

Piney Wood Lakes Chapter Texas Master Naturalist  
Gazebo Nature Preserve at Lake Livingston Dam

The Gazebo Nature Preserve at Lake Livingston Dam (GNP) project volunteers worked in 2023 on those stated agreements per the 2023 Amended and Restated Memorandum of Understanding between East Texas Electric Cooperative, Inc., Polk County and Piney Wood Lakes Texas Master Naturalist Chapter. Chapter members, plus interested public trained as GNP volunteers dedicated to the various ongoing GNP projects. Unfortunately, weather in 2023 factored in preventing planned activities due to conditions ranging from severe drought to record-breaking precipitation including a 500-year flood. There was also additional TRA work on their portion of GNP property west of the gazebo for improvements of an added access gravel road closest the river and concrete drainage parallel to the GNP access road. Plans were cancelled for an additional information board and cultivating native vegetation along the natural seep.

By year's end, GNP Co-Directors Timi Maples and Susan Tullos, with input from 2023 TMN President Ron Diderich, formed a Gazebo Nature Preserve Steering Committee to ensure achieving all GNP agreements and goals. The initial committee of six will be expanded to include advisors and volunteers with natural resource expertise from around the eco-region.

**A. Accomplishments for 2023 included:**

1. Goal: Overseeing GNP management, development and restoration of the natural resources consistent with the local ecoregion: Trained volunteers met monthly to enhance the existing grasslands and native flora, as well as provide needed maintenance around the existing ADA walkway. They chose individual projects to pursue independently. Projects included the monthly Work Day/Explore Day with Timi's guidance. There were the non-native species removal called "Privet Purge" and "Tallow Terminator". Future pursuit is planned to remove the Japanese Honeysuckle and Johnson grass that also strangling the native species. One important planned activity, a controlled burn conducted by the Texas Forestry Service, was delayed then postponed due TFS personnel needed for the ongoing wildfires around the state.

2. GOAL: Providing public education events based on ongoing preparations and collections of native plant species data, accurate records of migratory and resident birds and the local fauna that are throughout the preserve: Appropriate databases are being created to provide scientific data and educational signage for public outreach materials and events, as well as future grant applications. There were two formal public events advertised for the public, including a guided “Get your Steps” walk about and a birding observation day for the Audubon’s Christmas Bird Count. There were many occasions during the year where volunteers engaged with public visitors who stop by to view the river and waters below the dam with the multitudes of water birds present. Chapter members would take the time to visit with these people and answer questions.

3. GOAL: Developing a new Birdwatching Platform: This 2022 project idea progressed with collection and preparation of the necessary materials for supports, railing and flooring, once the 2023 Amended and Restated MOU was executed. The project was put on a temporary hold late 2023, pending a Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) State Committee review. Texas Parks & Wildlife Coordinator and Texas A&M AgriLife Assistant Coordinator are reviewing the MOU and platform documents, as required per the TMN Governing Documents, Chapter Operating Handbook of Jan. 2023. Chapter advisor AgriLife Agent Matthew March is our liaison with the state.

4. GOAL: Enhancing an existing lowland GNP area: A berm was formed in the lower marshy area, near the north east boundary, which enhances an area adjacent to the existing wetlands. Dirt/silt from a hydroelectric project was provided and delivered. This area will be included in a future walking path or board walk.

**B. Current proposed or planned 2024 projects include:**

1. 2024-Complete the Birdwatching Platform Spring 2024; add signage on platform use. Post informational bird lists on the Gazebo bulletin-board. Organize at least two public birding events featuring both the water area and the woods and grasses areas.

2. 2024- Post a “Welcome” sign with basic ‘leave no trace and ‘all pets must be leashed pets’ at entry to paved walkway. Paint the concreted oil drum at path entry. Place educational signage around the walking path.
3. 2024-Create and mow a circular walking path toward the wetlands and nature area in the GNP southeast corner for expanded birding and viewing nature. Clear around the two existing concrete pads by the wetlands for use in public events. Work with ETEC to correct the existing degraded asphalt walking path for ADA and public safety.
4. 2024- Expand projects to include nesting boxes for bats, wood ducks, bluebirds for observation and data gathering. Collect seeds and grow plants for distribution around the preserve. Assess viability for placement of Longleaf pines. Conduct controlled burn and create educational sections showing benefits of burned versus non-burned areas.
5. 2024-Expand the parking lot area with an added graveled area into the grasslands on the north side of the existing 7 car parking lot. This proposed project is pending attainment of donations and or a grant.
6. 2024- Place a wood split-rail fence parallel to the entry road on the grasslands side for aesthetics, security, and to prevent visitors parking off the pavement. This proposed project is pending attainment of donations and or a grant.

### **C. Future plans and/or wish list:**

1. Convey the drainage water from the existing seep that was concreted by the entry road and move via a pipe or culvert under the road into the marsh/wetland area. Provide interpretive signage on erosion control.
2. Planning for a future Visitor Center – A welcome center placed approximately near where the contractor buildings were located during the hydroplant’s construction. This facility would provide educational displays and brochures. Possibly it would provide a restroom facility. Research and studying this facility’s design will take time prior to submitting for review and approval.
3. Add interpretive signage with QR codes providing educational facts of the preserve, the hydroplant and the history of this location. Signage similar to what was in original ETEC recreational plans or updated to more contemporary signage.

4. Research activating the existing water well that was left intact, near the entry using solar energy or get electricity donated. Incorporate a storage shed with the pump house. The referenced shed is for use by GNP volunteers for storing tools and supplies acquired to enhance the preserve, and winter storage of nesting boxes.