhibit fabrication and installation at **Mississippi River State Park** with an anticipated installation date in September. The visitor center construction, with a fast crew and no winter weather delay, has progressed at a rapid pace. This visitor center and the state park will become a focus for travelers to historic sites in Marianna and Helena and along two National Scenic Byways that intersect there.

Mentioning Helena, the Department of Arkansas Heritage, the Historic Preservation Program, and the Civil War Sesqui-centennial Commemoration Committee has undertaken a massive project – **rebuilding the Civil War era earthwork fort at Helena**. Helena was a riverside metropolis and a barrier to Union control of the Mississippi. The battle of Helena was a significant event. The fort reconstruction provides an attraction and means to tell that story, and will be another significant interpretation point in this part of east Arkansas.

I just returned from an exciting trip to Tennessee to present an interpretation planning workshop to our compatriots in NAI Region Three. What a fine group of people and a creative and enjoyable regional workshop. Kudos to the talented Tennessee folks and especially **April Welch** and **LaRae Smiley** for an exceptionally well-run conference.

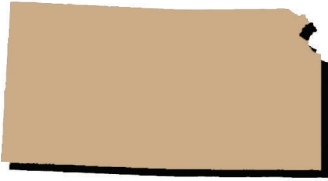
Superintendent **Laura Miller** tells me that her place, one of the newest National Park historic sites, the **Bill Clinton Boyhood Home**, is beginning interpretation planning and will begin public meetings and planning meetings next month.

Hot Springs National Park is revisiting their interpretation plan this spring, but with many interesting stories to tell, one thing remains clear – it’s about the water!

The city of Hot Springs hosted a March 29 opening of the **“Hot Springs: The Birthplace of Spring Baseball” trail**. It includes 26 exhibit panels with QR codes linking to audio, images and stories of players and baseball in the city. Baseball historians have painstakingly documented that more than 45 percent of inductees in the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., played in Hot Springs or were in some way associated with spring training in Hot Springs.

Angela Jackson, Curator at **Jacksonport State Park**, says this year marks the 15th anniversary of the 1997 tornado here, as well as the 200th anniversary of the New Madrid earthquake. In between there have been floods and storms. In addition, the world is supposed to end this year, so a disaster exhibit was inevitable. The exhibit blends science and history, focusing on three topics for each disaster: When they struck, what caused them, and how to stay safe. The disasters that will be included are fires, tornadoes, floods, snow and ice storms, and the New Madrid earthquake.

Jeremy Lynch and **Fort Smith National Historic Site** keep emphasizing the life and times of Judge Issac Parker. On March 23 and 24, the staff and volunteers of Fort Smith National Historic Site presented a mock trial based on a case originally heard by Federal Judge Isaac C. Parker in 1894. Babe Beard found three of his nephews trying to take a cow from his property at Cameron Indian Territory. After convincing his nephews to leave, Beard went to town. Upon his return he found the nephews once again trying to steal the cow. A fight ended with Beard striking a nephew in the head with a Winchester, a blow that ended the young man’s life. Murder? Manslaughter? The trial that followed was most interesting. The living history event will be in the historic courtroom. ■



KANSAS State Report

Pat Silovsky

Misty Ayers, Manager of Onsite Programs and Special Events at the **Lee Richardson Zoo**, reports that 2012 marks the 85th birthday of the zoo, so they are celebrating with a series of events. The winter event took place on January 27 from and had a Kansas Day theme. Guests were able to meet the Kansas State amphibian and reptile, visit keepers, watch Kansas animals receive enrichment, and receive some themselves from hot chocolate. The spring event on March 18 included animal enrichment and keeper talks throughout the day. A summer event will take place on July 4 and will focus on children with face painting, cotton candy, crafts, games, and ice/snow enrichment for the animals. A fall event will cap off the year of celebrations on November 10, with pumpkins for the animals and leaf piles for the animals and kids.

Delia Lister at **Nature Reach** is excited about their new addition, "Apollo" the Bald Eagle. With luck, he will be ready to be an animal ambassador by next Fall. Nature Reach was also very lucky to receive a new vehicle this year from an anonymous donor. It is far more fuel efficient and easier to handle in inclement weather than the old PSU vans which had been in use for the past 25 years! **Meagan Duffee**, a PSU Graduate student, has been hired as Nature Reach's first ever Assistant Naturalist. She has been a long time student volunteer and paid student employee. She is also a falconer and will be learning Taxidermy as her graduate project. Also..the trip to Iquitos, Peru this July to visit the Amazon Rainforest is a go. The group will have a chance to visit local villages, complete a community service project, see amazing wildlife and maybe even fish for a piranha or two. It truly is a naturalist's dream down there! If you are interested please feel free to contact Delia at dalister@pittstate.edu.

Lorrie Beck will be named Director of the **Great Plains Nature Center** upon the retirement of the current Director, **Bob Gress**, in September, 2012. Bob will retire from the City of Wichita Park and Recreation Department with more than 33 years of service. Lorrie Beck works for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and has been a member of the nature center staff since November, 2001. Congratulations, Lorrie.

The **Milford Nature Center** is excited about obtaining an educational display of a live black-footed ferret. After receiving training in black-footed ferret anesthesia (for work in the field) at the National Black-footed Ferret Conservation Center, it became apparent that we could receive a retired breeder such as many zoos have. Pelts, skulls, and carcasses may also be obtained for your own educational needs. Contact me at pat.silovsky@ksoutdoors.com if you would like the contact information.



LOUISIANA State Report

Gay Brantley

The **New Orleans Jazz National Historic Park** is proud to announce the release of a double disc CD highlighting the rich cultural diversity and history found in the music of the lower Mississippi delta. Every song has a tale to tell; from historic monologues and poetry set to music, to work songs, ring shouts, blues, and coded spirituals. Park rangers and researchers have provided song material, suggestions, and expertise in this collaborative effort to identify and interpret songs connected to National Parks and neighboring communities throughout the Lower Mississippi Delta region. To read a review, purchase the CD and booklet, or download 8th grade level lesson plans related to the CD, visit <http://www.nps.gov/jazz/index.htm>

On March 10, **Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge** ushered in the spring with the annual "Walk Where the Wildlife Walks." Families, groups and individuals enjoyed the beauty of springtime on guided nature walks, going mystery geocaching, and/or paddling the canoe trail. There were plenty of children's activities, including hiking the wildlife

challenge trail, making plaster casts of wildlife tracks, making personalized hiking sticks and getting their faces painted with flowers or butterflies, etc. This event was held in conjunction with the 109th anniversary of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Red River National Wildlife Refuge, with headquarters in Bossier City, held a ribbon cutting and open house for its new visitor center and administrative facility. They will be hiring a new Park (Refuge) Ranger this spring.

A personable new deer is enjoying its new digs **Walter B. Jacobs Memorial Nature Park** and all the visitors who come to see him. The Owl Night open house was well attended once again and ran very smoothly in spite of cold weather this year. Current educational contacts have increased by more than 4,000 over the past highest annual contact numbers for the park, in part due to increased outreach. Kudos to Education Director **Rachel Demascal**.



BREC's Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center rocked out with the Third Annual Rockin' at the Swamp event on March 10. Event components include rock collections, mineral displays, geology exhibits, interactive educational booths, the Treasure Trail, a rock climbing wall, a geode-cutting station, a "gold" mine, stone crafts, flintknapping demonstrations, a fossil quarry and a rock hound market. They are also in the final stages of developing plans for the renovation of the education building.

In honor of Black History Month, the interpretive staff at **Cane River Creole National Historical Park** partnered with the Cane River National Heritage area in presenting outreach programs to every Head Start classroom in Natchitoches Parish. Park Rangers and partners read aloud the children's biography of acclaimed artist Clementine Hunter, "Art from the Heart." After the reading, children had the opportunity to create their own piece of art copying Clementine's unique style. On February 17, park staff members also presented an outreach program in conjunction with the annual Backyard Bird Count. Along with the second-graders from Cloutierville School, park staff observed bird activity at the school campus and recorded their results on the Backyard Bird Count website.

Despite reduced staff at the **Port Hudson State Historic Site**, quality interpretive programs are ongoing. Civil War era weapons demonstrations are given on the first Sunday of each month, and there was a tour of the Louisiana Native Guards' Battlefield on February 11 for Black History Month. This was the site where for the first time in American history black soldiers, as part of the regular U.S. Army, made an attack. On March 10 and 11, Port Hudson assisted Lake D'Arbonne State Park with a Civil War battle reenactment, and on March 16 there was a night cannon firing demonstration to commemorate Admiral Farragut's passage of Port Hudson. A ghost walk, a Civil War symposium, and a big annual Civil War battle reenactment rounded out the month of programming.



A new chief of interpretation and education, **Nigel Fields**, joined the team at **Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve** in December 2011. He comes to the National Park Service from the EPA, where his work creating partnerships between the government and communities provided good training for his new job. Monthly "Expanding Horizons" programs for kids have returned to the Barataria Preserve. The Saturday programs cover topics from pirates to plants and provide a link between the preserve's wetlands and the wider world.

What's more Louisiana than a cruise down the bayou? The **Acadian Cultural Center and the Wetlands Acadian Cultural Center** will offer ranger-guided bayou boat tours this spring. The Wetlands Center program has been on hiatus for several years. The cruises at both centers combine history, culture, and nature---keep an eye out for alligators!





MISSOURI State Report

Jeremy Soucy

Missouri Department of Conservation

JEFFERSON CITY -- The Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) is celebrating its 75th anniversary through October 2012. Throughout the next year, the MDC-produced magazine, *Missouri Conservationist*, will highlight the Show-Me-State's unique, citizen-led conservation story, successful conservation partnerships and programs and future challenges. To read the *Missouri Conservationist* online or to subscribe, free to Missourians, visit <http://mdc.mo.gov/conmag>. MDC will also host anniversary events throughout the coming year at nature centers and other locations throughout the state. To follow anniversary activities, visit <http://mdc.mo.gov/about-us/get-know-us/75th-anniversary>.

Catherine McGrane reports that this fall **Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center** welcomed Naturalist **Robyn Parker** to the team. Robyn fit right in and has been going strong from the beginning. Powder Valley also celebrated its twentieth anniversary last October. Fun events leading up to the two-day anniversary celebration included a ribbon cutting opening a new water feature and a day of family activities. The ribbon cutting was attended by Outreach and Education Leadership, Community and Chamber of Commerce leaders, and over 1,300 visitors over the two-day celebration. Along with the new water feature, a new bird blind allows visitors to get closer to the outside wildlife viewing area and the water feature.

Lisa LaCombe reports that **Burr Oak Woods** is excited to present *Friday Night Live! Wildlife Academy Awards* on April 27. You've seen the Academy Awards. You've watched the Grammys. But you haven't seen anything until you've experienced the celebrity-filled 75th Anniversary of the Missouri Department of Conservation. Join us for an evening of glitz and glamor featuring Missouri's all-star cast as we celebrate the 2011 Wildlife Academy Awards!

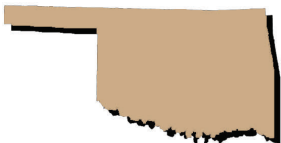
The Discovery Center in Kansas City celebrated ten years of connecting people with nature on April 7. **Steve Jacobsen** reports that visitors of all ages enjoyed tree give-aways, building bird houses, rain barrels, and more. Featured entertainment was Stone Lion Puppets performing "Down the Drain." The interpretive staff at the Discovery Center has also been busy revising and developing new interpretive programs for schools. The updated programming will tie in with the goals of the Discover Nature Schools program that is offered through MDC. The staff is looking forward to rolling out the new programs beginning in September 2012.

Lastly, **Wendy Parrett** reports that **Rebecca Rodriguez**, a recent graduate from University of Missouri with an animal science degree, started as an Education Specialist at Discovery Center on March 1. The job is a 2-year position.

Missouri State Parks and Historical Sites

Dana Hoisington reports that **Prairie State Park's** home school programs continue this spring with three more offerings. They will be making birdhouses for Operation Backyard Recovery, where Missouri State Parks are partnering with Wildcat Glades Conservation and Audubon Center in an effort to give families that were affected by the tornado bird houses to help the birds and families recover. They will also delve into the role of fire on the prairie. Lastly, they will answer that age old question: Bison or buffalo? What is the difference? Prairie State Park will also be changing things up a bit this year. Instead of offering two guided bison hikes a year as in years past, they will be offering at least six. One of the hikes last year included Sara Pauley, the Director of the Missouri Department of Natural Resources. If things go well they may try offering one each month year round.

Lastly, this is the year for the Prairie Jubilee on September 29, so mark your calendars! This is a great event for the whole family. This day-long celebration about the prairie will include guided bison tours, a living history loop, face painting, native plant sale, bison meat lunch, and musical entertainment. Prairie State Park will also be celebrating their 30-year anniversary during the Prairie Jubilee. If you would like to help out, give them a call or drop them an email. They will certainly have something for you to do. 



OKLAHOMA State Report

Kenton Peters

"We all dove underground into a groundhog burrow," said **Neil Garrison**, describing a guided hike that he led on February 2 (Groundhog Day). The event took place in the very center of Oklahoma City's urban area. The guided tour was all underground (i.e., the pedestrian walkways below street-level in the heart of the state's capitol city). Oklahoma City's "Underground" is well-lit and security-patrolled. Many cafes and other retail shops are set up in the underground locations. Neil reports that the original plan was to lead one public tour at 10:00 a.m., but an additional tour had to be added when the sign-up list for the morning program filled to overflowing.

The **Oklahoma History Center** hosted "An Evening with James Anderson" on February 2. Mr. Anderson is a re-enactor who does first-person interpretation at George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate and Gardens in Virginia. He portrays the farm manager and the distiller. His talk touched on work ethics in the 1700's, slave life and operating a distillery.

Park Naturalist **Sue Hochansen** has figured out a way to reach a target audience that many of us aspire to influence--those people that do not actually show up at your facility. Sue works at **Quartz Mountain Nature Park** (Lone Wolf, Oklahoma). She has a weekly broadcast on KCCU Radio--the NPR station based out of Cameron University (Weatherford, Oklahoma). An example is the public radio show that was aired on January 22--"How You Can Become a Citizen Scientist." (...i.e., how to conduct a census of dragonfly swarms...etc.) Wonderful program, Sue!

The **Oklahoma City Zoo** hosted a fundraiser for the traveling expenses of Rex, a male Asian elephant. The preschoolers raised \$100 dollars and presented it to Penny, the elephant mascot. In a moment of fortuitous timing, the nearby kiddie ride (which randomly plays teaser music and makes animal noises to attract children's attention) played the loud sound of an elephant trumpeting. The children excitedly thought that Rex was saying, "Thank you for the money."

Back in September/October, the **Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge** suffered a devastating loss when almost half of its drought-stressed acreage was reduced to a black, smoldering mess after a huge fire swept through the area. The fire was fought for 41 days until it was extinguished.

The Plains Indians and Pioneer Museum's Tammy Hawbaker has a new title: Museum Curator. (The museum is in Woodward, Oklahoma.) Tammy has been at the museum for over six years. Congratulations on your new job, Tammy!

The **Jenks High School Ornithology Club** partnered up with the **Tulsa Audubon Society** to host "Bald Eagle Days" on January 14 and 15. The highlight of this public event was the starring role that "Bensar" played in the program. "Bensar" is the 20-year-old bald eagle brought to the event by the **Sutton Avian Research Center** (Bartlesville, OK).

Joe Jacobi is the chief executive officer of **USA Canoe/Kayak** (Oklahoma City). He recently expressed his "commitment to getting our kids in the outdoors, living a healthy lifestyle and appreciating our natural resources." With all of the new, exciting things that are happening on the Oklahoma River, Joe stated that ..."[his staff will be] positioning Oklahoma City at the center of the outdoor movement."

A portion of the **Oklahoma Tackle and Hunting Show's** raffle income was earmarked as a donation to the 100,000 Kids in the Outdoors Foundation. According to the organization's information on the Internet, it "gets kids involved in the outdoors and is intended for those children who normally do not have the opportunity to do so. The winter tackle show was held in Oklahoma City on January 5-8.

The Cherokee Heritage Center is in Park Hill, Oklahoma. There is a new educational exhibit on display there: "Brother Versus Brother; The Cherokee Civil War Exhibit." The exhibit continues until April 30.

The **Oklahoma City Zoo's** Nature Explorers Preschool, a new program piloted last year, is going great! The three and four-year olds spend 10 hours a week at the zoo, often participating in zoo-wide events such as Groundhog Day. Birthday parties have hit an all-time high, and have been increased from five to eight parties each Saturday.





TEXAS State Report

Tara Humphreys

Council for Environmental Education

Geoffrey Castro from the **Council for Environmental Education** wants to share that since the launch of the **Growing Up WILD** program in 2009, NAI Region Six states have trained over 11,000 formal and non-formal educators through our state sponsors (55,000 nationwide). CEE's curriculum **Project WILD Aquatic** is going through a major expansion. The new *Project WILD Aquatic K-12 Curriculum and Activity Guide* will include field investigations, topics connecting to the Next Generation Science Standards, new content on occupations in wildlife conservation, and STEM connections. CEE is looking for a group/groups to join their national network of partners for delivering Project WILD, Growing Up WILD, and Flying WILD in **Louisiana**—please contact Geoffrey at geoffreyc@councilforee.org.

Texas State Parks

Drought and wildfires caused a significant drop in Texas State Park visitation this past summer and fall which has resulted in a budget crisis for the division. Park officials are encouraging people to visit parks and enjoy the numerous interpretive programs parks offer across the State. Contrary to previous situations where interpretation is one of the first services to be cut, park management is looking to interpretation to alleviate the situation by creating statewide programs and experiences that encourage new users of Texas State Parks. Here are just a few examples of those:

Statewide Initiatives

1st day Hikes on January 1st – Over 1,120 people attended these. One park, **Lake Brownwood State Park**, had 133 people attend their first day hike.

Outreach

While it was slower at **Old Tunnel State Park**, **Nyta Brown** got out in the community and presented interpretive bat programs to nearly 600 kids during the San Antonio Rodeo and Livestock show. She estimates she talked to 1,000 people during outreach events in February.

Making Improvements

As the second most visited park, staff at **Inks Lake State Park** enjoy giving guided tours on the only electric boat in the state park system, guided paddling programs, moonlight paddles, geology programs and fishing programs. They have completed a new trail overlooking a beautiful stream bed into the lake and look forward to developing new interpretation on this trail. Interpretive Services exhibit shop and planners installed new signage that has received rave reviews.

Unique Experiences and Events

2012 is a Centennial Year of Celebration in honor of Lady Bird Johnson's 100th Birthday – December 22, 2012. So **LBJ State Park and State Historic Site** will host several events throughout the year to honor her and celebrate the park.

The **Interprecache Project**, developed by **John Koepke** from **Government Canyon State Natural Area**, is a series of geocaches with a common theme: water—our reliance on it, its preciousness as a limited resource and how each of us can help conserve it for future generations. Eventually the goal is to have a complete series of Interprecaches that will lead a visitor all around the nearly 40 miles of trails at GCSNA, all the while linking to the theme, "It's All About Water."

Seminole Canyon State Park hosted their fifth Annual Archeolympics: Visitors of all ages competed in team and individual atlatl throwing, rabbit stick throwing and friction fire starting. Demonstrations and activities included cordage-making, flint knapping, ask an archeologist and guided tours to Fate Bell Shelter.

Guadalupe Mountains National Park

According to **Karl Pierce** of the National Park Service, 192,210 visitors spent \$12,973,000 in **Guadalupe Mountains National Park** and its surrounding communities. This money supported 202 jobs mainly in lodging, food, and beverage service. What a boost for the local economy!

