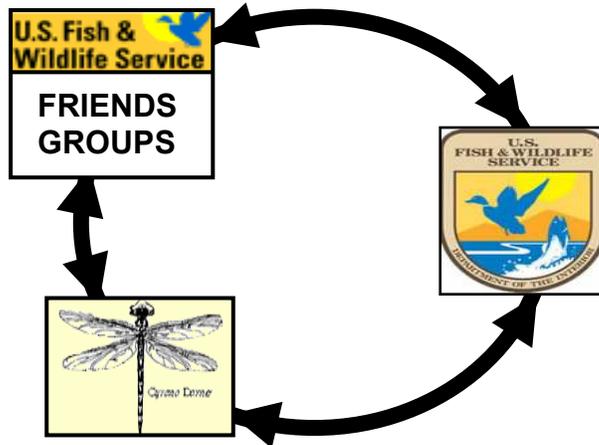


# PARTNERSHIPS

ADVANCED TRAINING  
Texas Master Naturalists  
Cradle of Texas Chapter  
June 9, 2010  
Phil Huxford



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## CONTENTS

**David Brandes:** Friends of the Texas Master Naturalists ..... 1

**Ron Bisbee:** Some Recollections on the History of the Texas Mid-Coast  
Refuge Complex and the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges ..... 4

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### Friends of the Texas Master Naturalists

By David Brandes. President, Texas Master Naturalists, Cradle of Texas Chapter

“Friends of the Texas Master Naturalists” truly describes the synergistic relationship between the Cradle of Texas Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists (TMN) and the Friends of the Texas Mid-Coast Refuges in Brazoria County, Texas. We help each other deliver on our missions and frankly would not be as effective without each other.

Our Friends are very accomplished at raising funds, which TMN does not do. Friend's funds and members construct facilities and trails for public use, and attract the public to the wonders of our coastal and inland refuge properties. While doing this they also educate the public to the wonders of nature and how to be good stewards of nature. Funds raised by the Friends directly and indirectly enhance TMN’s effectiveness on our refuges.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Many of our TMN members are also members of Friends because our missions are similar. TMN, while assisting on many Friends projects, is primarily adept as docents and educators. We are a life-long learning organization developing and delivering environmental education curriculums for all elementary and high school grade levels as well as the public throughout Brazoria County.

Here are some of the projects in which TMN members are involved in Brazoria County beyond our local refuge borders. Note how they complement and expand the Friends mission.

- Environmental Education
  - *INEOS Environmental Education Program:* This is a Partnership with INEOS, a chemical company which has placed 4500 acres of Brazoria County land in a conservation easement. The curriculum consists of 12 classes throughout the school year for all Angleton Independent School District third grade children. The school children come onto the easement three times during the school year for all day sessions of 4 classes.
  - *Linville Environmental Education Program (LEEP):* Similar to INEOS above, this is in cooperation with ConocoPhillips addressing the needs of Sweeny Independent School District K-12 children.
  - *Sea Center Texas:* TMN provides docents for the public and for Brazosport Independent School District who visit for school programs every year. Topics include our coastal ecosystems, wetlands and the fish hatchery science and operation.
  - *Brazoria County Parks Department:* This partnership provides TMN an opportunity to develop and execute summer environmental education programs for the public. An opportunity is also provided to input to parks planning and development.
  - *Brazoria County Libraries:* During the summer, two hands-on environmental education sessions are conducted at each of the eleven libraries, primarily targeting pre-school and elementary children.
  - *Texas Parks and Wildlife Department:* TPWD is one of our state-wide sponsors. Beyond Sea Center Texas, we provide docents for the local state parks.
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- Habitat restoration and access
  - *Gulf Coast Bird Observatory:* With this partner, we assist with restoring their local Columbia Bottomland Forest and wetlands habitat. Docents are also provided for their outreach activities. Some of our members serve on their Board of Directors.
  - Other habitat restoration projects:
    - Tall Grass Prairie Restoration at Armand Bayou Nature Center
    - Tall Grass Prairie Restoration at Sheldon Lake State Park
    - Wolf Lake Skimmer Lot Maintenance and Monitoring at BNWR
    - Halls Bayou Unit Coastal Prairie Restoration

## PARTNERSHIPS

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- Citizen Science Projects
  - *Invasive Species Monitoring Network*: In cooperation with The Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center and Texas Parks and Wildlife, species are identified, photographed and entered into a public database that is rolled into the USGA database of invasive species. The activities are conducted on and off our local refuges.
  - *Phytoplankton Monitoring Network*: In cooperation with NOAA and TPWD, our county bay waters are sampled biweekly for phytoplankton. Species are identified and counted before being entered into a NOAA database. Blooms of hazardous species are analyzed by the PMN project labs for toxins. Public alerts may be issued from these efforts.
  - *Cactus Moth Monitoring Project*: Sponsored by TPWD and Texas A&M University, the progress of this moth species detrimental to prickly pear cactus is monitored.
  - *Sea Turtle Patrol*: In cooperation with USFWS, TPWD and Texas A&M University, beaches are monitored during the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle egg laying season. Nests are identified for relocation to hatching facilities.
  - We participate individually in many other projects, such as Cornell Labs and TPWD citizen science projects, bird counts, butterfly counts, amphibian watches, etc.

Refuge projects supporting Friends:

- Public Use Facility Construction
- Discovery Environmental Education Program (DEEP), serving the Brazosport Independent School District
- Migration Celebration, a public outreach and education event
- Trail Maintenance and Development
- Invasive Species Eradication

I believe this demonstrates the level of cooperation and synergy with our Friends. Like many endeavors, we accomplish much more together than we could apart. I thank the Friends for all they do.

Dave Brandes  
President  
Texas Master Naturalists, Cradle of Texas Chapter

## PARTNERSHIPS

### **Some Recollections on the History of the Texas Mid-Coast Refuge Complex And the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges**

**By  
Ron Bisbee – Refuge Manager – 1978-2003**

Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge was the first refuge, being created in 1966 under the authority of the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp (Duck Stamp) Act. The exact date can be found in the first Annual Narrative Report on file in the Complex Office. Just prior to this time, Congress had advanced a loan to the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife of the US Fish & Wildlife Service based on the future sales of “duck stamps” to speed up the acquisition of important wetlands for waterfowl habitat.

San Bernard NWR came on line in 1969 under this same program. The entire Refuge System saw major expansion for waterfowl breeding and wintering habitat under this program. In Texas, the focus was on preserving coastal salt marshes for wintering waterfowl.

The program was so successful that in the mid 70’s, Congress again advanced loans for refuge acquisition but required a more thorough planning and prioritization process. State and Federal resource agencies along with public input identified numerous coastal areas of importance to wintering waterfowl and other migratory birds along the Texas Coast under the Category 8 Plan (the Texas Coast ranked 8<sup>th</sup> out of 34 plans nationwide in importance). Big Boggy NWR was created from this effort in 1983.

Major additions to these refuges also resulted from the Category 8 Plan. The largest was the 28,500 acre purchase of the Hoskins Mound Addition to Brazoria NWR in the early 90’s. The Slop Bowl area was also added to Brazoria NWR. The Smith Marsh Unit and the Sargent Unit were added to San Bernard NWR.

Now back to the beginning of Brazoria NWR. It was managed as a satellite of Anahuac NWR by Russell Clapper. Work crews would come over from Anahuac and constructed dikes and roads such as Olney Pond and Crosstrails. Soon Raymond Fleetwood was brought on as the resident Manager under Mr. Clapper. The current entrance road did not exist and travel was along a 5 mile dirt trail thru Dow property on the south side of Big Slough. This was, of course, closed to any public access.

San Bernard NWR came on line about the time Mr. Fleetwood retired and Larry Ivy became the Project Leader over both refuges and they became loosely know as the Brazoria Refuge Complex. In 1977, Mr. Ivy moved on to a refuge in Alabama and I transferred in from Okefenokee NWR in Georgia as the Project Leader.

In the early days, there was no base for field operations at Brazoria NWR and so all field work and equipment operations were based out of San Bernard NWR. In the early 80’s, I was able to place a Refuge Manager at San Bernard. Some of the early Managers were Earl Possardt, David Stanborough and Jack Crabtree. I generally looked after things at Brazoria until Rich Antonette came on board with the acquisition of the Hoskins Mound Addition in the early 90’s.

## PARTNERSHIPS

Somewhere in the mid to late 90's, I was asked rather hurriedly to come up with an official name for these three refuges. Since we were situated in the Mid-Coast Initiative area of the Gulf Coast Joint Venture under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, I opted to follow that name for the complex. This occurred after the formation of the "Friends of the Brazoria Refuges", hence the difference in nomenclature.

The Friends movement began in the early 90's in the Refuge System. Tom Schneider can be credited with recruiting Dick Hickner to be the driving force behind the establishment of the organization. Dick pretty much single-handedly got the group up and running in about 1994.

I recall that, early on, there was a big meeting in South Texas dealing with eco-tourism which was attended by Dick, Phil Huxford, Tom and I. There was a lot of talk about nature festivals. On the way back we all decided that we should start one based on our major asset - spring migration of birdlife. This was the birth of Migration Celebration.

Another milestone of the Friends was the Mentoring Program hosted by Molly Krival of Florida in 2005. This effort led to the recruitment of several new Board members that proved to be a real boost to the organization. I called it the rejuvenation of the Friends.