

Lost Pines Nature Trail

Brief History & Status

If you are new to the area or have been a Tahitian Village (TV) resident for years, you may not have yet discovered the Lost Pines Nature Trail (LPNT) area. It is located on Riverside Drive. It is a beautiful natural area that sits beside a section of the Colorado River that should be appreciated for what it has become.

The TVPOA was the initial owner of all of the reserves within Tahitian Village after the last “developer” left the Village. There are several reserve areas platted on the maps of Tahitian Village. Many are listed as “future park”, “future lake” etc. The TVPOA was being taxed by the county for these reserve areas. Shortly after the BCWCID#2 (Water District) was established the TVPOA transferred ownership of the reserve areas to the Water District. The Water District is not a taxable entity, as established by the State of Texas and approved by the Bastrop County Commissioners.

Even though the Water District owns the LPNT, BCWCID#2 does not have a charter (by law) or the means/funding available to create and maintain reserve areas for use (i.e. parks or Nature Trails etc.) Therefore, like all the other reserves in TV, they are open areas and are not maintained for public use.

Unlike the rest of the reserves, this area provides a rare access point to the river in Bastrop County and is located in the flood zone.

In 2007, concerned citizens of Bastrop County (not just Tahitian Village) realized the nature reserve area would benefit from stewardship by naturalists/biologists. They banded together to create the LPNT area from the 28-acre reserve owned by BCWCID#2. This area coupled with another adjacent reserve area, now owned by Pines & Prairie Trust, creates 90 acres of nature area on the river.

The Lower Colorado River Authority awarded the initial grant to begin the development. Numerous local partners were part of this initiative and subsequent funding initiatives developed the trails, cable and bollard fencing, ADA trail, picnic area, etc. Among those partners were Texas Parks and Wildlife, Bastrop Economic Development Corporation, Environmental Stewardship, US Fish and Wildlife, National Park Service and others.

Participation in these grants codified that this space be maintained as a nature park and toad habitat. A few of these grants were awarded based on maintaining the area as a sensitive wetland, recharge zone and Houston toad habitat. Due to these designations, vehicular and pedestrian activity must be controlled in specific areas of the nature reserve.

The area is open to the public and is to be enjoyed by the public. Its primary purpose is for the Nature Trails and as an ingress / egress to the Colorado River. It is also listed on the Texas Parks Paddle Trail website. The Water District cooperates with all organizations and individuals who wish to use the area for its intended use.

About three years ago, (May 2014) after a few years of neglect, (Sadly, grants provide for creating areas, but not maintaining them ... and the Water District also cannot maintain the area to the level required for safe public use with funds received from its customers) another group of volunteers assembled. The need arose because the area had been again overrun with vegetation and access was hampered by deterioration of the roads and parking areas. Even more so, the area was overrun with drunks, drugs, prostitution, poaching and other 'undesirable' activities.

This new group, spearheaded by Keep Bastrop County Beautiful (KBCB), sought out and received private donations and support from the County to do some needed repairs to the roads and infrastructure in order to preserve and maintain the area. Shortly after the maintenance improvements were made we found that the undesirable elements quickly returned. A group of volunteers maintained the area and also monitored gate access. Gates were locked from sunset to sunrise. Volunteers were put in harm's way by many undesirable elements during that summer. Even with the support of the Game Wardens and Bastrop County Sheriff most volunteers felt unsafe being put in the position of "cop" and left the ranks of volunteers.

The second year, considering the safety of TV residents and the public, and on the recommendation of the Sheriff's department, the Water District began to keep the two gates locked at all times except for a limited number of businesses and true LPNT stewards. (The Water District also grants occasional access to the disabled or others who have a documented need for entrance beyond the outside parking area.) The results have been outstanding. Locked gates do not deter families, kayakers, fishermen or hikers. As our Sherriff's Dept. will tell you, locked gates only deter the undesirables. Crime remained down. Trash was at "acceptable" levels where remaining volunteers could maintain the grounds. The experiment proved to the District and the County that once again, people with bad intentions appear to be fairly lazy in nature and do not like to walk with their coolers and drugs more than 10-15 feet.

The public access parking lot is about 50-75 yards from the original loading/parking area. Individuals will portage their kayak or picnic basket to or from this public parking area down a path leading to the river bank. (Kayak carts or wheeled coolers can be helpful.) This paved public access parking area provides safe parking during daylight hours and the entire nature reserve, including parking lots, is still marked as "no trespassing" after sunset.

The river companies provide additional security, volunteer hours and financial assistance after floods etc. in exchange for their access. The County provided additional support in removing some unsafe rotting Cottonwoods after the 2015 floods. Without this additional private and public support, the area would not be in its current condition.

Since 2014, a weekly crew of Lost Pines Master Naturalists and multiple TV residents have done their best to keep the park clean and accessible. These volunteers are often joined by the local river outfitters. This endeavor is fully supported by the BCWCID#2. All TV residents are welcome to join them and several have. Yet most of these volunteers live outside the Village.

The LPNT, again, is property owned by BCWCID#2 ... yet a public area for the enjoyment of Nature and the Colorado River. It is also habitat for toads, deer, eagles, snakes, bobcats and other critters in the area. The improvements were funded by public and private funds and although the BCWCID#2 'owns' the property it is just one of its many stewards. The BCWCID has always recognized the delicate balance between "access" and "security" at the LPNT and reserve trails. Rules are always a balance and were created by the District in cooperation with the many stewards of the LPNT.

Over time, it is the Water District's intent to find a new government entity to own this property. They desire to find an owner who has the ability to protect and maintain the area as a Nature area and kayak/canoe "Take-out" area for the Colorado River. We are currently in discussion with Bastrop County as a possible future owner. As Bastrop County becomes less rural, there is a need to preserve its natural areas and river access points as public parks.

If you want to volunteer your time and join up with the current volunteers, please contact the BCWCID#2 or TVPOA office and they will get you in touch with the Volunteer leaders or contact me at: sam@bcwcid2.org

Written by: Sam Kier, BCWCID#2 Treasurer and Board Member – June 1, 2017.