Steve Radack, Commissioner
Harris County Precinct 3

John Paul Landing
Environmental Education Center

May 2020

Commissioner Steve Radack welcomes you to his recently opened Environmental Education Center.

The John Paul Landing Environmental Education Center. Photo by Fred Collins.

John Paul Landing Park provides a great opportunity to get outside for a healthy dose of nature and exercise while still practicing social distancing. Playgrounds at the park are currently closed, but the Environmental Education Center, trails, pavilions, and restrooms are available for use. However, guidelines must be followed for safe practices and limits on the number of people inside buildings and pavilions.

All scheduled classes and activities at the Environmental Education Center have been suspended. While activities are tentatively set to resume on May 18, this is subject to change as the current situation evolves. Please call 713-274-3131 or visit www.pct3.com for information and updates to the park calendar.

Spring is in Full Swing
Life may be very different for all of us, but Mother Nature has kept things running like clockwork at John Paul Landing (JPL). Migrant birds are arriving from the south, flowers are blooming, and the annual resurgence of love bugs is underway. The Purple Martin houses are occupied, and dozens of Martins forage near the water’s edge throughout the day.

At left, a female Purple Martin soars overhead. At right, a male Purple Martin stands guard at the nest box. Photos by Kendra Kocab.
A variety of shorebirds and other water birds can be seen at JPL. During migration, the species reported varies almost daily as birds make their way north. One day, six Red-breasted Mergansers were on the lake. The next day, the Mergansers were gone and thirty Wilson’s Phalaropes had arrived. Greater Yellowlegs and Spotted Sandpipers are some of the easier shorebirds to see as they are often found near the shore as opposed to the mudflats in the middle of the lake.

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds feed on the honeysuckle at the north end of the park, while colorful Indigo Buntings forage in the bushes. The park is alive with the songs of Eastern Meadowlarks and the fussing calls of Scissor-tailed Flycatchers. Hawks and other raptors soar overhead. Some, like White-tailed Hawks, take advantage of the open fields to hunt for small mammals, crawfish, and reptiles. Others, like Bald Eagles, patrol the lake for fish.

Many visitors to the park are enjoying the vibrant wildflowers and showy aquatic plants. Around the lake, Cattails are abundant. The familiar brown “tails” are actually made up of tiny flowers. Female flowers form the brown cigar shape, and male flowers create the spike at the top. Pickerelweed is a welcome sight around the shore. Bright green leaves and purple flower spikes make this plant easily identifiable. It provides shelter for small fish and aquatic insects that live in shallow water and pollen for bees that visit the flowers.
Wildflowers are abundant around the park, but the best place to view them is directly behind the Environmental Education Center. The hills are painted with every color of the rainbow. A gradient of pink shades are on display from Texas Star, Beebalm, and Evening Primrose. Huge clusters of Crimson Clover provide deep reds, while Sunflowers, Texas Dandelions, and Plains Coreopsis give rise to a variety of yellows. A few Bluebonnets are still visible despite it being quite late in the spring for them, and bright purple Winecups round out the rainbow. Of all the wildflowers on the hill, Indian Blanket are the showiest. Their Technicolor blossoms are unmistakable and a favorite for photographers.
Expanding the Lake
A months-long project to dig out a new section of the lake was recently completed. Once the digging concluded, fish shelters were installed and the area was flooded with water from the surrounding lake. Finally, the land bridge used during the project was removed and the dirt hauled away. JPL staff kept a close eye, documenting each step of the process. Soon, visitors will be able to walk across a bridge connecting the south end of the park off West Rd. to the north end of the park where the Environmental Education Center is located.
About the Park
The John Paul Landing Environmental Education Center (JPLEEC) is located in the northern portion of Precinct Three’s John Paul Landing Park. The Education Center’s address is 9950 Katy Hockley Road. The park is 865 acres and its most prominent feature is a planned 450-acre lake. The lake serves as a major flood detention facility for the area. When complete it will hold 2200 acre-feet of water. It is designed to accommodate wildlife, both terrestrial and aquatic. The lake was dug over a number of years, and excavation will continue into the future. Currently, with this newest addition, the lake is about 176 acres. When completed at 450 acres, it will be the third largest body of water in Harris County.

The calendars for May and June can be found on the www.pct3.com website under Activity Calendars, or a link may be found on the John Paul Landing Environmental Education Center park page.