



Around the Bayou

NOW OPEN! 2,800-gallon Snapping Turtle Exhibit!!



Jim showing awestruck on-lookers the variety of native Louisiana snakes who also call the new turtle exhibit home.

Last year, Frank and Jim saw a news blurb about a huge snapping turtle caught in nearby Pierre Part. After several phone calls to the station, Frank located the fisherman and bought the turtle from the story along with several others that the fisherman had. Frank began the process of designing a home and an exhibit which would showcase the importance, beauty and rarity of the alligator snapping turtle. After months of research and ideas, he came up with the exhibit now in place.



The pride of the pond - one of our five alligator snapping turtles.

Artist and friend Craig Black..... Craig is a local artist with a Da Vinci touch - he paints, sculpts, writes and works in numerous mediums. After the pond itself was discussed, Craig set the forms and laid the steelwork to pour the monolithic structure. Frank and Jim wanted a natural setting for the turtles, but also wanted visibility for viewing. Craig

created a wire form to which he applied a modified mortar and sculpted the driftwood and cypress knee enclosure complete with various animals. The corner "knees" act as fountains which are supplied by their own water well and there is a biological filter system in the guise of a waterfall. Once cured, Craig applied paint to give the exhibit its realistic feel.

RECLAIMING OUR HERITAGE

Go online to read about ALLIGATOR EXHIBIT EXPANSION

Alligator Bayou and the Spanish Lake Basin - Part 1

The Spanish Lake Basin is an ancient backwater swamp of the Mississippi River that extends through East Baton Rouge, Ascension, and Iberville parishes. For thousands of years, the Basin has given life to a rich diversity of plants and animals and to families who still hunt, fish, farm, boat, and hike in the scenic beauty of this wilderness. However, in the past few centuries humans have negatively



impacted this ecosystem's health. Efforts to restore and maintain the health of the Spanish Lake Basin have been led by citizens working together. Motivated by a desire to preserve their culture and heritage, local people have demonstrated the power of a united voice. It is today's students who will one day inherit and take responsibility for Alligator Bayou and the Spanish Lake Basin. Care for the Basin and the subsequent protection of it will be fostered by students understanding the tremendous resource they have in their backyard. With this guide, students in the Spanish Lake Basin will come to understand and appreciate the importance of protecting this precious ecosystem.

Continued...

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From The Bayou



Greetings from Alligator

Bayou to all of our friends !! We hope this dispatch finds you all healthy and happy. We've been busy here in the last year. Our snapping turtle exhibit that Frank designed has really taken shape.

Frank's bulkhead and deck design truly set off the pool perfectly, and thanks to David, Eric and Blaine for the hard work and exact cuts to get it done!!

We're hoping this newsletter will become a regular feature and that you enjoy receiving it! Thanks to all of the supporters and friends we have made during the past years - we love our jobs because of you all! Remember, the fiercest reptiles sometimes happen to walk on two legs!!

ADDITIONAL ONLINE E-NEWSLETTER FEATURES:

- MEET THE STAFF
- GATORS HAVE BEEN SEEN
- GATOR FUN
 - Make a Gator Card
 - Swamp Wallpaper
 - Visitor Photos
 - Courtship Sounds

RECLAIMING OUR HERITAGE continued...

Spanish Lake Basin

Spanish Lake Basin is a watershed located just south of the Greater Baton Rouge area. This 17,000 acre basin drains three Southeast Louisiana parishes: East Baton Rouge, Iberville, and Ascension. Spanish Lake Basin, in turn, drains into the Lake Pontchartrain Basin (a 4700-mi estuary flowing into the Gulf of Mexico) via Bayou Manchac, the Amite River, and Lake Maurepas. Features of particular interest in Spanish Lake Basin include Bluff Swamp, an ancient backwater swamp of the Mississippi River, and two waterways, Bayou Manchac and Alligator Bayou. Because of their rural connection to the Mississippi River and Lake Maurepas, these two bayous played a pivotal role in the history of the basin. In addition to the Spanish Lake Basin's historical importance, the basin is ecologically significant because it's a wetland habitat. In Southeast Louisiana, including Spanish Lake Basin, wetlands provide vital functions and values for the area's people and wildlife.

The Call Of The Wild

Throughout the centuries, French, Spanish, Cajun, Canary Islander, African, and other cultures settled in the Spanish Lake Basin. The rich biodiversity and dynamic hydrology of the Basin led to a unique way of life for people migrating to the area. Uniting this multicultural society was their sense of history and identity, so it was with great concern that families living on the ridge of Spanish Lake Basin began to witness the negative effects of sprawling commercial and residential growth. One of the worst incidences was the felling of giant cypress trees at the turn of the 20th century. These trees were among the oldest and largest in the world. Beside feeding and sheltering wildlife, they absorbed rain, prevented erosion, and were revered for their age and beauty.

A Citizen Coalition Saves The Swamp

Upon learning of the return of timber cutters to the basin in the early 1990s, Frank Bonifay and Jim Ragland, business partners and residents of Bluff Swamp, united area residents to protest the proposed deforestation. Working with other concerned citizens, the men contacted neighboring landowners who planned to sell their swamp acreage to the timber companies. Sales were already in progress, and the timber companies began clear

While negotiating with local landowners to buy the endangered swamp, BSWR sometimes took drastic action, including legal measures, to block timber trucks from entering Spanish Lake Basin via Alligator Bayou Road. During these years, Frank and Jim virtually abandoned their successful contracting company and committed their time and money to saving the swamp. By the time landowners agreed to sell to the Bluff Swamp Wildlife Refuge in 1993, BSWR had acquired the needed partners: U.S. Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Louisiana Department of Forestry, and Ascension Parish. BSWR bought 901 acres and preserved it, as is, in perpetuity.

With their life's work defined, Frank and Jim established a private ecotourism business to educate people on swamp ecology. They also purchased the entrance to Alligator Bayou, 60 adjacent acres obtained too

The work to preserve this important area has just begun. The restoration and preservation of Bluff Swamp has required the courage and tenacity of many people committed to BSWR and Alligator Bayou Tours' mission. This mission is to educate local citizens, school children, and visitors about the wetlands and the cultural history of the Spanish Lake Basin. With the support of local residents, the Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, and the Lake Pontchartrain Basin Foundation, these efforts will continue to be successful.