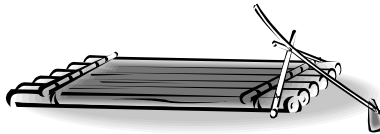


The Red River Raft



Volume 1, No. 1

A Publication of the Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc.

May 26, 2006

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Denise Bonck

Dear Friends of Red River National Wildlife Refuge,

It is with great pleasure that I write this historic message to all of you. Why? This is the first issue of *The Red River Raft*, the official newsletter of the Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc. Publication of the first year of the newsletter is being made possible by a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant that was obtained through the hard work of some very special Alliance volunteers last year – now our Board of Directors.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Alliance Board members for their time and dedication. I hope that you will praise them too. The Board and I want to thank all those that have joined our organization as members – THANK YOU! If you are not a member, we hope that you will become a member, join in our efforts, and tell others about our organization.

Just a little bit of information about me. I am a Virginia native but I have lived in Louisiana since 1997. I moved from the New Orleans area about two years ago after obtaining a job with the Department of Defense. I love my husband, Darin, and our two dogs and two cats. My education is Biology and Urban/Environmental Planning. I worked as a wildlife educator for the National Wildlife Federation and the Louisiana Nature Center and as planner for the City of Slidell, and served as a board member for the Friends of Louisiana Wildlife Refuges.

After learning that the Red River National Wildlife Refuge was in need of a grassroots friends organization to promote wildlife appreciation and education, I asked Brett Hunter, our refuge manager, and some caring volunteers in the community for help. I am not going to say the rest is history,

because this is actually the beginning. YOU ARE THE BEGINNING, your children are the beginning. Of what, you may ask.

There is a wonderful opportunity for all of us to be a part of a rebirth of nature in this area. It is a chance to improve the quality of life in our community and to make the place that you call home special. It is my hope that the refuge lands, your land, will become a special place on this Earth where the restoration of bottomland hardwood forests will foster healthy native *(continued on page 2)*

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THE MISSION OF THE RED RIVER REFUGE ALLIANCE, INC., IS TO BE AN ADVOCATE FOR THE RED RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE BY PROMOTING AND PARTICIPATING IN THE CONSERVATION, ENHANCEMENT, AND APPRECIATION OF OUR NATIVE WILDLIFE COMMUNITIES THROUGH EDUCATION, FUND RAISING, DEVELOPMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS, AND DEVELOPMENT OF ONSITE PROJECTS FOR VOLUNTEERS.

ecosystems for all to enjoy. I truly believe that what makes us more human and what keeps us sane in the crazy urban environment is the awe, beauty, and appreciation of the natural world. Interestingly, many studies have shown that youth that participate in outdoor recreational activities and volunteer in their community do well in school, have high self esteem, and develop good social skills. With that being said, let's turn off those television sets, get some exercise and fresh air, and bond with your family in the great outdoors!

Final thoughts: I want everyone to know that besides supporting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

in wildlife conservation, the Alliance is also here to serve you. Please tell us what recreational and educational services and opportunities you would like to see implemented on the refuge. We highly encourage you to participate in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the refuge. We also eagerly welcome your willingness to volunteer on special projects and the committees that we have such as conservation, construction projects, newsletter articles, and public outreach. Please attend the Freeman and Custis celebration that the Alliance will be involved with. I am looking forward to meeting you personally and getting to know you!

THE RED RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: AN OVERVIEW

By Brett Hunter and Nancy Menasco

Photos by Mark Walker, Jerry Bertrand, and Denise Bonck

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the "world's largest system of lands and waters whose primary purpose is the conservation of wildlife and habitat." Administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) of the Department of the Interior, the National Wildlife Refuge System encompasses 95 million acres and over 544 refuges. There are refuges in all 50 states and some U.S. territories. The Red River National Wildlife Refuge, created by an Act of Congress in 2000, is the only refuge in northwestern Louisiana; its creation brought Louisiana's total to 24. In creating the Red River NWR, Congress authorized the acquisition of a total of 50,000 acres. Land is acquired as funding becomes available and willing sellers are identified. There are five specific focus areas for land acquisition; these areas and their current status are described below.

Headquarters Unit: Bossier Parish

- Located on the Red River just south of the Jimmie Davis Bridge.
- Currently, the Headquarters Unit is just over 600 acres.
- The Headquarters Unit will one day be the home of the refuge's own Environmental Education and Visitor Center.



This facility will not only serve as the administrative building for the refuge, but will also provide education and interpretation opportunities for the local community and all of Northwest Louisiana. The headquarters unit can best be described as a mosaic of habitats ranging from riparian areas along the Red River to a higher site that currently supports an old pecan grove.

The refuge is working through the final phases of land acquisition. Once complete we will immediately begin the process to open the refuge to public access.

Bayou Pierre Unit: Red River and DeSoto Parishes

- Yates and Dill tracts located along and near the Red River on both sides of LA 1 and south and north of LA 509 in Red River Parish – These two tracts make up the fee title land base of the Bayou Pierre Unit totaling approximately 2,300 acres. The Bayou Pierre Unit is typical of a two-year old bottomland hardwood reforestation project in the Red River Valley. The unit is dominated by early successional habitats characteristic of a young reforestation project and supports a diverse group of wildlife species. This unit is also home to several large moist soil areas and potential greentree reservoirs that will be intensively managed for waterfowl and other wetland species once the much needed infrastructure and staff are available. *(Editor's note: A greentree reservoir is a management strategy that entails manipulating water regimes to provide habitat for wintering waterfowl).*
- The soon-to-be finalized Pintail Neighbors tract between US 84 and Smithport Lake in DeSoto Parish will add 1,700 acres of standing bottomland hardwood habitat to the area.
- The Yates tract east of LA 1, except the old rice fields adjacent to the highway, is open to the public to enjoy various wildlife-dependent recreational activities and is open seasonally for hunting.



Spanish Lakes Lowlands Unit: Natchitoches Parish

- Tracts bordered by LA 485 and bisected by I-49 near the Powhatan/Allen exit of I-49.
- The 2,700-acre Spanish Lake Lowlands Unit is the second largest bottomland hardwood reforestation project at the refuge and a portion of it is the only other acreage open to the public. Reforestation efforts began here in 2002, which is evidenced by the few trees that are beginning to win their fight against the surrounding vegetation. This unit of the refuge will one day be the maintenance hub for Red River NWR. It also has great potential for moist soil and greentree management.



Lower Cane River Unit: Natchitoches Parish

- Located south of Natchitoches on the Red River near Cloutierville and across the river from Montgomery.
- Late in 2005, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service closed the purchase of a 3,100-acre tract of land within the authorized boundary of the Lower Cane River Unit. The acquisition of this property effectively doubled the fee title land mass of the refuge and allowed the refuge to set in motion the plans for the largest bottomland hardwood reforestation project to be undertaken to date. The project was completed during February of 2006. Of the 3,100 acres, approximately 1,000



of those acres were set aside to provide a hot food source for wintering waterfowl and other wildlife.

- The habitats at Lower Cane range from riparian areas along the Red through vast acres of reforestation to natural lakes and agricultural fields. The area supports a great diversity of wildlife species to include annual visits of a fairly large flock of Sandhill Cranes. Due to the very limited access and the youth of the young forest, it will be several years before general public access will be allowed.

Wardview Focus Area: Caddo Parish

- Located on the Red River in northeastern Caddo Parish near the Arkansas border.



- No land has been acquired in this focus area at this time.

The four refuge units encompass approximately 8,700 acres; the 1,700-acre Pintail Neighbors tract acquisition will bring the total acreage to 10,400.

Future issues of the newsletter will feature in-depth articles about each unit.

REFUGE UPDATE

Brett Hunter, Refuge Manager

The refuge fiscal year follows the U.S. governmental fiscal year of October 1 through September 30. Here's what's been happening with the refuge in the current fiscal year, which began October 1, 2005:

- Started out the year with the beginnings of a moist soil rehabilitation project at the Bayou Pierre Unit just in time for the fall bird migration flight.
- Kicked off the Comprehensive Conservation Planning process in December 2005 with the biological review followed very closely by the public use review. (See the articles on pages 12 and 13 to find out how to become involved in the process.)

- Planted 1,600 acres of bottomland hardwood seedlings at Bayou Pierre and Lower Cane River Units.
- Continued to proceed with land acquisition projects at the Headquarters Unit and the Bayou Pierre Unit.
- Entered into a cooperative farming agreement with the previous landowner to farm approximately 500 acres of rice at Lower Cane.
- Began preliminary planning for visitor center site locations.
- Worked with a landscape architect to develop alternative site plans for the Headquarters Unit.

LIFE ON THE RED

This regular feature will spotlight the flora and fauna of the Red River NWR. In this issue, read about the Red-tailed Hawk, a raptor that can be found year-round on every unit of the Refuge, and the Nuttall Oak, one of the component species in the reforestation of the Refuge.

LOVE AND THE RED-TAILED HAWK

By Hubert Hervey

A falconer acquaintance of mine tells this story: Each person aspiring to become a falconer has to catch a fledged hawk, raised by a wild pair of birds, and teach it to trust the human for its care, especially teaching it to come to the heavy glove worn on one arm of the falconer to receive food (hacking). The man, who is now an Arkansas falconer, found a nest, waited until the young bird was fledged, successfully captured it, and started



trying to teach it to hack. Instead of coming to his protected arm and eating the offered food, the bird often took aim at his face. One of these attacks almost got an eye. After the third trip to the emergency room to have his face sewn up, his wife told him that she was not going to care for a blind man; he had to choose which he loved more, the Red-tailed Hawk or her. He admits that this was a hard call; but how was a blind man going to take care of a hawk all by himself? He turned the hawk loose, rationalizing that it was really a mean bird anyway.

The Red-tailed Hawk is the "chicken hawk" (redneck-speak) of my boyhood. Hunting and sporting magazines of the day extolled the value of shooting chicken hawks with hunting rifles, claiming that the farmer will thank you for killing a predator of his farm animals. I admit that I too have seen a few Red-tails explode in a puff of feathers. Now, I am wiser and actually love the pair of Red-tailed Hawks that nest on my farm in DeSoto Parish. The adults both have reddish-brown tails, especially on the top, whereas the one or two young they raise have brownish and gray-barred tails. For many years they have nested in lone bull-pines (timber man-speak), left because they were of a low-grade quality with many limbs. Rodents are the food of choice; snakes also rate highly. In times of stress, they will eat carrion and road kill. The largest animal I ever saw a Red-tailed Hawk feeding on was an adult Opossum.

She tried to fly off with the possum (country-speak), and did, but could not gain any altitude at all, just dragging the marsupial along at goatweed height. How do I know it was a female hawk?

Most species of hawks can be sexed, if you have a good look, by size. The females are larger and stronger. In Red-tails, they even present a different silhouette; males appear shorter-tailed and somewhat chunky, females look longer in wing and tail, and somewhat elongated. It is thought that Mother Nature made the sexes different sizes to enable them to have different hunting abilities and be expert at catching animals of different sizes. I guess I love Red-tailed Hawks. Why? They are survivors! Their devotion to each other and their offspring would be called love in the human world.

Red-tailed Hawks, or *Buteo jamaicensis* (science-speak), are the most variable in appearance of any bird species I can think of, ranging from the nearly pure white Krider's Red-tail, to nearly pure black Harlan's, with many shades of brown and reddish brown in between. All of these color phases may be found during winter on the Red River Refuge. There is a definite Louisiana connection to the Harlan's Red-tailed Hawk. It was in Louisiana that John James Audubon shot the bird that he painted when introducing the species; he named it for his good friend, Dr. R. Harlan

In summer a small number of Red-tails nest on the refuge. Sources indicate that our breeding Red-tails are of the eastern subspecies *borealis* (drat, more science speak), from the Greek *boreas*, or north wind. There are local opinions that the southwestern subspecies *fuertsi*, named for famed western wildlife artist, Louis Agassiz Fuertes, breeds here as well. It differs from the subspecies *borealis* in that it has no bellyband and no eye-line, giving it a hooded appearance. Red-tailed Hawks subspecies are known to interbreed where their ranges overlap, so we could also have intergrades.

Eastern Red-tails migrate south for the winter months and are the hawks seen sitting on light poles and fence posts along our highways in great number. They are easy to identify, even at highway speeds, by the white V showing on the back, or by the black belt on the belly. They are the Karate Kings of the air (don't let one kick you, you will bleed). On the Spanish Lake Lowlands Unit of the Red River

Refuge, I have seen through binoculars as many as forty of these birds in a 360-degree pirouette (dancer-speak) when rats are concentrated.

The number of Red-tailed Hawks reported on Christmas Bird Counts and Breeding Bird Surveys indicates populations are increasing. This is good for the farmer because rodents can decrease crop yields and natural controls such as Red-tailed Hawks and owls are always to be preferred to poisons. Red-tails even circle over our towns, helping to keep down the numbers of Norway rats that are such an integral part of civilization.

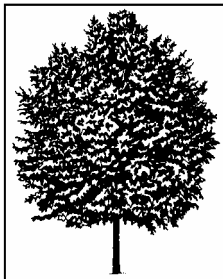
New York City's "Pale Male," the world's most famous Red-tailed Hawk, has had four mates since 1992 and has fledged twenty-five young from a stick nest on a building overlooking Central Park. He and his first mate, named "First Love," lived on pigeons, squirrels, and rats. The early demise of his mates has been due to an accumulation of poison from eating poisoned pigeons. Some New Yorkers love pigeons, others hate them, not realizing that the poison they use to keep pigeon numbers down is also killing the most natural control available to them. Residents and visitors to New York have found an appreciation for hawks while watching as "Pale Male" raises his family.

When you're attending a hawk count, on those days when few migrating hawks are in the air, the resident Red-tailed Hawks are always pleasant sights. What does love have to do with it? Most bird watchers would have no trouble answering that question.

THE NUTTALL OAK

By Denise Bonck

In August of 2002, the Red River National Wildlife Refuge became a reality with the dedication of a 600-acre tract of land along I-49 in Natchitoches Parish. At the dedication ceremony, former Secretary of the Interior Gayle Norton planted a Nuttall oak sapling on this first refuge tract, located in the Spanish Lake Lowlands Unit. The planting of this sapling was symbolic of both the bottomland hardwood forest that once covered much of the Red River floodplain and the planned future restoration on the Red River NWR of a part of that forest. The "Secretary" tree, identified by a large sign, is alive and well as witnessed by the participants in an Alliance tour of the Spanish Lake Lowlands Unit this past March.



The Nuttall oak tree, *Quercus texana*, was not distinguished as a separate species until 1927. It is named for Thomas Nuttall (1786-1859), a British-American botanist and ornithologist, who has been called the "father of Western botany." The Nuttall oak is a member of the red oak family and is sometimes called Red River oak. Red oaks mature acorns every two years whereas members of the white oak family mature acorns in only one season. An excellent landscape tree, the Nuttall's leaves turn bright red in autumn.

The Nuttall oak will grow in a wide range of soils and is one of the few important timber species found on poorly drained clay flats and low bottoms of the Gulf Coastal Plain and the Mississippi and Red River Valleys. The tree is of significant value to wildlife because of its heavy mast (acorn) production; its acorns are eaten by deer, wild turkey, and waterfowl. Squirrels find it of especial benefit in the winter as many acorns remain on the tree into January. Other refuge residents that feed on the acorns of Nuttall and other oaks include birds such as Mourning Dove, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Blue Jay, Brown Thrasher, and Tufted Titmouse. Oaks are a larval food source for the Gray Hairstreak butterfly. The Nuttall Oak is one of the species being reintroduced on various refuge units as part of the bottomland hardwood reforestation of the refuge.

The following is from the U.S. Forest Service Fact Sheet ST-554, October 1994, Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson:

Scientific name: *Quercus nuttallii* (now *texana*)

Pronunciation: KWERK-us nuh-TALL-ee-eye

Common name(s): Nuttall Oak

Family: *Fagaceae*

USDA hardiness zones: 6B through 8

Origin: native to North America

Uses: large parking lot islands (>200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; shade tree; specimen; residential street tree.

This native North American deciduous tree is capable of reaching 100 to 120 feet in height but is more often seen at 60 to 80 feet. The dull, dark green, lobed leaves are four to eight inches long and two to five inches wide. The small, reddish-brown acorns are 0.75 to 1.25 inches long. The bark is dark, grey/brown, and divided into broad, flat plates.

Go to <http://hort.ufl.edu/woody/index.htm> for more information on the Nuttall oak and many other woody plants.

THE FREEMAN AND CUSTIS EXPEDITION OF 1806

THE PROLOGUE

By Nancy Menasco
Photo by Jerry Bertrand



Red River in northwestern Louisiana today

The year is 1806 and the United States of America is only 30 years old. Thomas Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, is serving his second term as the young nation's third President. Lewis and Clark are on the way home from their transcontinental exploration of the Missouri and Columbia River systems. In Louisiana, Thomas Freeman, a civil engineer, surveyor, and astronomer, and Peter Custis, a young naturalist, accompanied by a military escort of 21 men and one servant, set out in two flatboats and a pirogue from Fort Adams on the Mississippi River bound for the mouth of the Red River. Commissioned by President Jefferson to explore the Red River to its headwaters, generally thought to be somewhere in the Southern Rockies near Santa Fe, New Mexico, it is the first American journey of exploration to include a naturalist. Before being

turned back near the Oklahoma border in what is today Little River County, Arkansas, by a Spanish force more than four times its size, the expedition will provide the first documentation of the natural history and ecology of the Red River Valley in Louisiana and Arkansas. Yet, in a few years, what Jefferson called his "Grand Expedition" will become the "Forgotten Expedition," its very existence unknown to most historians and scientists for over 160 years.

When Thomas Jefferson became President in 1801, New Orleans and much of the territory west of the Mississippi was owned by France. The region had been ceded by France to Spain in 1762 and then back to France in 1800 under the Treaty of San Ildefonso. During this time, the port of New Orleans had been rapidly rising in importance as a gateway to the area west of the

Appalachians. One of Jefferson's first acts as President was to send Robert Livingston and, later, James Monroe to Paris to try to negotiate with Napoleon Bonaparte for the purchase of New Orleans and the area of Louisiana east of the Mississippi that we now know as the Florida parishes; \$2,000,000 was authorized for the purchase.

Discussions had seemed to be going nowhere when, unexpectedly, Napoleon, who had become desperate for cash to finance France's continuing conflict with Britain, offered the surprised negotiators not just New Orleans but all of the French possessions in North America for the sum of \$15,000,000. Despite having no authorization to do so, Livingston and Monroe accepted the offer on behalf of the United States. The United States Senate would ultimately ratify the Louisiana Purchase treaty in October of 1803 by a vote of 24-7.

The Louisiana Purchase doubled the size of the United States. It covered almost 530 million acres and included part of Canada and part or all of fifteen future states: Louisiana, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Missouri, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Wyoming, Minnesota, and Montana. The treaty defined the eastern boundary of the lands purchased as running from the source of the Mississippi River to the 31st parallel. The northern boundary bordered British territory and was not fixed absolutely until the Anglo-American Convention of 1818 that split Canada and the United States at the 49th parallel. The southern and western boundaries, subject to ongoing disputes between France and Spain at the time of the treaty, were vague; the task of resolving the issue with Spain was left to the United States.

The difficulty was in determining what was under French control at the time of the treaty. Little headway had been made by 1806, partly due to Jefferson's rather imperialistic claim that the western boundary of the Louisiana Territory should be the Rio Grande, a claim that not even the French supported. Based on his theory that the French had explored and settled the Gulf Coast from the Perdido River in Alabama to the Rio Grande in Texas, Jefferson's claim that the United States owned half of Texas did not sit well with the Spanish. Of the boundaries proposed by various Southwestern notables that Jefferson consulted, the Sabine River, which forms much of the present-day border between Louisiana and Texas, was the most westerly.

Thomas Jefferson had dreamed of exploring the North

American interior long before he became President. When the Louisiana Purchase windfall fell into the lap of the United States, geographical and scientific expeditions into the West, including that of Lewis and Clark, were already planned. An expedition into the largely unexplored southwestern territory now became even more desirable. Not only would it provide the geographic framework necessary for diplomatic negotiations of the border dispute with Spain, it would also provide knowledge of the natural history of the area. The Red River would be the logical route for the expedition, flowing as it does through much of the disputed territory.

In 1805 Thomas Freeman, an Irish immigrant, is selected by Jefferson to lead the expedition. Freeman's training as an astronomer is especially important to Jefferson due to the value in future dealings with the Spanish of accurate latitudinal and longitudinal readings along the expedition's route. Recognizing his error in not including a naturalist in the Lewis and Clark party, Jefferson delegates the selection to Freeman. Freeman decides on Virginian Peter Custis, one year from his doctorate in the highly regarded medical and natural history program at the University of Pennsylvania.

Undoubtedly, the purpose of the expedition is primarily a political one. It is Jefferson's intent to test the Spanish resolve and to gather data in support of the U.S. claims, although in correspondence with Spanish officials, Thomas Jefferson attempts to alleviate their growing uneasiness with the expedition by stressing its scientific nature. Even though secondary to the political one, Jefferson's letters to Freeman

make it clear that there is a scientific objective as well. In addition to documenting the plants and animals endemic to the Red River Valley, its geography and geology, the party is instructed to take astronomical observations and to keep a meteorological chart. Discourse with and study of the Indian nations encountered along the route is encouraged; Freeman and Custis are, in effect, the first United States ambassadors to the Native American settlements they will visit. The safety of the expedition members is paramount; Jefferson's instructions are that if they meet with a superior force determined to prevent their continued progress, the expedition should abandon its mission. These last instructions, virtually identical to those given to the Lewis and Clark expedition, will ultimately determine the fate of the Freeman and Custis expedition.

In the next issue: The voyage, the animals and the plants, and why the expedition became the "Forgotten Expedition."

Sources for this article include the following:

Southern Counterpart to Lewis & Clark: The Freeman & Custis Expedition of 1806, Edited with Introduction and Epilogue by Dan L. Flores, University of Oklahoma Press, 1984, Red River Books edition with additional preface, 2002.

A Floristic and Ecological Interpretation of the Freeman and Custis Red River Expedition of 1806, D.T. MacRoberts, B.R. MacRoberts, M.H. MacRoberts, Bulletin of the Museum of Life Sciences, Louisiana State University in Shreveport, 1997.

FREEMAN & CUSTIS RED RIVER EXPEDITION OF 1806: TWO HUNDRED YEARS LATER A SYMPOSIUM

Wednesday, June 14, through Saturday, June 17, 2006

The Louisiana State University in Shreveport Museum of Life Sciences and Noel Memorial Library are sponsoring a bicentennial symposium on the “forgotten” expedition. The symposium will review the middle Red River region then and now. Historians, natural scientists, archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, and Caddo tribal elders will gather to share their knowledge, observations, and insights. Dr. Dan Flores, leading expert on the Red River expedition, will deliver the keynote address on Friday afternoon. On Saturday there will be an all-day trip on the Red River on a luxury barge provided by the Vicksburg District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

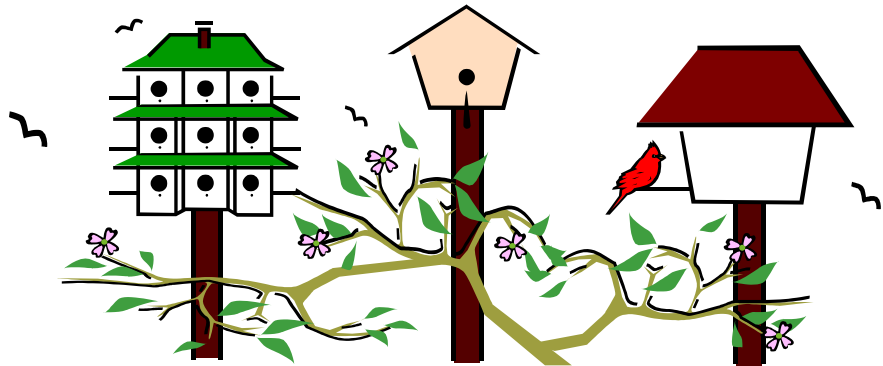
Symposium presentations are free and open to the public; however, there is a fee for lunch on Thursday and Friday and the barge trip on Saturday. To download a symposium brochure with complete details and a registration form, visit the website at www.lsus.edu/library/archives/events/freeman.htm.

PROJECTS COMMITTEE

A committee has been formed, the role of which will be to choose on-site projects to benefit the refuge. These projects will enable members and volunteers to become acquainted with the various refuge units and each other. If you're interested in being on the committee

or in volunteering for a project, contact Jerry Bertrand at 868-3255 or jeb1954@aol.com. Here are some of the projects being considered by the committee; if you have ideas for additional projects, contact Jerry.

- Create a photographic album of Refuge flowers, depicting the monthly changes.
- Create an album of night animals on the refuge.
- Erect birdhouses for Purple Martins, Eastern Bluebirds, Prothonotary Warblers, and Eastern Screech-Owls.
- Construct a Chimney Swift tower.
- Plant a birdhouse gourd garden.
- Create a Flying Squirrel habitat.



DONORS

The Alliance wishes to thank Paul Dickson and the Friends of Red River Refuges, Inc., for the generous donation of \$2,899. The Friends of Red River Refuges is the group that successfully lobbied Congress for the creation of the Red River National Wildlife Refuge.

CHARTER MEMBERS

Supporting (Family)

Nancy Menasco and Jerry Bertrand, *Shreveport, LA*
Denise and Darin Bonck, *Jamestown, LA*

Family

Robert and Pat Atkins, *Shreveport, LA*
Steven Gabrey, *Natchitoches, LA*
John and Jean Haygood, *Minden, LA*
Hubert and Pat Hervey, *Stonewall, LA*
Brian and Ginger Hughes, Emily Hughes, *Bossier City, LA*
Anne Kilbourn, Celeste and Katharine Kilbourn, *Minden, LA*
Richard and Jovena Larned, *Bossier City, LA*
Rosemary and David Lassiter, Mary Eileen and David Lassiter, *Stonewall, LA*
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Mark and Angie Walker, Chase Walker, *Bossier City, LA*
John and Leah Webb, Thomas Webb, *Shreveport, LA*

Individual

Linda Adrion, *Shreveport, LA*
Lindsay Coldiron, *Jonesville, LA*
Colleen Cookson, *Shreveport, LA*
Amanda Crnkovic, *Shreveport, LA*
William Edwards, *Elm Grove, LA*
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Shirley Huss, *Shreveport, LA*
Marquerite Loftin, *Bossier City, LA*
Greg Lott, *Shreveport, LA*
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Steve Romano, *Luling, LA*
Philip Roy, *Shreveport, LA*
Rosemary Seidler, *Shreveport, LA*

Corporate/Organizational

SSNS Bird Study Group, *Shreveport, LA*

The Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc., welcomes its charter members. At present, we have 14 individual memberships, 17 family memberships, and one organizational membership for a total of 32 memberships; including family members, the Alliance has 58 members.

The Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc., is a non-profit, tax-exempt charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law less the value of benefits received. Our Employer Identification Number is 03-0563504.

**BAYOU PIERRE UNIT CLEAN-UP DAY
October 15, 2005**

BEFORE



AFTER



THE CLEAN-UP CREW

From left to right: Brett Hunter, Denise Bonck, John Haygood, Philip Roy, Nancy Menasco, Jerry Bertrand, Buddy Scott.

Not pictured: Mark Walker (photographer), Colleen Cookson, Jean Michael, and Dan Werner.

RED RIVER REFUGE ALLIANCE, INC. DIRECTORY

Officers:

President
Denise Bonck rok08@netzero.net
Jamestown, LA 318-894-9796 (H)
456-4064 (W)

Vice President
Mark Walker sparky0127@cox.net
Bossier City, LA 752-5532 (H)
797-4305 (W)

Secretary
Steven Gabrey steveng@nsula.edu
Natchitoches, LA 318-357-9290 (H)
318-357-5375 (W)

Treasurer
Nancy Menasco nmcpa@aol.com
Shreveport, LA 868-3255 (H/W)

Board Members at Large

Jerry Bertrand jeb1954@aol.com
Shreveport, LA 868-3255 (H/W)

John Haygood 318-377-0274 (H)
Minden, LA

Hubert Hervey hawkeyehub@aol.com
Stonewall, LA 925-9249 (H)

Jennifer McKay jennifer@tsblaw.com
Bossier City, LA 747-4876 (H)
868-6633 (W)

Red River National Wildlife Refuge Manager

Brett Hunter brett_hunter@fws.gov
318-726-4222 Ext 31 (W)
318-366-4820 (Cellular)

All phone numbers are local calls from the Shreveport-Bossier area unless an area code is included.

NATIONAL FISH & WILDLIFE FOUNDATION GRANT PROGRESS REPORT

Update on the completion of objectives for the \$5,000 startup grant awarded to the Refuge Alliance by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation:

- Newsletter publication – You are reading the premier issue!
- Website creation – The website is under construction. Our webmaster is Philip Roy. Once the site is up and running, you will be able to access information about the Alliance and its activities at redriverrefugealliance.org.
- T-shirts and window decals bearing the Alliance logo – The logo is in the works and is expected to be finalized this summer, at which time the t-shirts and decals will be printed.
- Banner bearing the Alliance logo – This is also pending completion of the logo.
- Color brochure describing Alliance and its activities – This is expected to be published this summer.
- Creation of gardens and exhibits displaying vegetation communities and wildlife present in the Red River Valley in Louisiana during the Native American settlement era, especially as documented by the Freeman and Custis Red River Expedition that traveled the area in 1806 – The Bayou Pierre unit of the Refuge has been chosen as the location for the initial native plant garden and exhibits. A structure (see the facing page for pictures of the white house) that can be used for a visitor center and to

house the exhibits already exists on the unit. Also, the Bayou Pierre unit is open to the public. Planning for the garden and exhibits is underway and planting is expected to take place this fall.

- Generate publicity and draw visitors for the opening to the public of the headquarters unit of the Refuge – As soon as a date can be set for the opening of the headquarters unit to the public, you will be among the first to know. In the meantime, the Alliance will sponsor a booth publicizing the Refuge and the Alliance at the Freeman and Custis Expedition Symposium at LSU in Shreveport in June. In addition, Alliance volunteers will be making presentations to area organizations.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Want to get involved? Here are some ways you can not only benefit the Refuge but get acquainted with other Alliance members:

- Staff our booth at the Freeman & Custis Red River Expedition Symposium for a couple of hours on Thursday, June 15, or Friday, June 16.
- Join the Projects committee (see page 8) or volunteer for one of the projects.
- Submit an article, photograph, or artwork for possible inclusion in the newsletter.
- Assist in the design or planting of the native plant garden or in hardscape (benches, paths, water features) design or construction at the Bayou Pierre unit.

- Research, design, or construct exhibits on the natural history of the Red River Valley.
- Clean, repair, paint, and generally spruce up the white house at Bayou Pierre.
- Donate plants or construction materials for various projects.

Contact Denise Bonck, Nancy Menasco, or Jerry Bertrand to volunteer or to tell us your ideas for volunteer projects. You'll find contact information on the facing page.

Congratulations to Johnny Webb, the first Alliance member to complete the three-day heavy equipment certification class presented by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for refuge volunteers. Johnny says the next class (date to be determined) will include Bobcat training. Contact Jerry Bertrand if you're interested in this class.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING CALENDAR

The Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc., Board of Directors meets the fourth Tuesday of every month. Members are welcome at all meetings. **Note: Due to the library's earlier summer closing hours, the June and July meetings will begin at 5:00 p.m.**

Dates: Tuesday, June 27, 2006
Tuesday, July 25, 2006

Time: 5:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

Place: Broadmoor Branch
Shreve Memorial Library
1212 Captain Shreve Dr.
Shreveport, LA 71105

COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLANS: COMING TO A REFUGE NEAR YOU!

From the National Wildlife Refuge Association

WHAT IS A COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN?

Under the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Refuge Improvement Act), all national wildlife refuges are required to develop a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). A CCP is a document that provides a framework for guiding refuge management decisions. All refuges are required by law to complete its CCP by 2012.

CCPs are powerful tools the public can employ to help shape the future of wildlife conservation in America. They give us the opportunity to have a say in the direction of individual national wildlife refuges and to ensure that wildlife conservation remains a priority. Refuge managers rely on public backing which allows them to make tough, controversial management decisions, such as eliminating jet skiing, harmful agricultural activities or other activities that simply don't belong on wildlife refuges.

WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS OF CCPs?

The whole process - from formulating a plan to implementing it - complies with standards outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). NEPA requires CCPs both to examine a full range of alternative approaches to refuge management and also to involve the public in selecting the alternative best suited to the refuge's purposes. In addition, the Refuge Improvement Act also states that refuges must "develop and implement a [planning] process to ensure an opportunity for active public involvement in the preparation and revision of comprehensive conservation plans."

HOW DOES THE PROCESS WORK?

All seven U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regions hire planning staff to help facilitate the process of developing CCPs. However, there is great variation among regions; the regions that have more planning staff tend to have more refuges whose CCPs are already complete. To supplement regional planning staff, some refuges hire on-site planners as well.

Developing a CCP generally takes about a year from start to finish; the number of refuge staff available to work on the plan affects the length of the process. There are five basic steps in the CCP process:

Step 1: Scoping Phase. Refuges hold open houses and distribute surveys to the public to help identify all possible concerns and issues regarding the

refuge. At this time, refuge employees collect data on such things as fish and wildlife resources, environmental education needs and costs.

Step 2: Formulate Plan. Refuge staff outline key issues and concerns, as well as long-term goals for the refuge. Next, they analyze alternative ways to protect fish and wildlife, resolve concerns and meet goals.

Step 3: Write Draft Plan. The draft plan identifies management alternatives and examines the effects each would have on wildlife and habitat, visitation and public use, and refuge acquisition and expansion. Once the draft plan is written it is distributed within the Fish and Wildlife Service for internal review. Then, the draft is ready to be distributed to the public. Often times, refuge staff will send out press releases and hold open houses and presentations on various issues.

Step 4: Revise Plan. After hearing from the public, refuge employees analyze the comments, revise the plan and issue the final CCP.

Step 5: Implement Plan.

WHAT ROLE CAN YOU PLAY?

- Get informed! The first step to getting involved in the CCP process is letting the refuge know that you want to be included. Call your local refuge and ask to get on their mailing list. Many refuges publish newsletters that give updates on where they are in the process. The refuge can tell you when their open houses occur and when the draft plan will be published, so that you can provide input each step of the way.
- Attend informational sessions held by refuge staff. These can help you untangle some of the complex issues that CCPs often cover. For example, the plans contain scientific components that are difficult to understand fully on your own (unless you happen to be a scientist!).
- Obtain a copy of the draft CCP. This might be the most important time to participate in the process because the draft plan is still flexible. Although typically the draft plan resembles the final product, some drafts contain gray areas that are open to debate. Your comments matter a great deal here, as refuge staff weigh each alternative and try to pick the best one.
- Read the draft plan carefully. You can get an overall sense of the plan by looking closely at the proposed alternatives. Take your time and make

sure that you understand all of the implications for each alternative and each issue. Here, it might help to get together with friends and discuss it as a group. Try to answer the following kinds of questions as you go:

- Are proposed public uses balanced? Or does the plan favor some activities over others?
- Are proposed uses "compatible" with the refuge's purposes?
- Is the refuge managing for multiple species?
- Is it engaging in endangered species recovery?
- Write a comments letter to the refuge stating your views on the draft plan clearly and concisely write a few bullet points with a couple of sentences

explaining each. Organize others and get them to submit their individual comments. The more individual comments sent in, the better. You can also write a group letter in addition to your individual ones.

- For a detailed look at ways you can influence the CCP process, check out the Citizen's National Wildlife Refuge Planning Handbook at the following website:
www.defenders.org/habitat/refugeplan.html

Reprinted with permission from the National Wildlife Refuge Association's website at www.refugenet.org

RED RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION PLAN

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Red River National Wildlife Refuge. This CCP is required by the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997. The plan outlines the management practices and public uses that will occur on the Refuge for the next 10-15 years.

An important part of the planning process is gathering input from the public who use or are affected by the Refuge. The Service wants to know what the public would like to see implemented on the refuge, ideas for management, or concerns for wildlife. The public input received will be used to develop alternatives to current land uses and management practices. These alternatives are then evaluated for their impacts to the habitat and wildlife. The Service makes a decision on which alternative is preferred and this decision is then referred back to the public for further review. Public open house meetings were held in Shreveport and Natchitoches the week of May 15. If you were unable to attend or you have questions concerning the issues involved, please call or email Lindy Garner.

The Service welcomes your comments and suggestions for the CCP in writing. You may use the form on the next page to write your comments. To be most useful, written comments should be sent by **July 1, 2006**. Please mail, fax, or email your comments to:

Lindy Garner – Planning Biologist
North Louisiana Refuges Complex
11372 Hwy 143
Farmerville, Louisiana 71241

Telephone: 318/726-4222, Ext. 5
Fax: 318/726-4667
Email: lindy_garner@fws.gov

RED RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE VISION STATEMENT (DRAFT)

The Red River National Wildlife Refuge will be managed to provide for the restoration, enhancement, and conservation of bottomland hardwood forests, managed wetlands, and associated prairies, as an integral component of the Red River ecosystem. These habitats will support a variety of migratory birds, species of special concern, and associated wildlife and plants. Conservation and education will be enhanced and encouraged through strong partnerships with agencies, organizations, and private landowners. The refuge will work continually to gain public support and provide opportunities for environmental education and interpretation, hunting and fishing, and wildlife observation and photography throughout the Red River Valley.

CCP COMMENT FORM

Name _____

Mailing Address _____

City, State, Zip Code _____

Important: Because the Comprehensive Conservation Plan/Environmental Assessment will be a public document, all of its associated records, including mailing lists and comments submitted by the public, may be subject to public review. We will only release names and addresses from our mailing list when we are required to do so by law (e.g., under the Freedom of Information Act). If you wish to have your home address withheld in such a case, please indicate so below. We will not sell or otherwise distribute mailing lists for commercial purposes. If we do not hear from you by July, 1, 2006, we will remove your name from the mailing list.

- Keep me on your mailing list.
- Keep me on your mailing list, but do not release my home address.
- Remove me from your mailing list.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

What do you think are the most important refuge management issues facing Red River National Wildlife Refuge?

How do you think the above issues should be addressed?

How would you like to see the refuge habitats and wildlife be managed on Red River NWR?

Are the types of public use and visitation that are permitted and encouraged on the Refuge appropriate?

Out of the six wildlife-dependent priority uses (wildlife observation, photography, hunting, fishing, environmental education, and interpretation), which ones are you most interested in seeing promoted on the Red River NWR?

Please provide any other comments or suggestions for how you would like to see the Red River NWR managed over the next 10-15 years. (Attach additional sheets if necessary.)

NOT A MEMBER YET?

Please consider supporting the Red River National Wildlife Refuge by joining the Refuge Alliance today. Charter members (the first 50 memberships) will receive a free t-shirt with our logo on it. The logo is in the works! Already a member? Pass along this application to a friend.

Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc. Membership Form

Name _____ Email address _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

Phone Numbers (Include all area codes and circle your preferred number):

Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ Fax _____

Please check type of membership:

- ___ Individual: \$15
- ___ Family: \$20
- ___ Supporting: \$50
- ___ Corporate/Organization (Friend): \$100
- ___ Corporate/Organization (Supporter): \$250
- ___ Life: \$500

List additional family member names for family memberships below. Include email addresses and phone numbers if different from above.

Date _____

Please mail check to P.O. Box 52506, Shreveport, LA 71135-2506

I am interested in (please check one or more):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outreach, membership, media | <input type="checkbox"/> Computer (graphic design, GIS, data input, other _____) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental education | <input type="checkbox"/> Fund raising, grant writing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife research studies/surveys | <input type="checkbox"/> Large construction projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wildlife observation and interpretation | <input type="checkbox"/> Small construction projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hunting, fishing | <input type="checkbox"/> Outdoor maintenance projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special events planning | <input type="checkbox"/> Habitat and conservation plans |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Staffing booth for events | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter writing, lobbying, legislative issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Artwork |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter | <input type="checkbox"/> Special projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Website development | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

THE RED RIVER RAFT

The Red River Raft is a publication of the Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc. Submissions of articles, photographs, and drawings for consideration for publication may be sent via email to Nancy Menasco at nmcpa@aol.com or mailed to the following address:

Editor, The Red River Raft
Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc.
P. O. Box 52506
Shreveport, LA 71135-2506

Changes of address and other official correspondence should be sent to the mailing address shown above.

Red River Refuge Alliance, Inc.
P. O. Box 52506
Shreveport, LA 71135-2506