



Houston Parks and Recreation Department

FINAL REPORT

**Houston's Birds and Bayous
Public Awareness and Educational Campaign
(Birds and Bayous of Houston)
Contract # 582-8-84969**

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Houston's Birds and Bayous Public Awareness and Educational Campaign (Birds and Bayous of Houston)

Executive Summary

The following information is provided to share with the grantor, Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, a comprehensive report describing the successful completion of the Houston's Birds and Bayous Public Awareness and Educational Campaign, administered by the Houston Parks and Recreation Department (HPARD). This final draft report, including program activities implemented July 15, 2009 provides a thorough summation of the accomplished goals, objectives and performance measures.

The success of Houston's Birds and Bayous Public Awareness and Educational Campaign program is attributed to its diverse programs, events, activities and staff teamwork and leadership. Additionally, the dedication and commitment of grant partners and HPARD employees played a vital role in the program's accomplishments. The aim of the campaign was to reconnect urban youth with nature by profiling ecological resources along migratory bird paths. Program outreach also impacted the lives of teen and senior populations.

Introduction

From the onset of the project, the grant has been marketed in the Houston Parks and Recreation Department's Winter, Summer and Fall Activities in the Park catalogs. Youth and seniors were encouraged to join in with fun activities and field trips that would allow them to explore Houston's birds and bayous. This free program aimed to connect participants with nature by increasing their awareness of Houston's important ecological resources.

It was the goal of the grant to involve as many as 14 community centers with programs and services of the grant, however, youth and teens from 30 additional community centers in close proximity to the grant sites were also afforded the opportunity to participate. The populations being served involved low to moderate income minority youth, teens and some seniors to connect them with the natural environment and help them make environmentally sound decisions.

This program was funded in part by a grant from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Project Methodology

The goals and objectives of the grant project were to provide hands-on environmental education to youth and adults regarding Houston's remarkable abundance of avian species, the unique bayou system that provides their natural habitat, and how the protection and stewardship of these ecological resources result in a cleaner and healthier Galveston Bay.

The grant made provisions to involve partnering collaboration with local organizations who are avid supporters of promoting nature programs. These programs take place near bayous as outdoor classrooms and incorporate excursions to Galveston Bay to reinforce the connection between birds, bayous and the bay.

Project Results

14 HPARD community centers served as primary program sites for implementation of the Birds and Bayous grant. The community centers included Northwest locations, Swiney, Melrose, Tuffly, and Midwell; Southeast locations, Mason, Garden Villas, Edgewood; Southwest locations, Alameda, Linkwood, Godwin and Sunnyside; and Northwest locations, Love, Judson Robinson, Jr., and Proctor. Youth and teens from an additional 30 HPARD community centers participated in planned "Birds and Bayous" activities.

All goals, objectives, and performance measures have been met. As of July 15, 2009, of the grant period, a total of 1,622 urban youth and teens were impacted through on-site learning sessions, experiential environmental education sessions, family bird walks and field trip excursions. Additionally, 315 adults/volunteers and 18 seniors were also exposed to this worthwhile project.

PARTICIPANT'S NUMBERS AND ACTIVITIES

Venue: Lake Houston Wilderness Park (LHWP), a beautiful forested expanse of nearly 5,000 acres is located approximately 30 miles north of Houston off of Hwy. 59. LHWP offers a variety of outdoor learning experiences for people of all ages including camping, hiking, canoeing and outdoor recreation. Lake Houston Wilderness Park was the perfect spot for Houston Parks and Recreation Department's participants to be involved in extensive nature study as part of this grant. Activities were led by Greg Akins, Nikia Lewis, Kay Joshua, Crystal Johnston and Glenn Miller which included:

- Bird migration study in the LHWP Nature Center
- Education of proper binocular use
- Construction of bird feeders
- Summer bird count activities
- Bird hikes and
- Birding scavenger hunts

Total Participation: 469 youth and 101 staff. Participating community centers and attendance numbers were recorded on the following dates attended Lake Houston Wilderness Park including

- June 10, 2009, 35 youth and 8 staff from Love, Carverdale, and Freed Community Centers
- June 12, 2009, 36 youth and 5 staff from Cherryhurst, River Oaks Community Centers
- June 17, 2009, 38 youth and 10 staff from Edgewood, Bessie Swindle, and Crestmont Community Centers
- June 24, 2009, 34 youth and 9 staff from Robinson Sr., Clinton, and Lakewood Community Centers
- June 25, 2009, 35 youth and 8 staff from Candlelight, Independence Heights, and Montie Beach Community Centers
- July 8, 2009, 41 youth and 5 staff from Alameda, Townswood, and Sunnyside Community Centers
- July 9, 2009, 28 youth and 8 staff from Hartman, Ingrando, and Settegast Community Centers attended Lake Houston Park.

- July 15, 2009, 38 youth and 8 staff for Swiney, Denver Harbor and Tuffly Community Centers
- July 16, 2009, 30 youth and 8 staff for Godwin Linkwood and Emancipation Community Centers
- July 22, 2009, 38 youth and 9 staff for Fonde, Woodland and Stude Community Centers
- July 29, 2009, 37 youth and 7 staff for Garden Villas, Sagemont and Charlton Community Centers
- July 22, 2009, 40 youth and 7 staff for Tidwell and Shadylane Community Centers
- July 22, 2009, 38 youth and 9 staff for Fonde, Woodland and Stude Community Centers

Venue: Keith Weiss Park, 12300 Aldine Westfield. Total Participation: 477 youth and 91 staff

Keith Weiss Park, a northeast geographical located park represents 500 acres of woods and open fields great for birding and wildlife watching. The park offers a variety of outdoor learning experiences for people of all ages including hiking, fishing and outdoor recreation. Keith Weiss Park provided a summer experience for youth to explore nature and participate with in birding activities as part of the grant. Glen Miller, grant partner led lead youth with hands-on birding activities including:

- Education of proper binocular use
- Bird identification games
- Summer bird count activities
- Bird hikes and
- Birding scavenger hunts

Participating community centers and attendance numbers were recorded on the following dates at Keith Weiss Park:

- June 23, 2009, 157 youth and 19 staff from Linkwood, Townwood, Sharpstown, Cherryhurst, Almeda, Sunnyside, and Hackberry, Godwin Community Centers.
- July 10, 2009, 100 youth and 48 staff from Tuffly, Swiney Robinson Sr., Denver Harbor, Shady lane, Clark, and Tidwell, Godwin Community Centers
- July 21, 2009, (Relocated to Tom Bass Park due to rainout), 160 youth and 16 staff from Candlelight, Fonde, Highland, Lincoln, Love, Proctor, Stude and Woodland Community Centers.
- July 31, 2009 (Relocated to Mason Park due), 60 youth and 8 staff from Melrose, Tuffly, Tidwell, Edgewood and Finnigan Community Centers.

Venue: Sims Bayou Urban Nature Center, 3997 River Drive Houston, TX 77017.

Venues: Community Centers. Total Participation: 537 youth, 13 teens and 93 staff

Sims Urban Nature Center is a 1.1 acre sanctuary located in historical Park Place on the original channel of Sims Bayou. The center contains a log cabin, barn, gazebo, gardens, and a pond with native plants, boat dock and seasonal wetland trails that afford a unique opportunity to experience

nature in a dense urban setting. Mary Ann Weber, Educational Director and grant partner gives leadership to provide participants with guided tours and hands-on activities that inspire them to want to visit over and over again.

The nature center provided a perfect summer park setting for youth and teens to spend day camp hours with passive and active nature activities and exploring Sims Bayou. A variety of activities included:

Youth enjoyed hands-on birding activities including:

- Birding 101 on site sessions
 - Education of proper binocular use
 - Bird identification games
- Summer bird count activities
 - Bird walks
- Birding fitness activities
- Bird crafts and art projects
- Water testing
 - Urban bayou study

Participating community centers and attendance numbers were recorded on the following dates at the Sims Urban Nature Center:

- March 3, 2009, 55 youth, 3 staff and 1 volunteer from Linkwood Community Center
- March 24, 2009, 48 youth, 5 teens, 5 staff and 1 volunteer from Almeda Community Center
- March 25, 2009, 24 youth, 2 staff and 1 volunteer from Love Community Center
- March 27, 2009, 48 youth, 3 teens, 2 staff and 1 volunteer from Edgewood Community Center
- April 2, 2009, 33 youth and 2 staff from Tuffly Community Center
- April 7, 2009, 14 youth, 1 teen, 3 staff and 3 volunteers from Garden Villas Community
- April 8, 2009, 11 youth and 7 staff from Mason Community Center
- April 14, 2009, 30 youth, 2 staff and 7 volunteers from Proctor Community Center
- April 15, 2009, 26 youth, 2 teens, 2 staff and 1 volunteer from Tidwell Community Center
- April 22, 2009, 51 youth and 5 staff from Judson Robinson, Jr. Community Center
- May 1, 2009, 17 youth, 2 teens, 4 staff and 1 volunteer from Swiney Community Center
- May 2, 2009, 10 youth, 2 staff attended "Festival on the Bayou" and enjoyed birding and bayou education activities.
- May 5, 2009, 21 youth, 2 teens and 3 staff from Godwin Community Center
- March 2009, 52 youth and teens, 17 staff participated in the 2009 City of Houston Water Fest T-Shirt Design Contest that promoted learning objectives, point and non-point source pollution.

- June 22, 2009, 20 youth and 3 staff from Tidwell Community Center
- June 24, 2009, 21 youth and 5 staff from Godwin Community Center
- June 26, 2009, 18 youth and 4 staff from Mason Community Center
- July 20, 2009, 24 youth and 5 staff from Proctor Community Center (Numbers to be provided following trip)
- July 23, 2009, 20 youth and 2 staff from Garden Villas Community Center (Numbers to be provided following trip)
- July 30, 2009, 15 youth and 2 staff from Settegast Community Center

Venue: Buffalo Bayou. Total Participation: 32 youth, 32 teens, 14 staff and 18 seniors

Buffalo Bayou Partnership is dedicated to developing and maintaining sustainable development, native plantings, environmentally-friendly programs and tours for Houstonians and visitors. Historical tours of Buffalo Bayou included an overview of the history of bats that migrate along the bayou.

Participating community centers and attendance numbers were recorded on the following dates with tours on Buffalo Bayou:

- March 13, April 15, May 8, Pontoon boat rides cancelled by Buffalo Bayou Partnership due to inclement weather. All trips were deferred to Summer 2009.
- June 15, 2009, 18 seniors and 2 staff from the Recreation Programs Section
- June 26, 2009, 15 teens and 3 staff from Edgewood and Melrose Community Centers
- June 30, 2009, 16 youth and 4 staff from Fonde Community Center
- July 14, 2009, 16 youth and 3 staff from Stude and Almeda Community Centers
- August 6, 2009, 17 teens and 2 staff from the Recreation Programs Section

Venues: Brazos Bend State Park, 21901 FM 792 Needville, TX 77461 AND other HPARD Community Centers. Total Participation: 12 youth and 8 staff and other HPARD Community Center

Not far from downtown Houston lies Brazos Bend State Park, a scenic haven for birdwatchers and wildlife observers. More than 270 species of birds have been sighted within the park. Bird hikes are scheduled each month. Glen Miller provided contractual services for youth, teen and senior populations at the community centers including:

- Birdhouse projects including construction, painting and placement in the community centers
- Birding education
- Birding tours on field trip excursions

- Information on clean water and pollution prevention
- Education on diverse communities along and in the bays and bayous through paper game
- Activities pertaining to water life research, weather studies, and bayou birds and mammals
- Microscopes activities to learn about small creatures that live in bays and bayous.

Participating community centers and attendance numbers were recorded on the following dates with tours on Buffalo Bayou:

- May 6, 2009, 6 teens and 4 staff from Carverdale Community Center
- May 7, 2009, 6 teens and 4 staff from Judson Robinson, Sr. Community Center

Venue: Mason Community Center, Host Site for Nature, Fitness and Sports Expo and Family Bird Walks

- July 31, 2009, 50 family members and 8 staff from Recreation Programs Section

PARTICIPANT'S FEEDBACK SUMMARY

Participants were verbally polled from the community centers to gauge how many participants had participated in birding activities before. Of all of the groups, the numbers reflected over 75% had no exposure to the type of activities made possible through the grant. Over 90% of the participants expressed an interest to return to nature setting and be involved in birding and outdoor recreation activities again. It was overwhelming to learn from the group that being in nature settings brought a sense of calmness and appreciation to the youth, teen and senior participants.

DISTRIBUTION OF ANY MATERIALS FUNDED THROUGH THE GRANT

Birds and Bayous have been promoted in the 2009 Houston Parks and Recreation Department Summer Spring, Fall and Summer Activities in the Park Catalogs.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF PROGRAM/ACTIVITIES

Hard copy of photos will be available on CD's, hardcopy via mail.

PARTNER FUNDING INFORMATION

- In-kind and/or cash contributions including tracking of all submittals of all cash and/or contributions, financial invoices including contractual services, mileage and transportation have been included in the final report.

Project Conclusions

Whereas some activities were deferred due to inclement weather that hindered implementation in the fall and spring of the year, the grantee has taken every measure to ensure that all goals and objectives have been met. The efforts of every administrator, staff member, partner and volunteer working together help make this grant one of the best for the citizens being served. Funding was reallocated to satisfy the spending of \$1,500.00 originally designated for stipends due HPARD receiving late notification that anticipated contractors not being able to participate in the grant. Therefore, in compliance with the grant guidelines, the funding was move to the transportation

category which made provisions to service a greater number of inner city youth and teens with birding educational opportunities.

Lessons Learned

While the outcome of the project was outstanding, HPARD always seeks opportunities to provide excellence in programming and services to our customers. For future grants with Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), the Department will consider including additional partners to enhance program diversity, hands - on experiential sessions with youth, and presentations from a cross-section of the environmental education community.

CD Digital Photos

Classroom Sessions and Field Trip Excursions