

Around the Bayou



BABIES!!!! We just hatched 25 new little gator babies - YOO HOO! The babies are all in remarkable health and doing great. David got to be surrogate dad to a lot of the little ones as Jim, Jamie and I were out of town during the hatch (although Jim did get to help the last one come into the world). We are also on the lookout for other babies in the alligator exhibit and out in Alligator Bayou.

LOOK UP!! We just completed putting the roof over the new walkway and observation deck at the alligator exhibit. David worked tirelessly and put in long hours, indeed, to work through our design. The results are incredible. And, to top it all off, the roof made it through Katrina in perfect shape!! The roof will provide shade in the summer for our visitors and keep the rain off their heads. I tried to keep the design in the Acadian style - hope you love the results as much as we do!



REPAIRS Craig Black finished the repairs to the turtle exhibit - there was some stucco that needed replacing and he put a new paint job on the interior. We are (as this newsletter hits the virtual waves) putting a new sealant on the floor to maintain the health and beauty of the exhibit. He also repaired the mermaid whose tail saw a few too many first graders climb atop!

What Can I Do?



Recent pollen tests show that Cypress Flats, around a thousand years ago, was an ancient bald cypress swamp with 300 foot-tall trees so thick and profuse that no sunlight could filter through their foliage. The trees were thousands of years old. Deforested in colonial times and impacted in recent decades by locks and levees, Cypress Flats, is now a vast, open lake of giant, hollow trees and fallen logs. It is still beautiful, though in a different way. Snowy egrets and blue and green herons fish in the shallow waters, nutria rest in tree trunks, alligators glide along the muddy banks, and bald eagles nest in hollows of broken empty treetops. In nature everything has a use. If you have been interested by what you learned in this guide, you may wish to participate in or convey to your students some of the ways in which Spanish Lake Basin and other basins are being and can be restored.

(Pick a Hand, Any Hand)

Everyone can help restore and preserve the health of the Spanish Lake Basin. The best way to begin is by learning how to reclaim the swamp's natural state. Just as area citizens formed Bluff Swamp Wildlife Refuge and took steps to save 901 acres of the basin, it is possible for anyone to contribute his or her time, talents, and ideas. Below are some examples of what is currently being accomplished in the Spanish Lake Basin.

- In 1999, students from St Josephs Academy began testing water quality at six sites in Alligator Bayou, Spanish Lake, and Cypress flats. as part of the lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation's Water Watch program, students were trained in testing procedures. Other sponsors locally associated with this effort and participating under the auspices of the Coastal Ecosystem Stewardship Project include the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, Alligator Bayou Tours, Bluff Swamp Wildlife Refuge, and Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service. The data gathering, as a watershed stewardship program, will help monitor progress in the Basin's restoration program and highlight potential problems that need closer attention in Alligator Bayou and Cypress Flats.(CONT.)



From The Bayou



There has never been a better example of a dark cloud having a silver lining than the recent devastation of Hurricane Katrina. We have heard from numerous friends made on our tour during the past years who sent prayers, thoughts and love our way. We were remarkably blessed and we got through Katrina virtually unscathed. We lost a few trees, but overall, Alligator Bayou is fine. The influx of emails was amazingly important to us - it brought smiles and tears to all of us and we realize what a wonderful gift you all are! At the same time, it is heart-wrenching to see New Orleans and all of those poor families who have lost not only homes and belongings, but family as well. We need to all keep them in our prayers, and we also need to do what we can for them. Donations of food, clothing, personal goods and money are vital - a tragedy of this magnitude requires action on our part. This reminds us that we are indeed one family
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- In March 2000, 35 students from St. Joseph's Academy planted nearly 50 cypress seedlings in Bluff Swamp. The Louisiana Sea Grant College Program co-sponsored this event. A private nursery and the Louisiana Department of Forestry donated the seedlings.

- Alligator Bayou Tours conducts eco tours on its tour boat and sponsors festivals focused cultural history and ecology. Bluebonnet Swamp, a program of the Baton Rouge Recreation & Parks Commission educates its visitors about Alligator Bayou Tours and the beauty of the basin.

- The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation has funded

this curriculum guide and related educational tours for 960 students attending schools in the tri-parish area.

- The Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation conducts adult education field trips in association with Alligator Bayou Tours in the Spanish Lake Basin.
- Local citizens join BSWR, and their taxdeductible contributions help underwrite its conservation efforts.
- The Baton Rouge chapter of the Sierra Club guides educational canoe trips for its members and the public.
- Tourists, film crews, and media from all over the world visit Spanish Lake Basin to enjoy, learn, and tell others about it.
- Sponsors of Baton Rouge's annual Earth Day publicize related events held on the Alligator Bayou music pavilion

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and, although horrible, this disaster helps us all to feel closer to each other.

We have had so much going on the last few months, and we're sorry for the delay in the newsletter (Orhan with Dezins has tried to hard to keep us on track!).

In addition to what we have listed in our Around The Bayou section, we are currently working on the plans for habitats for a bobcat and a fox! The fox we hope to get was found as a pup on the road and saved by a local family. He's fairly tame and cannot be released, so we're trying to set him up a home worthy of his wild nature.

On top of all that, we also saw well over a thousand bowlers during the Bowling Congress and we also hosted the beautiful contestants from the Miss Teen USA (more next issue) pageant. Both of these groups were phenomenal - friendly, caring, and wonderful reminders of the true spirit of humanity!

As you can see, we've certainly not been sitting around twiddling our thumbs!

There is, however, a situation we hope you call can help us with!! Alligator Bayou is unfortunately in the eye of several political entities who hope to make it a drainage basin for Baton Rouge. Currently, the plan aims to drain the swamp and Alligator Bayou - then, when the rain brings too much water to Baton Rouge, they can open the locks and flood the basin here. Of course, the "sugar coating" makes this plan sound like a long sought-after solution that benefits everyone. Except the wildlife that exists now, or the wildlife that needs the land to succeed - like gators, deer, bobcat, foxes, possums, raccoons, et al. We propose that instead of risking such a delicate environmental jewel, they make the upper end of Manchac function as it did and put a reversible pump at the Mississippi River and the head of Manchac. This serves two vital purposes. It alleviates the flooding problem when necessary, and it also will allow the introduction of fresh water back into Bayou Manchac to recreate the "artery" and improve water quality, sedimentation and improve the health of the ecosystem from the River all the way to the Gulf. We see this a win for all - and we hope you do, too. We may be calling on all of you to help us by contacting the politicians when the time comes.... Please, keep us in mind and help if you can!!!!

Enjoy the autumn, and see you in the swamp!!!!

Later, gator!
Frank and Jim

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- ALLIGATOR BAYOU COUPON
- VISITOR PHOTOS
- PET ADOPTION
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