

Volume 14, Number 3  
Fall 2011

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER  
OF FRIENDS OF  
ANAHUAC REFUGE  
PO BOX 1348  
ANAHUAC, TX 77514



# Gator Tales

FRIENDS OF ANAHUAC REFUGE

## Refuge Manager's Report

By Jimmy Laurent, Refuge Manager



The summer of 2011 will go down as one of the driest summers in recent history. We have been facing drought conditions since early January and these conditions are expected for the next three years. As indicated in the past newsletter, we have to make do with the situation Mother Nature presents us with. This includes taking advantage of conditions in the bayous when the waters are fresh enough and catching rainwater when it occurs.

The refuge continues to complete hurricane projects that began after Hurricane Ike. These projects have continued into this year and most should be complete by the end of 2012. The refuge staff has been heavily involved in these projects. Several of our staff members have gone through Contracting Officer Training Representative (COTR) to ensure projects are completed on time and to resolve any quality control issues. The role of the COTR is to be the eyes and ears of the Contracting Department in the Regional Office. This allows us flexibility in scheduling projects and improves our efficiency to get projects completed on time.

Several large scale hurricane projects remain at Anahuac. This includes the Visitor Information Station (VIS), shoreline protection project in the Intracoastal Waterway, and the paving project through Federal Highways Administration (FHA). The majority of all the other small scale projects on the refuge (Hackberry Overlook, East Bay Bayou Bridge, walking trails at Skillern, etc.) have been completed.

*(Continued on page 5)*

## President's Message

By Travis Lovelace, FOAR President

It has been and still is a very hot and dry summer. As a result we have not had our monthly work days. However, much has continued to occur including but not limited to:

- the Friends had a booth at the Chambers County Employee's Health Fair in Anahuac and had the opportunity to talk with many people about our beautiful refuge, the Friends organization, and our new Visitor Center
- the Friends provided volunteers to assist with Free Family Fishing Day which was a big success and a fun time for everyone
- the Prairie Restoration Project volunteers went to Armand Bayou Nature Center in Houston (Clear Lake area) to learn about their processes to accomplish their native prairie restoration project as well as going to Brazos Bend State Park to collect prairie seed along with experts who shared information with us about their project enabling us to continue growing our program and working on the Anahuac Refuge native prairie restoration project
- volunteers have helped staff work in the two nature stores, the Visitor Information Center on the refuge as well as the Visitor Center in the new refuge complex headquarters on Highway 563.

We owe a BIG **thank you** to **Marilyn Kircus** for her huge effort in watering all the trees and shrubs planted as part of our Adopt-a-Tree project last winter. Without her tremendous effort, we certainly would have lost many of our plants due to the drought. In addition, she continues to propagate bushes, trees, and other plants for future plantings and to trim and clear areas of debris allowing better ground to replenish that which was lost. Thank you, Marilyn, for all your hard work and dedication to helping our refuge to have a better habitat for plants and wildlife.

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### Our Mission

**The mission of the Friends of Anahuac Refuge is to support, preserve, promote, and enhance Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge and its use for recreational, educational and scientific research purposes.**

# Calendar of Events

**Gator Fest September 17-18, 2011**  
**Fort Anahuac Park Anahuac, TX**  
[www.texasgatorfest.com](http://www.texasgatorfest.com)

Anahuac is known as the Alligator Capital of Texas. Gator Fest provides live music, airboat rides, cajun food, alligators, carnival rides and much more, including a booth for the Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge. Sign up for a shift to hand out flyers and talk about the refuge and our Friends group. You'll get free admission to Gator Fest and help our group at the same time.

**Rice Festival**  
**September 30 - October 1, 2011**  
**Winnie, TX**

Sign up for a shift to hand out flyers and talk about the refuge and our Friends group. Good recruiting opportunity to add to our membership and volunteer base.

[www.texasricefestival.org](http://www.texasricefestival.org)

**Bike Around the Bay**  
**October 8, 2011**

<http://www.bikearoundthebay.org/>

Hand out refreshments to the riders in this fund-raiser for Galveston Bay Foundation (one of our supporters and a frequent partner). Publicize our group.

**Volunteer Banquet**  
**Friday, October 14, 2011**  
**6:30 p.m.**

**Waterfowl Hunt Open House**  
**October 15, 2011**  
**4017 FM 563 Anahuac, TX**

**Kids' Day at Buffalo Bayou**  
**October 29, 2011**

Activity stations will include a showcase of bayou animals and insects, wildflower seed ball making, sun prints, crab marsh, numerous hands-on activities from over 25 Houston non-profit organization's partners.

**FOAR Workday**  
**November 5, 2011**

Join other volunteers for a project to improve your refuge. Previous projects include gardening, construction, clean-up, and eating lunch together afterward.

**To get more information or to help with any of these activities, call Stephanie Martinez, Volunteer Coordinator for the US Fish and Wildlife Service, at 409-267-3337 or email her at [Stephanie\\_Martinez@fws.gov](mailto:Stephanie_Martinez@fws.gov)**

## FISHING DAY 2011 ANAHUAC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



Fishing Day on June 4 was great! Almost 150 people showed up to fish and enjoy being together.



Many thanks to these and other volunteers who helped



Ian Martinez and the other kids had a blast

**Join us next year**  
**First Saturday in**  
**June**  
**Free Fishing**  
**No license required**  
**Great family fun!**

# Nature Store News

By Kay Lovelace, Nature Store Manager

Whew!!! It is hot and dry here on the upper Texas coast. The weather has been unusual in many parts of the country. We are still thriving and just as excited as ever with our newest Visitor Center Nature Store and still appreciate our humble Nature Store on the refuge. It has served us very well the last 3 years. Thanks to all of you and others who have stopped to visit with us and who have made purchases in support of our beautiful refuge. We have had visitors from Texas, many other states, and other countries. That's what makes volunteering in the store so much fun; we get to visit with so many different people.

We now carry **local story and history books** in the Visitor Center Nature Store that appeal to not only those who live in our area but to those who are interested in the historical significance of the Anahuac area in Texas history. Come by to check them out.

We are looking forward to fall and the holiday season and will be expanding our selection of merchandise. We have room to expand now!! First we will concentrate on bringing in more children's items that are educational and have a nature theme. Then we will expand gift and souvenir items. Come by often to check us out and to visit; we love talking with you.

If you aren't already, we would be delighted to have YOU as a volunteer in one of the stores, on our Nature Store committee, or as an occasional helper as your schedule permits. Stephanie Martinez is the volunteer coordinator with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and can be reached via email at [Stephanie\\_Martinez@fws.gov](mailto:Stephanie_Martinez@fws.gov) or by phone at (409) 267-3337. You may also contact me at (409) 252-3454 or via email at [kay3454@windstream.net](mailto:kay3454@windstream.net).

*See you on the refuge!*



*VIS Pond, August 2011*



*Nature Store at the new Visitor Center*

## Features of the New Visitor Center

By Tami Schutter, Refuge Staff

The new Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center (VC) is open for business and business has been great! In the three months that it has been open, we've had almost 2,000 visitors come through! It was hard to tell how many people the VC would attract in the beginning, but I'm proud to say that the locals seem very pleased with it. If you haven't been to the VC yet (which I can't imagine why not!) then let me tell you about a few of the attractions. The first area you come to is the large breezeway with some kiosks in the middle. You can see all the way to the backside of the building, which is a very pretty view, and you can also get brochures and other info from the kiosks. Seems simple right? Let me tell you, I'm not the most observant person at times, but if you take the time to look at what you're standing on in the breezeway, you will really get a chance to see the Upper Texas Coast. Under your feet you will see a large map of the coast, where the VC is located (noted with a star by Lake Anahuac), where Moody, Anahuac, McFaddin, and Texas Point National Wildlife Refuges (Refuges) are located, and also where our sister refuge, Trinity River National Wildlife Refuge, is located. Don't be thrown off by the blue water and the green land, we know the water here is brown and the land here is ... well brown this year! It's really a great map and it shows the vast amount of land that we manage.

Now, if you take a walk inside you will see our exhibit hall, which features some of the flora and fauna that you find on the Refuges, some of the management tools we use on the Refuges, and then some information about the local community. One of our more hidden features, and my personal favorite, is the Airboat Object Theater. We have literally taken an

airboat that was formerly used for duck banding on the Refuges (until Ike of course) and turned it into your Refuge adventure seating! Don't be surprised if your seat moves a little bit, it's all part of the adventure!

When you're finished with your airboat ride you might be a little tired or dirty (imaginary dirt of course), but that's okay because we have one of the best Nature Stores that I have ever seen. The Friends of Anahuac Refuge (that's you!) have put together a wonderful Nature Store that features field guides, shirts, hats, wildlife photography, organic coffee, and even a cold drink! Every purchase that a visitor makes goes to benefit Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge, and members (that's you!) even get a 10% discount.

I'm so excited about the new VC and hopefully we have done the Refuge System, Texas, Chambers County, the city of Anahuac, the Friends of Anahuac Refuge, and the Refuges staff proud!

*Editor's Note: Those of you who have been members for a few years may remember that the land on which the new Visitor Center is located was donated to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service by **Chambers County** in 2006 for a Visitor Center for Anahuac National Wildlife Refuge.*

*(Gator Tales, December 2006)*

# Prairie Dreams

By Marilyn Kircus



Travis and his research area.  
Plants are growing under shade cloth

Travis Lovelace is a man with a dream. He wants to learn to grow the wildflowers, some now rare, that used to grow in the coastal prairie. Then he wants to find friends that will help him grow these plants. He will then donate them to Anahuac NWR to use in their prairie restoration project. Hundreds will eventually be needed.

Meanwhile, the refuge staff is preparing land just south of the boardwalk from the Butterfly Garden to The Willows to plant a native prairie. They have disked it several times to remove weeds and agricultural grasses that have replaced the prairie. They will plant a mix of grasses native to this area, including little bluestem, switch grass, brownseed paspalum, Indian grass and eastern gamma grass.



Some of Travis' test plants

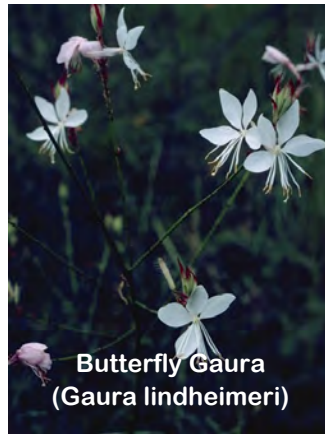
Travis is learning to grow rattlesnake master, liatrus, compass plant, Indian Plantain, pale coneflower, mistflower, green milkweed, and other forbs. Eventually, he'll be starting seeds or cuttings in flats or containers (used for plants with a long tap root) and then transplanting the young plants to gallon pots. He'll grow the perennials for a year and then they'll be ready to be planted in the prairie. Annuals will only take a few months until they will be ready to be planted in the prairie or, better yet, grow on his property to give him a large amount of seed to plant in future years.



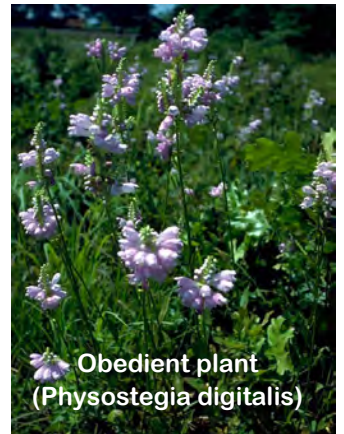
Compass Plant  
(*Silphium laciniatum*)



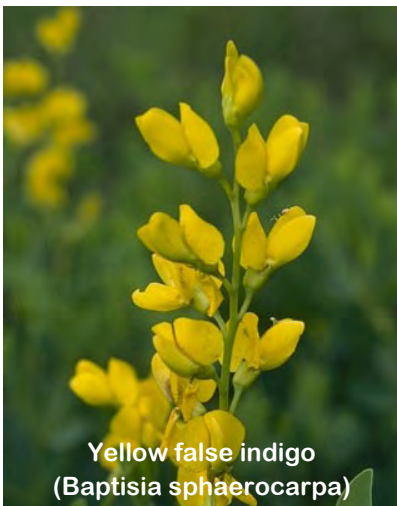
Pale coneflower  
(*Echinacea pallida*)



Butterfly Gaura  
(*Gaura lindheimeri*)



Obedient plant  
(*Physostegia digitalis*)

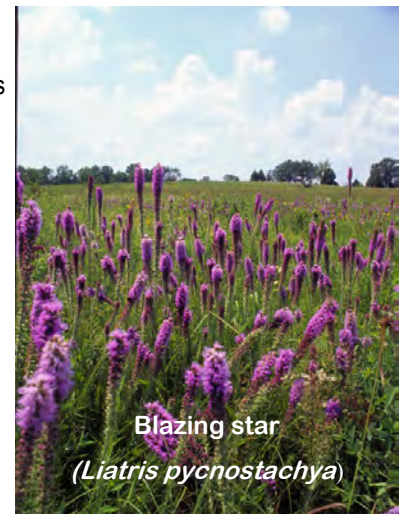


Yellow false indigo  
(*Baptisia sphaerocarpa*)

One of the problems in getting seed is that it needs to come from the immediate area (within 50 miles), or an area that is very much like ours. Our staff biologist, Patrick Walther, refuge biologist, says that plants obtained from other areas may grow too aggressively here or may not be salt adapted and would all be killed by salt water flooding.

As Travis obtains the correct seed, he will be looking for lots of people to help him grow it. If you are interested in helping him by starting seed at your house and then transplanting the seedlings to gallon pots and growing them for a year, contact him to get on his list of helpers. He also needs gallon pots.

Contact him at: [atl3454@windstream.net](mailto:atl3454@windstream.net).



Blazing star  
(*Liatris pycnostachya*)

Plant pictures from picture gallery at Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center

*(Refuge Manager's Report, continued from page 1)*

The VIS is a working project. I know many of you have questions and concerns regarding this project. Here is the latest on what has transpired. The bonding company is reviewing the existing structure and will determine if they can salvage what is there. If this happens, they will re-initiate a new contractor to complete the project. Regardless, this will unfortunately be a drawn-out process. Stay tuned for more news to come in the future.

The shoreline protection project which will armor the bank and prevent erosion from the large ships in the Gulf Coast Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW) has begun. This project will run from the High Island bridge on Highway 124 (north side) to Oyster Bayou on the west side of the refuge. With the exception of the private inholdings, the entire refuge boundary will be protected from large waves that are eroding the banks along the GIWW. This project would not have been possible without additional funding from our partners at the **Galveston Bay Foundation**. They contributed a significant amount of dollars in addition to the refuge's allocation to complete the project. We anticipate planting smooth cord grass behind the breakwaters in the months to come.

Another large scale project is the FHA paving project on the refuge. FHA has begun working around the Shoveler's Pond area and will continue working on Anahuac in the next few months. The goal is to have all paving, approximately 4.5 miles, completed by late January. This will not only improve road conditions traveling through the refuge but will save us time and money on routine maintenance in those areas. Targeted areas include Shoveler's Pond, Skillern Tract, portions of the road along Frozen Point and Oyster Bayou boat ramp.

The refuge is looking better and better each day. Whether it's hurricane projects, mowing or simply driving to the bay, I encourage everyone to visit Anahuac and see the progress that we have made over the past three years.

## Keeping Our Trees Alive

As mentioned in the President's Message, we owe a huge debt of gratitude to Marilyn Kircus for keeping our newly-planted trees alive during the current severe drought.

She drives the truck 40 to 100 miles 5-6 days a week hauling 115 gallons to water about 400 trees planted this past spring. Each water run takes about 2.5 hours.

She has also kept weeds from growing around the trees and marked the smaller trees growing in mowed areas so the mowers don't cut them down. Trees in the unmown areas are marked with tall poles and flags so they don't get missed when the water truck comes their way. She is currently cutting baccharis in order to make the trees more visible and to give them more of the water.



*Marilyn watering mulberry trees in the butterfly garden*

## Obituary: Katy Coffee

Katy Coffee, a former FOAR board member (2008), passed away on June 3, 2011. She was a wildlife biologist and worked as a District Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Newcastle, WY. She was an enthusiastic volunteer and advocate for environmental issues. While she lived in our area, Katy joined us during workdays, meetings, and outreach events and was always smiling and happy. It was wonderful to work with her. Her untimely death is such a tragedy and she will be deeply missed.

*(President's Message, continued from page 1)*

This fall, our activities will continue with volunteers to assist with Gator Fest, Rice Festival, Buffalo Bayou Festival, planting and watering of trees and shrubs, building of tables for the nursery, building bird houses, as well as staffing the nature stores and visitor information centers. As you can see, the Friends managed to be productive despite the heat and this fall we will be even busier. **All these activities would not be possible without volunteers. Join us, come out and volunteer and enjoy the great outdoors and the company of others with similar interests—we truly do have fun and leave the refuge feeling like we have accomplished an important project!!!**

**To join our happy group of volunteers,  
call Stephanie Martinez,  
Volunteer Coordinator for the US Fish  
and Wildlife Service at 409-267-3337 or  
email her at  
Stephanie\_Martinez@fws.gov  
to provide your contact information.**

# Secrets of the Skillern Tract

By Marilyn Kircus

The Skillern Tract is not yet on most birders' radar. Instead they come to Old Anahuac and visit The Willows, The Butterfly Garden, Shoveler Pond, and the Hackberry Trail. A few look for the seaside sparrows down by the boat launch site on the bay. Some have learned about the great new place, made by the geese, down the road to Frozen Point, where wintering birds could be seen from the road to the levy of Oyster Bayou.

But drive another seven miles east, and enter the Skillern Unit and a different set of habitats appear. The unit adjoins East Bay Bayou and thus has a little riparian area. As a place that was farmed for rice before Ike, and in which farming has again started this spring, it has brought in waders, including whimbrels along with up to 500 fulvous whistling ducks and perhaps 75 to 100 black-bellied whistling ducks. In mid May, I spotted the last of our winter ducks, a lone male blue-winged teal, who was hanging out with a fulvous whistling duck. It has a huge permanent pond - one of the very few fresh water sources on the refuge. In the winter, I would occasionally flush a woodcock hanging out close to East Bay Bayou. And when I arrived early to bird, I found forty plus black-crowned night herons roosting there, although evenings saw hundreds of double-crested



Purple Gallinule



Cross the bridge and follow the sidewalk

cormorants and several great egrets roosting on the same tree stumps, left by Hurricane Ike. And, in the winter, I've spotted eagles sitting way back on the south east side of the pond in trees and also flying over.

This summer, a few neotropical cormorants nested in the stubs of the trees as well as orioles, yellow-billed cuckoos and perhaps Anhingas. Hundreds of cormorants and great egrets are using the same area for roosting now, in late summer, so I love to go there late in the evening to watch cormorants, herons, fulvous and black-bellied whistling ducks fly in. Some cattle egrets are also using the area as a roost.



The Rookery Overlook

There is usually a flock or two of both white-faced and white ibis to enjoy. In late spring to

early summer, a pair of purple gallinules can often be spotted just before the overlook and another one sometimes sits on the same clump of cattail at sunset. Common gallinules (*the new name for moorhens*) and red-winged blackbird calls remind me that this is marsh habitat. Boat-tailed grackles call and skulk to and from their nests in the cattails. This is the only place I find lots of little blue herons. And as the sun sets, common nighthawks peep their fluttering, diving, climbing path through the sky. Two yellow-crowned night herons begin fishing near dusk and can sometimes be found on early morning visits. Lots of little green herons are around, many of them recently fledged. Orchard orioles also used this unit, but I could find them easier on the east side, near the second fishing platform.



Eastern Kingbird and Yellow-Billed Cuckoo

In migration, there are warblers, buntings and other common migrants. In the winter, there are lots of red-tailed hawks and I've seen kestrels there also. Walking the path mostly used by fishermen on the east side going south and the grassy path on the east side going north is often extremely productive.

There are two new accessible paths there -one to an East Bay Bayou Overlook where you can get good views of the fields in the evenings. But the piece de resistance - and my favorite place on the refuge - is the new accessible trail to the rookery overlook. "Rookery", you gasp. "I never knew there was such a thing at Anahuac." I was surprised to find, that in the four years I hadn't visited Anahuac, a permanent pond had been installed with islands which were planted to attract wading birds. Hurricane Ike destroyed most of the rookery and lots of the riparian trees but some are still left. (And hopefully, replacing



White-Faced Ibis and Black-Necked Stilt

the rookery trees and enhancing the riparian area will be a future Friends of Anahuac project. And I'm rooting button bushes to be planted there.)

At this writing, Shoveler Pond is still in rehab to return it to the fishing hole it used to be. And the road to Shoveler Pond is getting paved so it will be closed through early to mid fall. The Skillern Tract is a good alternative birding destination and a great additional birding destination as well. It is also the best place to see alligators, since the drought has caused them to move from the Shoveler Pond area. But they are easily seen in East Bayou around the bridge and fishing platforms and are also in the pond.

# National Wildlife Refuges Preparing for September Teal-Only Season

Department of the Interior · U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service · Texas Chenier Plain NWR Complex  
P.O. Box 278 · Anahuac, Texas 77514 · Phone: 409/267-3337 · Fax: 409/267-4314

**For Release:** August 30, 2011  
**Contact:** Tami Schutter, 409-267-3337

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has announced that portions of the Anahuac, McFaddin and Texas Point National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) will be open to public waterfowl hunting during the upcoming 2011 September teal-only season. The teal-only season will take place on the refuges September 10<sup>th</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

During the September teal-only season, the Pace Tract and portions of the Middleton Tract will be open daily on Anahuac NWR. Portions of Texas Point NWR, as well as the Central Hunt Unit, Star Lake/Clam Lake Hunt Unit, and the Mud Bayou Hunt Unit on McFaddin NWR will also be open daily during the teal-only season. Hunters should refer to the 2011-2012 waterfowl hunting regulations and maps for current hunt unit locations. The East Unit on Anahuac NWR and the Spaced Hunt Unit on McFaddin NWR are closed during the early teal season.

Waterfowl hunters scouting potential sites can access refuge hunt units open for the early teal season on the Anahuac, McFaddin and Texas Point NWRs on Saturday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, and Sunday, September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 during daylight hours.

All hunters are required to possess a signed waterfowl hunting permit while hunting on all hunt units of these refuges. This free permit may be obtained by contacting the Refuge offices during regular business hours (8:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday-Friday), at the Visitor Information Station on Anahuac NWR, or on-line at <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/refuges>. Last years permits are no longer valid and all hunters must obtain new permits for the 2011-2012 waterfowl season. All state and federal regulations are applicable. For additional information and complete refuge hunting regulations, please contact Tami Schutter at 409-267-3337.

*The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.*

Catch us on Facebook! You can read updates, see photos, post comments and look at comments posted by others. Set up your ID on Facebook and look for Friends of Anahuac Refuge. You will sometimes see "Topic of the Day" and can join in the discussion. This interactive medium will let you know what's going on in a timely fashion if you'll make us your Facebook Friend.

## Get your newsletter via e-mail

To see the photos in color, save the Friends postage and printing costs, and get your newsletter sooner, sign up on our e-mail list. We'll be happy to send you the newsletter as a PDF file. Just notify the newsletter editor at [drcharris@yahoo.com](mailto:drcharris@yahoo.com) or [friendsofanahuacrefuge@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofanahuacrefuge@gmail.com). You can read the newsletter with Adobe Reader, which is available as a free download (you probably already have it on your computer).

Time to renew the link from your Kroger card to Friends of Anahuac Refuge. Please take the enclosed Customer Letter with you on your next visit to Kroger to keep contributions flowing to your Refuge. Each year we get several hundred dollars in support of our projects.



Contact us at [friendsofanahuacrefuge@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofanahuacrefuge@gmail.com) to:

- ◆ Donate 1 gallon - 3 gallon pots
- ◆ Have your newsletter delivered via e-mail
- ◆ Volunteer for some opportunity in your area of specialization
- ◆ Be notified of Volunteer-for-a-Day workdays
- ◆ Help grow seeds for prairie restoration
- ◆ Help water and mulch plants
- ◆ Deliver snacks to canteen areas for staff
- ◆ Help in Nature Store (2 locations)
- ◆ Help with Special Events

**Gator Tales**

## Return Service Requested

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Friends of Anahuac Refuge

PO Box 1348

Anahuac, TX 77514



**[www.friendsofanahuacnwr.org](http://www.friendsofanahuacnwr.org)**

Your Friends of Anahuac Refuge Board of Directors meets the first Tuesday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the US Fish and Wildlife headquarters at 4017 FM 563.

You are welcome to come and share your ideas.

### F.O.A.R. Board of Directors

**President** — Travis Lovelace

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**Comments? Questions? Send us an e-mail at [friendsofanahuacrefuge@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofanahuacrefuge@gmail.com)**

### Membership Application/Renewal

New     Renewal     E-mail Newsletter

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work or Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

- \$15.00 — Regular Membership
- \$22.50 — Family Membership
- \$50.00 — Sustaining Membership
- \$75.00 — Family Sustaining Membership
- \$100.00 — Corporate Membership
- \$300.00 — Lifetime Membership
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Donation (any amount)

Complete and mail with membership fee to:

**Friends of Anahuac Refuge**

**PO Box 1348**

**Anahuac, TX 77514**

**or join/renew online**