

# The Watering Hole

*The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy Quarterly Newsletter*



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## Thank You Powell Foundation!

We are pleased to announce that the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy received grant funds from the Powell Foundation to further the capital project improvements and make the greenspace a destination for our neighbors and residents from all over the Houston area.

**Thursday, July 29 at 7 pm is the date for our annual meeting**

Please email: [barbararichards90@gmail.com](mailto:barbararichards90@gmail.com) to register for the Zoom meeting.

## Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy receives grant money from The Powell Foundation

The Powell Foundation awarded a \$500,000 grant on May 15, 2023, to the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy for their capital project campaign. The funds will be used to support the construction of walking and biking trails, recreational and educational amenities, infrastructure improvements, and prairie preservation at the Willow Waterhole Greenway. With this generous donation, the Conservancy has reached \$10.7 million towards its campaign goal of \$12 million.

Founded in 1967, the Powell Foundation is a private family foundation dedicated to investing in public education, arts, conservation, and human services. The Foundation envisions a world where Harris, Travis, and Walker Counties are thriving communities where all residents have a high quality of life.

**“The Conservancy is ecstatic to have the support of the Powell Foundation, and with the unprecedented support for our area we have received from private foundations in Houston is now at \$8 million. The Greenway's transformation will have a huge impact. The improvements to increase accessibility and added amenities will enable many more community residents to use and enjoy the property.”**

*Bill Burhans, WWGC President*

Announcing a new grant





## Construction Updates

In late April, construction work began on 3.5 miles of trails at Westbury Lake, funded by the Harris County Precinct One Commissioner's Office. Over one mile has already been completed, including the section along Dryad Drive and Westbury Little League, down to the pier, and a portion of the Highway 90 berm. The entire length is expected to be completed by the end of October unless there are significant weather delays.

Bidding has been completed, and a construction contractor has been selected for the construction of 3.1 miles of trails at other lakes west of South Post Oak. Additionally, a utility easement trail will be established to connect the lakes to West Bellfort/Chimney Rock. This work is expected to commence in July at Triangle Lake.

Funding for the 4.5 miles of trails at Prairie Lake, east of South Post Oak, was received from the Kinder, Brown, Cullen, Wortham, Fondren, and Powell Foundations. The design for 1.4 miles of trails in this phase is 90% complete, and construction is likely to commence in September.



Our construction guys at work!



Construction photos credit: Trudy Holmes & Brett Byers

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## Tall - and not too tall - Plants of Summer

Sad to say, the lush display of annuals has ended at the Prairie Wildflower Gardens.

Gone to seed are the golden yellow claspig coneflowers and the white or lavender beebalm that dominated the gardens. To replace them we see tall flowers, especially the American basketflower and the common sunflower.

American basketflower, *Centaurea americana*, has been dominating the gardens and started blooming in late June. Ours reach a height of six feet on a single sturdy stem that branches out with a blossom or two on each branch.

Due to our drought conditions, the light purple flowers with creamy centers, open in the morning to be available to the bumblebees that favor them but partially close during the day to open again the following morning. To discover the basket, turn over the flower and see that its intricate calyx, a cup where the seeds will form, is where it got its name.



Basket Flower Calyx

Another tall flower that is often disdained is the Common sunflower, *Helianthus annuus*.

You see them all over in areas that don't get mowed. Birds love their seeds and butterflies, their nectar. We just have a few which are at least six feet tall. They make a beautiful photos when you use the blue sky as a background.

We invite you to explore the gardens and look for other blooms. There are not as many but they are welcome and necessary for the insect population. All kinds of butterflies are seeking flowers. They are finding the hairy sunflowers, the gaillardia, the liatris and the partridge pea.

Blanketing the gardens in many places is a morning glory vine. Its job is to help protect the plants below and conserve moisture in the soil. You'll see their delightful blooms in the morning.

A small crew of us tend the gardens on Thursday mornings from 7 to 10. Come see us and the flowers. We love to talk about them.



Basket Flowers



## Advisory board member profile : Mary Warwick

Animals and nature have been constants in Mary Warwick's life, so it makes sense that she would fall in love with the Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy and agree to join our advisory board.

As a child, she would bring home stray dogs and cats and hide them in her bedroom until her parents discovered them. It was no surprise, then, that she chose to enter a veterinary technology program after graduating from our very own Westbury High School in 1980.

After earning her bachelor's degree in education and teaching kindergarten, she went on to obtain her master's degree in environmental science and managed a 700-acre nature preserve on Galveston Island. All of her interests came together when she became the Director of the Houston Humane Society Wildlife Center.

The Center's mission is to promote environmental conservation through public education and rehabilitation of Texas wildlife brought together two of her biggest loves, wildlife and education.



She joined the Houston Humane Society in 2022 and ensured that her staff received vaccinations and training to rehabilitate bats. This, along with the Center's relocation to a larger facility at 3100 W. Fuqua in the southern part of Houston in the fall, has been part of Mary's work to make the Center more accessible to the public, improve its services, accommodate more animals, and offer in-house education programs.

When not at work, Mary loves to kayak in Galveston's West Bay, bird watching, travel, explore, and knit. Her son, Steven, works as a website developer at General Motors, and her daughter, Elizabeth, is in veterinary technology school. Mary and her husband, Rob, have a dog, Bella, and three cats: Maggie, Rosie, and Alice.

Being part of the Willow Waterhole Conservancy holds special significance for Mary as it brings her journey full circle. It allows her to return to her old neighborhood and release rehabilitated wildlife into the ponds of the greenspace, reconnecting with the natural environment.



The Warwick Family

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# Thanks to our newest Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy members

Thank you to our local community members whose yearly contributions keep Willow Waterhole a beautiful urban greenspace. The list below reflects new members from April - June 2023.

Individual Members	Family Members	Supporting Members	Sustaining Members	Greenway Patrons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Barbara Beard</li><li>• Robert Button</li><li>• Luanne Novak</li><li>• Genevieve Stevens</li><li>• Kimberly Thee</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jeffrey &amp; Lori Actor</li><li>• Janet &amp; Bob Cunningham</li><li>• Jessica Neeley &amp; Brian Davis</li><li>• Mari Rude</li><li>• Mary Shapiro</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Curtis Monroe &amp; Kelly Woody</li><li>• Patricia Wolfe</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fred &amp; Dixie Stow</li><li>• Tedd &amp; Genevieve Winter</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• David &amp; Jennifer Roschke</li></ul>

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## Join Us in Supporting the Conservancy

You might wonder why we ask you to financially support the greenspace. It's obviously open for all to enjoy without an admission fee. We do, however, have expenses. The volunteers have operating expenses such as, water bills (during the hot dry summer we must water some plants), electricity bills, security cameras, equipment and supplies (hoses to water those thirsty plants and garbage bags to keep the areas clean), and so much more. Please consider helping us with your membership fees. We are extremely grateful.

### HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER?

Sign up online at [www.willowwaterhole.org/support](http://www.willowwaterhole.org/support).

## Our resident turtles at WW

If you have crossed the bridge down from the Schwartz Gazebo, you probably have seen small heads staring at you from the water. Don't be concerned, it's only some of the four-legged reptiles that call the waterhole their home. There are primarily three types of turtles in our waters, the red-eared slider, the common snapping, and the soft-shell.

The daily life of a turtle doesn't include a lot of activity and looking for the next meal fills plenty of the day. Predators don't provide much of a threat if you are adult size, but the small ones need to be aware of birds looking to keep their bellies full. You can also see these reptiles basking in the sun on our warm, sunny days.



Common Snapping Turtle

Most turtles are omnivores, enjoying both plants and animals in their diet. The lakes provide fish, crawfish, worms, insects, and smaller turtles (oh no!) for their protein and the abundant aquatic plant life rounds out their diet. Please be aware that during the cold weather months, their digestive system slows down so a large amount of food in the stomach will rot.

If you cannot resist the urge to feed them during other months, they would love some romaine lettuce, zucchini, corn, kale, bananas, strawberries, and maybe some cantaloupe.

Although turtles may approach during feeding, please do not attempt to catch them. Turtles do not have teeth; however, their strong jaw can be painful if it encounters your hand or arm. Otherwise, just enjoy these beautiful animals from a safe distance.



Red-Eared Slider





## Conservation Updates

### April 2023:

- **Jack Stanger, Troop 740:** planted trees around the AT&T building and painted picnic tables and signs.
- **Trees for Houston:** –200 trees planted during the month.
- **Trails:** Construction signs are up.

### May 2023:

- **Interfaith Environmental Stewardship:** Moved 50 bags of mulch around the Naturescapes.
- **Harris County Flood Control:** Mowed the banks at the park.

### June 2023:

- **Westbury Lake:** Sidewalks have been removed.
- **Kennedy Scout Pavilion:** Three scout project plaques were installed.





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## Birding Update - The Green Heron

Many green herons have been sighted during recent bird walks.

The bird forages in a very slow, deliberate manner and its voice is a loud “kyoook”. Its natural habitat is streams, rivers, lakes, and marshes so it feels right at home at the Willow Waterhole.



Green Heron

Green Heron photo credit: Mark Meyers

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## Trees of Willow Waterhole - Bald-cypress

A recent tree count revealed that Willow Waterhole is home to over 789 bald-cypress trees, which are well-suited to the area's standing water year-round. Only a select few tree species on Earth can thrive in these conditions. The bald-cypress has several adaptations to water and soft mud, including flared and buttressed trunks and unique "knees" that arise from the roots.

This impressive tree species can grow to great size and age. It is one of the few coniferous trees that sheds its leaves, and its attractive ferny foliage turns russet brown before falling in the autumn. While it grows fairly rapidly when young, its growth slows as it ages.

In the past, construction companies utilized bald-cypress wood for boat building, wharves, silos, and other purposes that required resistance to rotting. Some birds, especially ducks, consume the seeds found in the small cones.



Bald-Cypress

Source: Trees of Texas, An Easy Guide to Leaf Identification, Carmine Stahl & Ria McElvaney, p. 221

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## Snapshot: Visitors from Platou Community Center

We love our neighbors and are even more grateful when they come to the greenspace to experience all the beauty and adventures it provides. This summer, kids from a program at the Platou Community Center visited to learn more about the sights and sounds at WW. Hopefully, we can share more time in the future with these intelligent and inquisitive students of nature.



### A final word: Send us your photos!



We'd love to feature your photos in The Watering Hole newsletter. Clear, simple snapshots of landscapes, wildlife, and the lakes are ideal. Email photos to [volunteer@willowwaterhole.org](mailto:volunteer@willowwaterhole.org) or tag us on Facebook.

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Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy

Park Address:  
5300 Dryad Drive, Houston, TX 77035  
Email: [info@willowwaterhole.org](mailto:info@willowwaterhole.org)  
[www.willowwaterhole.org](http://www.willowwaterhole.org)

