

Wetlands—A Vital Habitat

Wetlands are habitats that are often misunderstood. They are frequently described as “swamps” with the implied meaning of wasteland. In reality, wetlands provide a habitat that is vital to the health of our planet. Wetland areas can be likened to our bodies’ kidneys because they filter water. Wetlands can have characteristics of both upland and aquatic environments, thereby making them a transition area. Because of this, they are difficult to define. The amount of water and the length of time it remains on the land defines the area. A true wetland does not have to be constantly wet. In fact, the definition describes it as an area that is wet as little as two to three consecutive weeks of the year. Other indications of a true wetland are the types of plants and soils found there. Because water soaked soils result in low oxygen content, only specially adapted plants can survive. Common plants include reeds and rushes that can “push” oxygen down into their roots through their hollow stems. Soils are usually gray and may have reddish streaks running through them.

Wetlands perform many valuable roles for humans and wildlife. The most important are:

- Water Quality – act as a filter
- Habitat – provide homes to hundreds of animals, including migrating birds, as well as those that winter there along the Gulf Coast
- Erosion Control – help to stabilize banks
- Flood Buffers – act as natural detention ponds
- Nurseries – serve as havens for young crab, fish and shellfish
- Recreation – provide sites for fishing, hunting, bird-watching and wildlife photography

The major threat to wetlands is human destruction, caused by agriculture and industrial development and urban and suburban sprawl.

Filling or draining wetlands may require a permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Hours and Information

Monday-Friday: 8:00 am—4:00 pm; Saturday: 10:00 am—4:00 pm

Closed Sundays and major City holidays

Admission fees: Free for self-guided tours; fees for guided tours and field trips by reservation; Call for details

Staff:

Superintendent of Natural Resource Programs: Tracey Prothro

Administrative Assistant: Amina Klair

Animal Care: Holly Hollingshead

Education Coordinator: Jina Faith

Education Interns: Carla Eppler, Berenice Rodriguez, Hunter Slovacek

Exhibits Coordinator: Terry Cecil

Outreach/Volunteer Coordinator: Mary Alice Trumble



The Wetlands Center is located approximately 22 miles east of downtown Houston, TX

The Wetlands Education Center
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Baytown Parks and Recreation Department

The Eddie V. Gray Wetlands Education and Recreation Center

Where indoor education
meets outdoor recreation



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The Wetlands Center

The Wetlands Center, located on the banks of Goose Creek, opened on January 26, 1998. Eddie Gray, a member of the Goose Creek Stream Greenbelt Development Committee, sought the committee's permission to purchase an abandoned bowling alley and turn it into a wetlands center. In 1996, after the land was purchased, the Committee applied for and received a \$350,000 matching grant from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to develop the center. Lee College and Goose Creek Consolidated Independent School District (GCCISD) also entered into agreements to support and use the facility. Each contributes funds annually. The center property encompasses six acres. The 14,000 square-foot building includes staff offices, meeting rooms, a science lab, a computer lab, and the 9,000 square-foot Robert M. Craig exhibit hall.



Eddie V. Gray Wetlands Center

Educational Programs

Education lies at the heart of the Wetlands Center's mission. In cooperation with GCCISD, the center currently offers the ExxonMobil Wetlands Ecology Program, a day-long educational

field trip for every fifth grader in the school system. The program consists of indoor instruction at the Wetlands Center and outdoor, hands-on activities at the nearby Baytown Nature Center. The Wetlands Center also offers the Covestro-sponsored program, *I³* to all fifth-graders. *Liquid Science*, sponsored by the Baytown Rotary Club is for seventh grade students.

Each summer the Chevron Phillips Summer Science camps attract students from grades one through ten for week-long experiences of fun-filled learning and off-site educational field trips. Winter camp is held during the first week of the holiday break and spring camp is held in March when the GCCISD has its spring break.



On a Galveston field trip during "Wade Into Wetlands" Summer Science Camp

Other educational offerings include

"Wetlands Wagon" outreach programs taken to schools, libraries, and businesses to educate students and the public on the importance and preservation of wetland areas.

Educational birthday parties are offered for children from ages 4-12. The Wetlands Center provides the program and the birthday family supplies the decorations and refreshments. The fee is \$125 for a two-hour time period.

Both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts may earn badges at the Wetlands Center, as well as at the Baytown Nature Center. Call for details and fees.

During the winter and summer "Gator Tales" is a popular one-hour program for pre-school children and their parents. The free Wednesday offering includes story time, crafts, nature activities and often live animals.

Volunteers have a large role in the educational programs at the Wetlands Center. Most either teach or assist with school field trip groups visiting the center. Volunteer orientation is in August.

Recreational Programs

A variety of recreational programs are offered at the Wetlands Center. Hunter Education and Angler Education classes, both Texas Parks and Wildlife programs, are held at the facility.

Bird watching is one of the most popular recreational activities in the country. The Wetlands Center is an official stop on the 500-mile-long Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. Black-crowned Night-Herons, Osprey, Roseate Spoonbills, White and Brown Pelicans and various shorebirds can be seen along the banks of Goose Creek behind the center. Another local site on the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail is the Baytown Nature Center at 6213 Bayway Drive.



Support

Programs and activities at the Wetlands Center are funded by the City of Baytown, through grants, donations and program fees. Additional support comes from the Friends of the Wetland Center, a nonprofit group that provides financial support to the center.

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