

TPWD features Bastrop on PBS

Bastrop will be featured in an upcoming Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) special television program at 5:30 a.m. on Friday, Dec. 19 and again on Sunday, Dec. 21 at 9 a.m.

While it will be seen on PBS/KLRU on those specific days, it will also air across the state on PBS affiliate stations. The program demonstrates how the community of Bastrop has rallied around what began as the Texas Paddling Trails project, but has grown to a much larger conservation and nature tourism project, involving many volunteers and community partners.

The first of three segments on the special program, the Bastrop segment, "Reclaiming a River," documents the restoration efforts initiated by Steve Box and Denise Rodgers of Environmental Stewardship, of a 30-acre tract of land owned by the Bastrop County Water Control District #2



Kayakers enjoy the El Camino Paddle Trail, a six-mile length from Fisherman's Park to the new Lost Pines Nature Trails site.

(BCWCID#2).

The land, once known as the old Tahitian quarry site, is now named the Lost Pines Nature Trails (LPNT) and is downriver and adjacent to the Colorado River Refuge owned and restored by Pines & Prairies Land Trust. The LPNT restoration efforts began as a project to provide a suitable public access site for the Texas Paddling Trails project.

Bastrop set a new precedent

with TPWD, when Rodgers proposed not one, but three contiguous paddling trails, an endeavor no other community in Texas had attempted. With the recent launch of the second of the three trails, the Bastrop Paddling Trails are now being touted by TPWD as a demonstration nature tourism project. Bastrop is showing other communities throughout the state how they can benefit economically by attracting nature tourists to

their communities to paddle.

The first paddling trail, the 6-mile "El Camino Real" trail from Bastrop's Fisherman's Park to the Lost Pines Nature Trails site, was designated by TPWD at the first annual NatureFest in 2007.

The second trail, the "Wilbarger," a 14-mile trail from the 969 Utley Bridge to Fisherman's Park, was launched at the second annual NatureFest in September. Next up are plans to continue downriver from the Lost Pines Nature Trails site all the way to Smithville.

After both the city and county adopted resolutions to proceed with improving the Lost Pines site, Box and Rodgers organized a committee that included representatives from BCWCID#2, Tahitian Village Property Owners Association, Bastrop Economic Development Corporation, Lower Colorado River Authority, Bluebonnet Electric Coop, TPWD and anyone else who wanted to be

actively involved.

Planning meetings took place on a monthly basis and, with the help of LCRA, a site plan began to emerge. With a concept plan in place, they then wrote grant proposals on behalf of BCWCID#2 to the LCRA for \$25,000 and TPWD for \$100,000 to fund the developments.

The Lost Pines Nature Trails project extends the walking trails from the Colorado River Refuge and includes a half-mile handicapped accessible trail, about 1.2 miles of natural hiking and biking trails along the river. Other improvements will soon include a few picnic sites along the river.

Still a work in progress, the site already has seen many changes, from new cable and bollard fencing to granite trails, a parking lot, kiosks, trail signs and benches. One of the next phases of the project will be to solicit volunteers to take part in maintaining the site.

The "Reclaiming a River" segment on PBS/KLRU, while short in duration in TV time, reflects only a small part of the effort that has gone into the project over the past 18 months from countless volunteers.

One of those volunteers, Dale Morrison, also featured in the TV special, came to the project as a well-seasoned trail builder from New Jersey, California and Nevada who has donated hundreds of hours to the project. After a brief respite to have a pace-maker installed, Morrison is back to work and is currently conjuring up a plan to connect the LPNTs with the June Hill Pape Memorial Riverwalk in downtown Bastrop.

As seen on the special, TPWD is also providing guidance from their biologists on

how to utilize the natural terrain of the land located in the flood zone. With time and respect, the land will begin to recover, restored to its original condition.

"It will take many people who love and respect nature to step up and make this park their own," Rodgers said. "We need to organize regular trail and river clean-up projects, and we invite anyone to come and help us. We encourage everyone to visit the LPNT and take a stroll along the river. It's a great place to walk your dog."

"Reclaiming a River" could not be airing at a more opportune time for Bastrop, as it comes on the heels of a recent announcement that U.S. Congressman Lloyd Doggett was successful in obtaining \$245,000 for "planning, design and construction of recreational trails," for the city of Bastrop.

Lucky for Bastrop, the federal earmark was awarded prior to the recent collapse of

the economy. A new phase of the planning efforts for paddle, walking, hiking and biking trails will begin soon, and will likely add to the river access improvements already made at Fisherman's Park and the LPNT.

In addition to Bastrop's "Reclaiming a River," the broadcast will feature San Angelo State Park and the prehistoric creatures who visited there, followed by a segment that will show the efforts currently underway to save the endangered Brown Pelican at Sundown Island in Matagorda Bay.

Anyone interested in being a part of any aspect of Bastrop's recreational trails projects can call Box at 300-6609, Rodgers at 303-7858 or visit www.EnvironmentalStewardship.org.