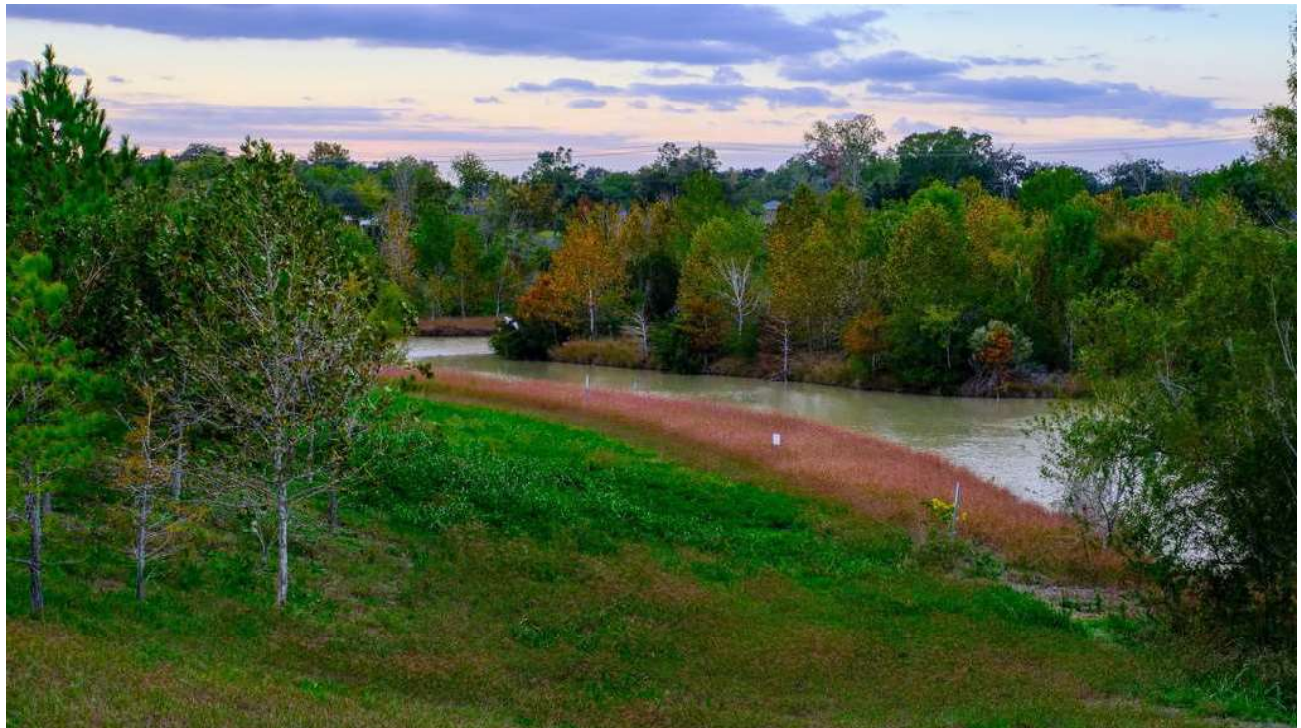


Winter 2024 Volume 4 | Issue 1

The Watering Hole

The Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy Quarterly Newsletter



IN THIS ISSUE

- Happy New Year - PG #2
- Grant Money - PG #3
- Flowers for a Lady - PG #4
- Construction Update- PG #5

2024 is going to be amazing

We gather together again to celebrate the successes achieved in 2023. Visitors to the Waterhole can now enjoy new trails, a new butterfly exhibit, improved roads, and much more. These changes are the result of so many individuals efforts, such as the generous donors, diligent contractors, loyal volunteers, to name just a few. With all the growth in 2023, we are extremely excited about a wonderful 2024.

Photo credit: Alfred Cervantes (Houston Film Commission)





Happy New Year

Thanks to all supporters of the Greenway!

The Conservancy expects great things in 2024, building on accomplishments in 2023.

2023

- The Conservancy’s **Discover Your Greenway** Capital Campaign reached **\$12 million**.
- Five miles of new ADA all-weather hike and bike trails were completed.
- The fishing pier was built.
- Butterfly sculptures were added.
- 250 trees and fifteen pounds of wildflower seeds were planted.
- Six Eagle and Gold Award projects were completed.
- Fifteen conservation and maintenance workdays were held with students, scouts, faith organizations, and corporate groups.
- The 11th annual MusicFest was held.
- Gasmer, Ricecrest, and Clematis streets were repaved by the City.
- Annual Conservancy memberships reached over 200 and Facebook followers reached 5600.



2024

- Three more miles of trails to be completed.
- Wayfinding signage added to all trails.
- More benches and trees to be added along trails.
- Four new parking areas with 150 additional spaces.
- Pedestrian safety improvements on South Willow, Gasmer, and South Post Oak.
- Many more conservation/maintenance workdays and scout projects.
- Development of the 15-acre native coastal prairie preserve in accordance with an environmental and educational access master plan as approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife, Harris County Flood Control District, and environmental and community organizations.
- Resumption of five major scholastic cross country meets.
- The 12th annual MusicFest.



Grant Funding for Greenway Accessibility and Safety Enhancements

The Elkins Foundation awarded the Conservancy **\$250,000**

in support of the Discover Your Greenway Capital Campaign. This funding will be used to complete accessibility and safety improvements. The Elkins Foundation's mission is to enrich the quality of life for individuals from all walks of life by supporting a wide variety of educational, healthcare, cultural, community, and religious organizations located in and serving Houston and the Greater Gulf Coast.

The Conservancy is so appreciative of private foundations that have supported the capital campaign.



Trail Construction at Westbury Lake



Sculptures at the Greenway

It was truly a grand opening for the “Flowers for a Lady” sculptures at the Greenway on October 23rd.

The sculptures are located at 5300 Dryad Drive. Come out to take a look, walk on the new trails in the area, and enjoy the weather.

Created by the internationally renowned artist, Rosalinda Toro, in honor of Kathleen Tinsley Ownby to recognize her legacy of creating additional park land for Houstonians through the SPARK School Park Program.



**Willow Waterhole
Greenway
October 23, 2023**

**Ribbon Cutting for
“Flowers for a Lady”
Sculptures**

**In Honor of
Kathleen Tinsley Ownby**

<p>“Flowers For A Lady” October 2023</p> <p>The three sculptures are in honor of Kathleen Tinsley Ownby and recognize her legacy of creating additional parkland for Houstonians. Her mother, Councilmember Eleanor Tinsley, founded the SPARK School Park Program in 1983 and Kathleen has been the executive director since 1988. As a result of her efforts, there are now over 300 SPARK Parks in seventeen school districts in the Houston area. Kathleen grew up in Willow Meadows, graduated from Westbury High School, and has also been an influential advocate for the development of Willow Waterhole Greenway.</p> 		<p>“Flowers For A Lady” Rosalinda R. Toro – Artist Concrete-Tile and Glass-Mosaics-Stainless Steel-Stained Glass October 2023</p> <p>The triad of beautiful sculptures are in honor of Kathleen Tinsley Ownby and recognize her legacy of creating additional parkland for Houstonians through the SPARK School Park Program. The blue butterflies in flight represent the transformation of parks in the city and the concrete columns wrapped in colorful flower mosaics represent Mrs. Ownby’s love for flowers and respect for nature. They remind the viewer of the importance of caring for nature and how life can bloom beautifully in balance with body, mind, and spirit.</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>“Flowers For A Lady” Sculptures In Honor of Kathleen Tinsley Ownby October 2023</p> <p>Thanks to Major Contributors:</p> <p>Ownby Family and Friends Kinder Foundation John P. McGovern Foundation District K Council Member Marthe Casarez-Tatum</p>	
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Construction Updates

Dillon Pitts, with IDEAL Contracting Services, and his crew had been steadily constructing the new trails at Westbury Lake in 2023.

At the age of eighteen, he told his dad that he wanted to learn the business. His dad and his dad's prior partner taught him all he knows. Five of the men on his crew also worked for his dad. Dillon has a lot of construction experience, especially from building a 28-mile trail from the Trinity River to Lake Houston.

A native Houstonian, he grew up in LaPorte. He is married with two girls, Charlotte, age 5, and Magnolia, 18 months. His favorite part of being at Willow Waterhole is the beautiful views of the trees and lakes. We couldn't agree more!



Over three miles of trail construction at Westbury Lake has been completed. January's activities included backfilling and grading along sides of the trails, hydro mulching of grasses, some tree trimming, general cleanup, and clearing the construction camp. This project was funded by the Harris County Precinct One Commissioner's Office.

In the spring, you will start seeing wayfinding signage, the addition of more benches, and the extension of the parking lot at Westbury Lake.

The new Triangle Lake Trail is complete except for the addition of benches. The other four lake trails will be completed by the end of June 2024 in the sequence of Scout, Heron, Willow, and Prairie. These trails and new parking areas have been funded by private foundations.

When all the accessibility improvements are completed there will be eight miles of trails and four parking areas.



Several board members hosted chicken lunches for the workers



The Eastern Phoebe

This common flycatcher is at Willow Waterhole from mid-October through March.

It perches conspicuously in open areas often near water and bobs its tail frequently.

The Eastern Phoebe has a dark head and tail, a black bill, and gray smudges on each side of its breast.

Listen for its “fee-bee” call.



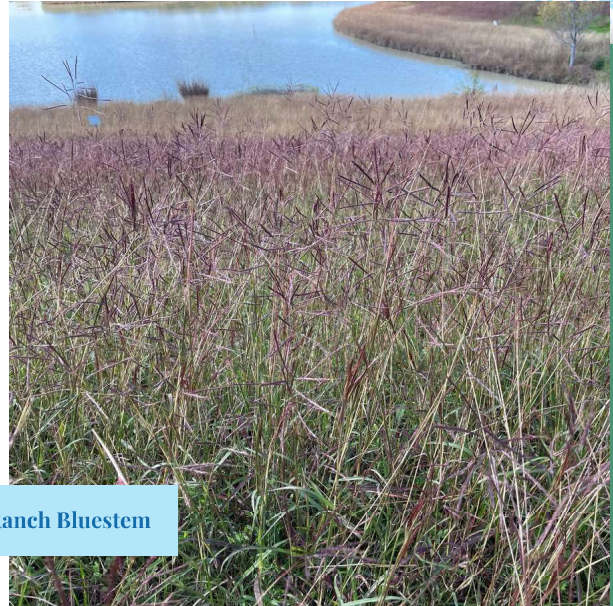
Eastern Phoebe

Photo Credit: Mark Meyer

King Ranch Bluestem - Invasive Beauty

As you walk along the trails, the willowy tall grasses with purple seeded tops are hard to miss. The King Ranch Bluestem is unfortunately an invasive species that presently claims more than half of Texas as its home.

Originally created on the King Ranch for grazing animals, it cannot be contained in open areas. Control is almost impossible even with frequent mowing, controlled burning, and herbicides. This invasive grass diminishes bird and insect diversity and abundance and is drought resistant. Stems lay on the ground and the long dangling seed heads can grow at a rate of 2–3 feet in height within 7–10 days. Its value appears to be the beauty it brings to the Waterhole.



King Ranch Bluestem



Welcome to the Goats!



If you recently visited Prairie Lake, you have seen the goats. Goats are ruminant animals, which are grazing mammals that acquire nutrients from plant-based foods and grasses.

The Harris County Flood Control District is piloting an innovative, eco-friendly vegetation management approach which involves 300 goats provided, managed, and cared for by a third-party vendor to naturally graze down areas of vegetation in the Willow Waterhole Native Prairie Preserve.

After the goats graze a section of the preserve down to specified levels, they are moved to another area to repeat the process.

This vegetation management project is just one part of the Willow Waterhole Prairie Management Plan, which serves to conserve and restore this coastal prairie ecosystem, one of the last urban coastal prairie sites in Harris County.

Reduction in vegetation, particularly noxious and invasive species, can promote growth of desirable native species we want to protect, such as the endangered Texas prairie dawn flower found in this area.

The pilot goat grazing project is expected to be completed in winter 2023/2024, removing hinderances to the Texas prairie dawn's germination and growth in the spring.



Nature's Weed Eaters

photo credit: Cindy Chapman



Texas Prairie Dawn

<https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife>



Need your help with young cats

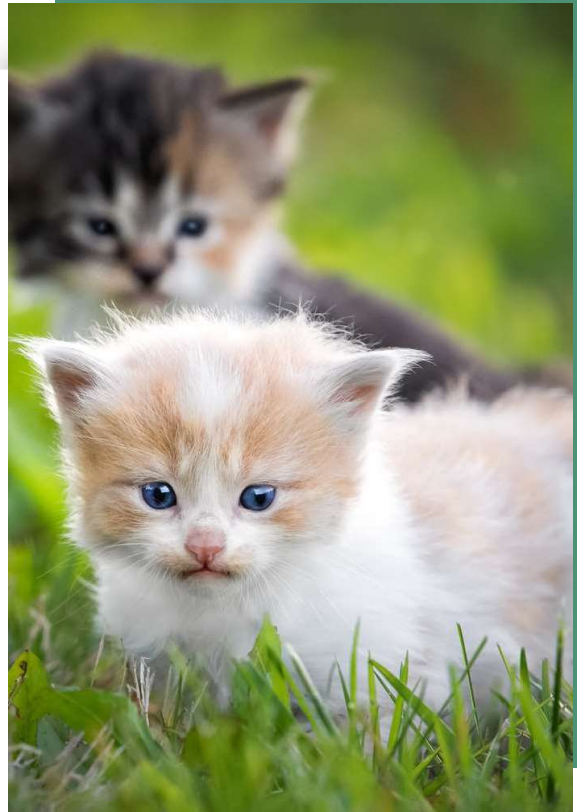


Since July, local resident Wendy Schneider and two others have trapped, spayed or neutered, and either fostered, adopted, or returned approximately 10 young cats who live in the Greenway along the fence line with Ranchwood Apartments.

There are as many as 50 feral or tame stray cats living in or around the area. Wendy and her friends plan to continue this work for the sake of preventing pet suffering and overpopulation and because they realize what a treasure we have at the Waterhole.

They are hoping to get more help from the community and asking for volunteers to trap, feed, transport cats to or from surgery, and individuals who live nearby who can offer a climate-controlled garage or room where caged cats can be held overnight before surgery and to recover for approximately 24 hours post-surgery.

There is always a need for food and cash donations for this rescue operation. If you can provide any type of support to Wendy and friends, please send a note to wendy.watrous@gmail.com.



Thank you!



Thanks to our newest Willow Waterhole Greenway 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 and donors from **October 2023 - December 2023**.

Individual Members	Family Members	Supporting Members	Sustaining Members
--------------------	----------------	--------------------	--------------------

- Alison Connor
- Paula DeWitte
- Ed & Janice Fastow
- Michael & Danielle Guffey
- Alan Guttman
- Tod & Carla Heverly
- Molly Marshall
- Keith McAuliffe
- Miles White and Alicia Goldberg
- Jessica Wilbanks

- Gerri Ashworth
- Sarah and Joeff Bentley
- Becky St Denis
- David Wallace
- Margaret & Richard White

- Deidre & Kevin Douglass
- Russell and Christie Harrison
- Cindy Knox

- Sandra & Gordon Kuehl

Conservation Updates

- **New bus stop enclosures and sidewalk:** Added in front of The Gathering Place at 5310 South Willow Drive.
- **Construction at Triangle and Westbury Lake:** Completed in December.
- **Scout Pack 806** - Picked up trash on Ricecrest. Very thankful for their work.



Dormancy at the Willow Waterhole Prairie Garden

We are in the season of the year in the northern hemisphere called winter. The plant world seems to be in decline with trees and plants losing leaves, flowers failing to bloom, and plants turning brown. Plants still upright might be showing dry seeds or might be showing empty seed pods.

But lots is going on. First, the dead plants, stems and leaves, if they are not cleared, provide hiding places for insects and their eggs. You will often find caterpillars amongst the leaves. A nice grassy mound might be a hiding place for mice. Frogs and toads will bed down wherever they can find protection and, being cold blooded, will wait for warm weather to become active. Snakes and turtles do this too.

In the prairie gardens at Willow Waterhole we have cut down and lightly cleared a lot of the plant material. I say “lightly” because we don’t want to deprive reptiles and rodents a place of shelter during the cold spells of the Houston winter.

What we are seeing in the gardens are all kinds of seedlings popping up but staying close to the ground. Some leaf shapes we recognize right away are Carolina geraniums and American basket flower. The bluebonnet leaf is easy to spot once you learn its shape. Others are a bit hard to name but will develop and we will recognize them as they get tall. The prairie plants for 2024 are getting ready to fill the gardens.

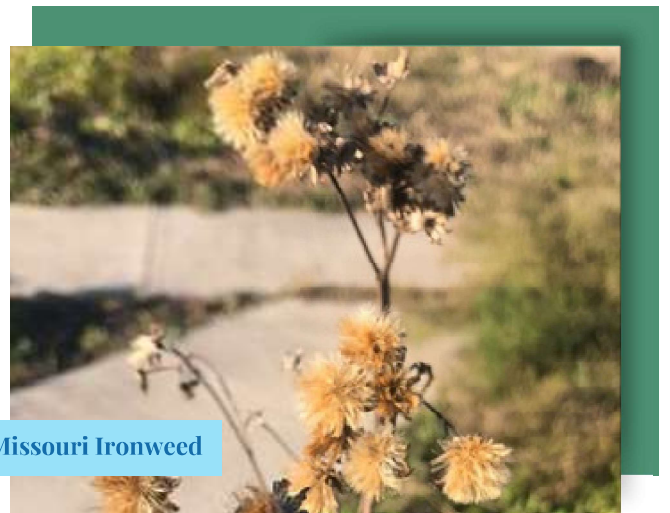
Dormancy is a part of natural life cycles. It happens because the days grew shorter as we approached the Winter Solstice on December 21. The weather is cooler. Since that date the days have been getting a bit longer. Our portion of the planet gradually tips towards the sun and our hemisphere will warm up to bring back tree and vigorous plant growth.

Enjoy the dormancy of our Houston winter. So far it has been mild with salvia and Indian blanket blooming vigorously. Maybe we will get some colder days in January and February. The native plants won’t mind.



Red Salvia

Photo Credit: Hazel Potvine



Missouri Ironweed

Photo Credit: Hazel Potvine



Celebrating the successes of 2023



Greenspace Conservancy Board members and friends gathered in December for their annual thanksgiving meeting. It's not the usual thanksgiving event because we share pizza not turkey, but it is to give thanks for the many hours of support for the Waterhole. We all love the greenspace and truly appreciate the amazing progress in 2023!

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 or tag us on Facebook.



Willow Waterhole Greenspace Conservancy

Park Address:
5300 Dryad Drive, Houston, TX 77035
Email: info@willowwaterhole.org
www.willowwaterhole.org

