

New Amenities at the Port Aransas Nature Preserve

When you visit the Port Aransas Nature Preserve sites this winter there will be many new amenities available. Contractors have been busy all summer rebuilding trails and boardwalks at the Nature Preserve at Charlie's Pasture North and South entrances and the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center. These were damaged in the 2017 storm surge from Hurricane Harvey. As you visit the Nature Preserve at Charlie's Pasture North (1200 Port St), you can take a short walk on the Loop Trail which takes you to an overlook of the wetlands and pond. Don't miss Clay's Hill trail which is great birding during migration and winter. This trail is a mowed grass ¼ mile loop up a small hill. There is a new bench off the trail that overlooks the shallow pond and marsh. This area has been undergoing habitat restoration including removal of invasive trees and grasses and last winter staff and volunteers planted about 80 native Texas trees and shrubs. Come back to see this area as it will just keep getting better each year.

No visit to Port Aransas would be complete without a trip to the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center. Now, better than ever, the site offers a second boardwalk for bird watching over the freshwater and brackish marsh. The boardwalk built this year replaced the original boardwalk which was destroyed by Hurricane Harvey. Don't miss taking a walk south to the end of the boardwalk to the newly paved trail. The trail offers a short walk past sunflowers and wooded habitat. Staff and volunteers recently planted 110 native Texas trees and shrubs. Take a break on the bench under the mesquite tree and enjoy the beautiful view of the saltmarsh habitat of the Nature Preserve at Charlie's Pasture. If you are up for a longer walk, continue past the concrete path on the unimproved trail for 550 ft where it meets up with the newly constructed South Trail. The South Trail is one-mile long and alternates between boardwalk over the wetlands and crushed granite trail through the upland habitats. About halfway down there is an observation tower that offers expansive views of Mustang Island. The trail ends at the Nature Preserve at Charlie's Pasture South entrance. The trail can also be accessed at the entrance (2650 TX-361). This site also offers a parking lot and picnic area.

Joan and Scott Holt Paradise Pond is located at 410 Cut Off Road- the driveway is directly north of Restaurant San Juan. The front of the site has a boardwalk under large black willow trees and through a pollinator garden with several benches. When you enter the back there is a short trail that leads you to a boardwalk that goes over the small freshwater pond. The site has been through a lot of changes, including the neighboring development and clearing of trees and brush under the powerlines. Finally, the pond filled with saltwater from Harvey's storm surge and further killed and damaged many black willows and other important trees. Staff and volunteers have planted hundreds of trees at the site and will continue to do so. The City has purchased the 0.5 acres behind the pond from the developers. The land will be planted with more trees and the boardwalk will be extended across the pond and connect with a trail that will lead to the Community Park. Construction is expected to take place in the spring of 2023 and planting in the winter 2022-2023.

Wetland Park is located at 1112 TX-361 and is a short boardwalk and shaded observation deck overlooking wetlands. No new construction here but it's an easy stop and often full of wading and shorebirds.

The Port Aransas Nature Preserve offers free weekly programming which changes seasonally. Check out our Facebook page, the South Jetty Visitor's Guide or stop by our office at 106 Cut Off Road for more information. Every Wednesday at 9am Birding on the Boardwalk at the Birding Center. Every Tuesday 12:30pm Yoga at the Preserve at the Charlie's Pasture Pavilion on Port St. Every Saturday 8am Nature

Excursions in Charlie's Pasture (~2.5 mile walk). 1, 3, 5th Saturday at the Community Park and 2nd & 4th at Charlie's Pasture South. Every Tuesday 8am Clay's Hill Bird Walks with Clay Taylor at the Charlie's Pasture Pavilion.

