

Around the Bayou



Let's Go For A Stroll During the past two months we have been working on a new walkway and observation deck for the alligator exhibits. Frank Bonifay designed an elevated walkway with an observation deck for an up-close look at the alligators. The walkway and deck also act as a demarcation between the new alligators and the original group. See October/November 2004 issue for more on our new gators.

Spring Tours The 2005 Spring tour season is underway. We are hoping for nesting alligators in both the new and the original pits. We have created nesting sites in the habitats and hope the females will take to them. Our 90-minute tours include narrated cruise and a brief walking tour. A visit to our Alligator Eco-Habitat and our Snapping Turtle Pond is sure to delight visitors of all ages. Reservations are required and tour prices are \$25.00 / adult and \$15.00 / child (2 - 15 years of age).



Gator Baby Update - As you know our mating and egg-laying seasons were successful and we 29 baby gators resulted in our efforts. Upon hatching, we removed the babies from the alligator habitat because the threat of predation on baby gators is very high. We did lose several babies to natural attrition and our remaining 24 babies are doing very well. They're now feeding on shiners and reptile food. With continued success we will raise the young for approximately a year or so until they reach 18x in length and they become predators themselves.

200 YEARS: A CHANGING LANDSCAPE



A Changing Land By 1803, both sides of the Mississippi River from New Orleans to Baton Rouge were occupied by settlers. The more desirable property was on the eastern side of the River, descending into the Spanish Lake Basin's low-lying swampland. Much of the Basin was cleared of trees and vegetation for planting, however, relatively few acres were needed. Rather, plantations utilized the fertile soils deposited in the riverbank. This area was fittingly described as the "Golden Coast" from New Orleans to Donaldsonville. By 1828, wealthy planters dedicated their labors to single crops: indigo, tobacco, cotton, sugar, and rice produced in commercial quantities. They cut the gigantic virgin cypress trees to build beautiful, stately homes and constructed individual levees (a condition of land

grants) to protect their houses and fields. The state and federal governments gradually took responsibility for flood protection and by the late 1800's had built continuous levees along most of the Mississippi River within Louisiana. The levees separated the Spanish Lake Basin from the River, transforming it from a backwater swamp into a freshwater catch basin.

20th Century - Period of Rapid Growth The success of sugarcane and cotton as Louisiana's cash crops attracted more people to the natural resources of the Basin. In the early 1900's, landowners sold their swamp acreage to timber companies resulting in a massive cutting of the giant cypress trees. Called the Cypress Age, this 40-year period devastated the wetland forests, leaving blackened stumps and crippled ecosystems behind.

From The Bayou



We recently hosted a party for the Bowling Congress which has just hit Baton Rouge. We really enjoyed this appreciative, fun and diverse group of bowling enthusiasts. We accepted an invitation to the event located at the River Center. There are teams bowling from 7:00 AM to 2:00 AM EVERY DAY for 120 days. We have been honored by their appreciation and support of Alligator Bayou, and we encourage all of you to go see this wonderful event and welcome the bowlers to Baton Rouge.

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Somehow the bald cypress giants deep in Bluff Swamp were spared. This was rare and no one knows why this occurred. Also during this time, the discovery of oil and gas in 1907 and 1916, respectively, led to additional changes in the landscape. The population of the tri-parish area exploded when Standard Oil built a Baton Rouge refinery in 1909, shifting the state's economy from agriculture to industry. Along the Baton Rouge corridor, the people relationship with the Mississippi River changed with the industrialization of Southeastern Louisiana in 1926, the Baton Rouge Municipal Dock replaced the city's wooden wharves, as river traffic grew busier. By the late 1930's, oilfields studded the river corridor as Standard Oil boosted its refining capacity to supply the nation's military during World War II. In the late 1950's, a large percentage of the remaining river frontage in Iberville and Ascension Parishes was purchased by chemical industries. Since then, Louisiana's economy has been largely based on the petrochemical industry.

Citizens Take Action During the 1990's, billions of dollars in industrial expansion led to growth in the population, commercial businesses, residential development and traffic in the tri-parish area. The environmental impacts felt during this resurgence in development around Spanish Lake did not go unnoticed and fueled the subsequent move to protect the area. The citizens began speaking out against air, water and land pollution. In the early 1990's, Bluff Swamp Wildlife Refuge was established to protect against more contamination. Since then, progress, progress has been made in the clean up and conservation of the watershed.



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- In 1991, representatives from the refuge and a variety of citizen coalitions fought against permitting a hazardous waste recycling company to locate on the edge of the Spanish Lake Basin and drain its storm water runoff into Bluff Swamp.
- In 1992, Bluff Swamp Wildlife Refuge and citizen groups protested the proposed location of a regional airport a few miles away. The airport could have disrupted the swamp ecology.
- In 1993, timber companies began to clear cut the bottomland-hardwood forests in the Basin. Sixty acres at the entrance to Alligator Bayou were lost.
- Also in 1993, unhealthy levels of E.coli bacteria were discovered draining from the wastewater outputs of two nearby state penitentiaries. Consequently, treatment systems were improved for those outflows.
- In 1997, Bluff Swamp Wildlife Refuge, conservation groups, sportsmen's leagues, and area citizens gathered to protest and were successful in defeating plans to construct an interstate loop across the northern part of the Basin.
- There have already been many battles fought for the Spanish Lake Basin, but the challenge persists as unregulated development continues to threaten its health.