

Mid-Coast UPDATE

Newsletter of the Mid-Coast Chapter, Texas Master Naturalists

SUMMER 2020



*Our mission: Education,
Outreach, Service*

COMING UP

Chapter activities are up in the air for the remainder of 2020:

■ **Board meeting:** Board meetings have been held via Zoom due to the pandemic.

■ **Chapter meeting:** Face-to-face chapter meetings have been put on hold due to the pandemic.

■ **State meeting:** Texas Master Naturalist annual meeting will be a virtual event Oct. 14-17. See pages 2 and 3 for more information.

■ **Full calendar** on our website: <https://midcoast-tmn.org/>

ONLINE

Get the latest chapter news and information on our website and social media outlets:



UPDATE

Mid-Coast Update is published four times a year. Send feedback and ideas to communications@midcoast-tmn.org. **Print and save:** Save or share this newsletter! Use legal-sized paper to print.

2020: It's been a year like no other

By DENNIS DURKEE
Mid-Coast Chapter

- ▶ Training classes canceled
- ▶ Volunteer venues closed
- ▶ Chapter meetings scrapped
- ▶ Board meetings gone virtual
- ▶ State conference reconfigured

The COVID-19 pandemic has rocked every aspect of our lives. And our Master Naturalist world is no exception.

"First and foremost, all Texas Master Naturalist events, meetings, service projects must be compliant with all state, county and local public health proclamations and ordinances." reads the advice from the state program office. "Safety is our guiding principle for operations."

Between 60% and 65% of TMN membership statewide, by age alone, is considered to be in the "high risk" category of COVID-19. "If we can help minimize exposure, 'hunker down' and socially distance ourselves then just maybe these calls to do so can be lifted sooner rather than later — THAT may just be our 'service' over these next few weeks," the state office said.

On June 26, AgriLife Extension released an updated Transitioning Back Guidance document. The document was originally released in May. But portions of the guidelines were further delayed during July as the virus surged across Texas.

Earlier in the year, the document had laid out a three-step process. The



third step, which was delayed to Aug. 1 and could be further delayed, states: "Group meetings of 25% capacity of space or fewer people only if social distancing can be practiced. All volunteers may be at work site but should practice social distancing. Wearing masks is encouraged when in public spaces."

For now, no face-to-face chapter meetings are scheduled. The 2020 Initial Training class schedule is delayed. The chapter board has resumed quarterly meetings via Zoom. And the state conference in October will be a virtual event instead of gathering in Houston. Many of our partners, such as local volunteer groups, local organizations, state parks and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, are closed or operating on a limited basis.

For the latest information:

Resource page for AgriLife updates: <https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/coronavirus/>

State coronavirus information page: <https://dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus/>



The 2020 Initial Training class was off to a great start — then the pandemic hit. Here the class learns about coastal ecology on Feb. 15 at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge.



‘Doc & Martha’ documentary chosen for state conference

By DENNIS DURKEE
Mid-Coast Chapter

Our chapter commissioned a documentary film on two iconic South Texas naturalists, Wayne “Doc” and Martha McAlister. The film was released last year and was featured at the 2019 Rockport Film Festival and the 2020 Victoria Book Festival.

And now, it has been selected to be screened during the Texas Master Naturalist Virtual Annual Meeting Oct. 14-17. If you have not seen the film yet, don’t miss it!

Greg Pasztor of San Antonio produced the film. Chapter members Brigid Berger, Bill Burge and Jane Moore were instrumental in getting the film fine-tuned and ready to share.

After Doc retired as a biology professor from Victoria College, the couple moved to Matagorda Island as U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service employees. Beginning with our chapter’s first training class in 2000, Doc and Martha taught Master Naturalists about barrier island ecology and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge ecology.

Kris Kirkwood recalls: “They seemed to have reservations about our organization at first, and about projects we were doing, like turtle patrol on Matagorda Island. They soon came to trust us, though, as fellow naturalists.”

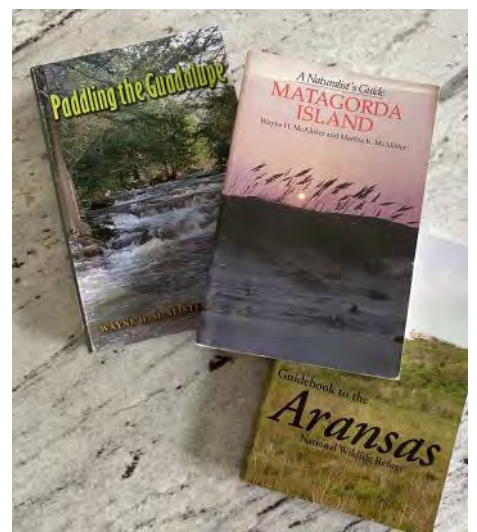
From educating hundreds of school groups to writing numerous books, their impact on our region is immense. At our chapter’s tenth anniversary on Dec. 5, 2010, they were made honorary Mid-Coast Chapter members.



Dr. Wayne McAlister PhD and Martha McAlister. Doc has passed while Martha lives in Cuero.



Doc leading a chapter training class in 2015.



Some of the books written by the McAlisters.



State conference goes online due to pandemic concerns

By **MARY PEARL MEUTH**
Texas Master Naturalist Program

As a result of the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the Texas Master Naturalist Program has decided to suspend this year's in-person event in Houston, in favor of a fully virtual experience.

The decision reflects TMN's responsibility to protect the health and well-being of its members, conference attendees, and the general population while still serving its mission to provide education, outreach, and service dedicated to the beneficial management of natural resources and natural areas.

The Texas Master Naturalist Annual Meeting is geared toward Texas Master Naturalist volunteers, their chapters, agency advisors, representatives of partner organizations, and supporters of the statewide TMN Program. The meeting provides an opportunity for our volunteers and affiliates to receive all of their Advanced Training requirements for the year within one extended weekend.

It's also an opportunity for program participants and supporters to network,

share new ideas and projects and to learn from one another

While we may not be seeing you in Houston this fall in person, we are committed to creating a valuable and engaging educational and networking experience that mirrors our in-person Annual Meeting. In fact, we're quite excited about all of the new possibilities that a virtual conference opens up for our event!

Please save the dates for us now! We've shifted the dates to Wednesday through Saturday to accommodate the virtual setting. We'll be online with you October 14th through 17th with four days of sessions, interactive programs, and some surprises we'll be sharing later this summer.

This year's meeting presents an opportunity to "attend" even more sessions than ever before. With the virtual format for this year's meeting, sessions will be offered from 9 a.m. through 4 p.m. most days and with a lunch break every day. We also have some fun, extra sessions lined up for pre-conference and each evening during the conference week, we're hoping to host virtual socials and watch events.



MEETING DETAILS

► **When:** Oct. 14-17, 2020

► **Where:** From the comfort of your home office, back patio or reclining chair.

► **Registration opens:** Aug. 5

► **Agenda and complete information:** https://txmn.tamu.edu/2020-annual-meeting/?fbclid=IwAR10Ppex3luuowlucS3SO0CgZpN_S_fRXr1ZAE4QHmDVpvvbVQnz5jqwePA

Shop on Amazon? You can help chapter at same time

Do you shop on Amazon?

Do you want to provide some financial support to the Mid-Coast Chapter?

If you answered yes, then we have a deal for you!

Chapter Treasurer Janet Cunningham recently set up MCTMN as an authorized charity with the AmazonSmile program. AmazonSmile will make a donation to our chapter in the amount of 0.5% of all of your future Amazon purchases once you've designated MC-

TMN as your charity of choice.

To get started, follow this link: <https://smile.amazon.com/gp/chpf/about>. You can find our chapter by searching for

Mid-Coast Chapter Texas Master Naturalist Inc when you set up the program. And don't forget to tell you family and friends — anyone can designate our chapter for donations,



Chapter members on the go

Volunteer work honored in February



Volunteer milestone awards are presented to these members at the chapter meeting on Feb. 8 at Fulton Mansion State Historic Site.

Volunteer work honored in November



Volunteer milestone awards are presented to these members at the chapter meeting on Nov. 9, 2019, at the Texas Zoo.

Mid-Coast class of 2020



The Class of 2020 has its Initial Training schedule disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

SABP 10th anniversary conference



San Antonio Bay Partnership had a well-attended 10th anniversary conference Jan. 22-23 at UHV. Greg Simmons, Bob Cunningham and Sally Scroggs man the chapter booth at the conference. Chapter member Allan Berger is SABP president and was conference host. Brigid Berger and Dennis Durkee helped with planning. In addition to Allan, conference speakers included chapter members Beth Hudson and Wilfred Korth.

CoBALT crew, Museum of Coastal Bend



Coastal Bend Archaeological Logistics Team (CoBALT) volunteers are honored Jan. 21 for their preservation efforts. The group includes chapter member Debbie Griffith (fourth from left). The Museum of the Coastal Bend has received a major gift to enlarge the museum to include a big focus on the work that CoBALT is doing at the McNeil dig site near Victoria.

Victoria Book Festival, Victoria College



Nathalie and Fred Woolfrey (left) man the Mid-Coast Chapter booth at the first Victoria Book Festival on March 7 at Victoria College. Brigid Berger helped Martha McAlister at her booth, as well as lead the screening of the "Doc and Martha" documentary film.

Staying close to home? You can still find ways to explore nature

By CARLA HASKETT
2020 Initial Training Class member

Social isolation doesn't have to mean separating yourself from nature. You can find plenty to do around the house to add background knowledge or investigate something new in the world right around you.

► iNat like it's going out of style

What critters inhabit the dark recesses of your garage corners? Do you know every species that helps (or can hurt) you in the garden? Spice it up by competing to see who can get the most unusual image within 48 hours and give a prize.

<https://www.inaturalist.org/posts/25692-inaturalist-world-tour>

► Keep on doing what you are doing, but save sea life

This Chrome extension is designed to divert ad revenue to oceanic cleanup efforts.

<https://chrome.google.com/webstore/detail/ocg-saving-ocean-life/cnmdgbpgnlocnjnoiphaoepebfijidi>

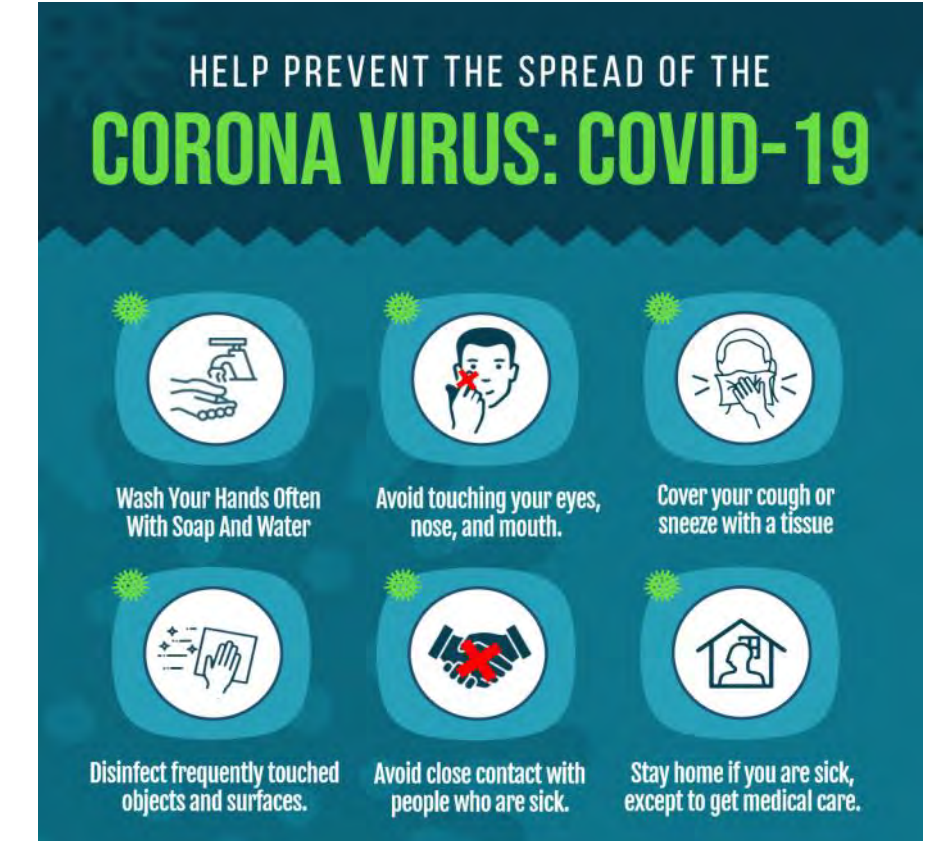
► Have yourself a giggle

Watch (or rewatch) the True Facts series. Just the way they say "nudi-branches" is good for a snicker or two. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F7V8DRfZBQI&list=PLOHbM4GGWADc5bZgzbivvtAuWGow6h05>

► Learn From The Best

The Nature Conservancy offers more than 400 hours of free training online. Get training preapproved for AT hours. <https://www.conservationtraining.org/>

► Listen to some free audiobooks that present information about ani-



mals and nature topics

https://librivox.org/search?primary_key=77&search_category=genre&search_page=1&search_form=get_results

► Get drawn into the wonders of the natural world by engaging with real animals through video series

The Texas State Aquarium had light-hearted daily Aquavision presentations. There are materials online, as well as the past archives sessions: <https://www.texasstateaquarium.org/educate/learn-from-home-activities/>

► San Antonio Zoo video series focuses on information and staying PAWSitive

<https://www.facebook.com/SanAntonioZoo/>

► Go beyond Pikachu to peek-a-zoo

Through the miracle of augmented reality, try a 3-D virtual interaction by entering an animal's name into Google via your phone. Peer into your camera and enjoy an engaging visit with a wild creature.

<https://www.9to5google.com/2020/03/28/google-3d-animals-list/#>

Crane population remains steady

Whoop, whoop! Wintering whooping crane survey results were released this spring at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. The population remains stable at an estimated 506 birds, with 39 juveniles and 192 adult pairs.

"While we did not detect growth in the size of the population this year, we do continue to observe whooping cranes outside of our primary survey area, indicating they continue to expand their winter range," said Wade Harrell, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. "Next year, we will be adding the Holiday Beach secondary survey area to our primary survey area given we detected enough whooping crane groups there to meet our protocol for inclusion."

Read the report: https://www.fws.gov/uploadedFiles/WHCR%20Update%20Winter%202019-2020b.pdf?fbclid=IwAR27fw4g_H4RONq9gO7CrUoqBEBfGzu9a5f4EuEnHf7Ch2dZC7LrR2TzHtc



This map shows the sampling area used to monitor whooping cranes on their wintering grounds along the Texas coast.



ABOVE: Chapter member Greg Simmons lectures on the Geology of Texas on Feb. 5.
RIGHT: ALL members learn how to convert plastic bags into reusable items in a March 3 program lead by chapter member Beth Hudson.



Chapter members share passions with ALL academy members

Mid-Coast Chapter members share their expertise through a longstanding relationship with the Academy of Lifelong Learning at Victoria College. It's an opportunity to share with doz-

ens of interested people as well as a chance to earn volunteer hours. The 2019-2020 programs were organized by Beth Hudson. Chapter members were a regular staple on ALL's

Spring 2020 curriculum until the COVID-19 pandemic forced the college to postpone the schedule. The Fall 2020 schedule has been canceled, but the college hopes to resume ALL in Spring 2021.

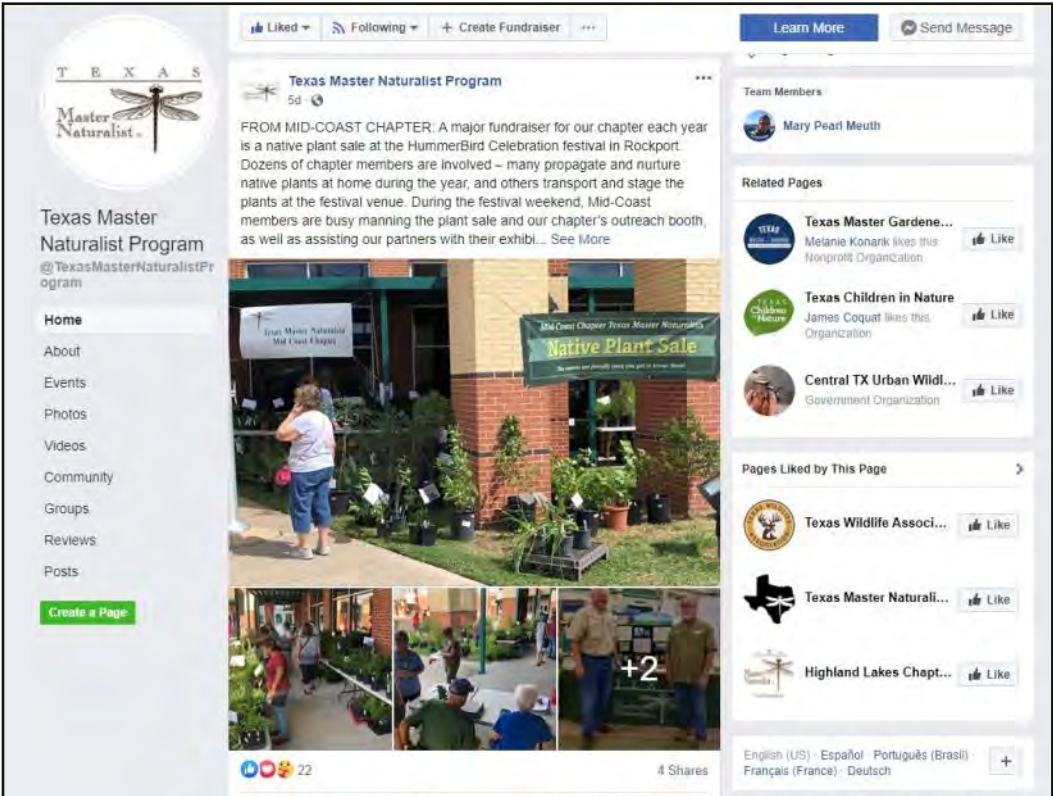
Chapter in state spotlight during Facebook 'takeover'

Followers of the Texas Master Naturalist state program's Facebook page learned about the Mid-Coast Chapter during the week of July 19-25.

The state office invited local chapters to "takeover" the state page for a week to post about chapter achievements and events. About eight chapters signed up. Chapter member Dennis Durkee posted during Mid-Coast's week.

"We're hoping this will be a great way to let others know what your chapter is up to," said Addison Regennitter, student assistant at the state office.

Follow the state office here: <https://www.facebook.com/TexasMasterNaturalistProgram/>



ABOVE: Mid-Coast Chapter had center stage on the Texas Master Naturalist Program's Facebook page during the week of July 19-25. One of the posts shared information and photos on the native plant sale at the HummerBird Celebration.
LEFT: Another post boasted of the astounding volunteer hours and Advanced Training hours earned by Mid-Coast Chapter members since 2000.

Using prescribed fire as a tool to manage the land

By TRENT TEINERT
TPWD Oak Prairie District 7

Returning a natural fire cycle to a landscape is the pinnacle of wildlife management. If you are implementing prescribed fire on your property, it means you are doing everything else right and that you can now use fire as a management tool. For many, the complexity of implementing fire can be a daunting task. For those interested in using fire as a tool to manage land, there are some great resources available.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) offers prescribed fire workshops where people can learn to safely use prescribed fire. TPWD wildlife biologists will come out to your property with personnel and equipment to assist landowners conducting a prescribed burn. Our goal is to provide quality educational opportunities and work "hands on" with individuals for a few years until they gain the experience necessary to safely and reliably use fire as a management tool. TPWD unfortunately has limited capacity for this service and can only assist so many people a year.

Prescribed burn associations fill a much-needed role in Texas. Prescribed burn associations are an organization of people that help each other accumulate resources and experience to conduct prescribed fires. Currently there are 11 prescribed burn associations in Texas scattered across the state; geographically about half of the state is supported by a burn association. In the Oak Prairie District 7 there are two, the South Central Texas and Coastal Bend prescribed burn associations. Much of the region, and the state, need a burn association and many people are looking for assistance. The parent organization for these associations is the Prescribed Burn Alliance of Texas.

Coastal Bend Prescribed Burn Association



This trailer and its equipment are valued at approximately \$15,000 and were donated by the Coastal Bend Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation to TOWMA, the Texas Organization of Wildlife Management Associations, who in turn assigned it to CBPBA for day to day management, scheduling and upkeep. It is equipped with most of the items required to conduct a prescribed burn. Only four wheelers or other vehicles are needed in addition to what comes with the trailer. The trailer is stationed in Victoria. It is available to anyone qualified in its use for a small rental fee. The fee charged is used for maintenance of the trailer. To reserve the trailer, phone Terry Blankenship at (361) 364-2643.

These associations typically acquire nonprofit status and provide networking, training and equipment cost sharing.

The first big benefit of a burn association is the network provided by the association. Everyone can help each other burn. Often manpower is the limiting factor on a burn. Six to eight people is considered the minimum to safely conduct a prescribed fire.

Having more people participate in a burn means there are more eyes to watch for escapes and generally means fire suppression capabilities increase. With this network helping each other burn, people can gain more experience than if they only burn on their property. If someone is able to burn once per year on their property, it might take 10 years for that person to accumulate the experience of 10 fires.

Conversely, if someone assists other landowners, they may accumulate 10 burns of experience in one year! Many of the associations provide training opportunities for its members and provide a network for upcoming trainings.

Equipment sharing is the second big benefit to prescribed burn associations. Most burn associations have been able to accumulate a burn trailer. In these trailers there are water tanks and pumps, hand tools, torches, radios, road signs, and everything you need to conduct a prescribed burn. You can usually rent these trailers by the day for a small fee.

Funds generated by the fees go to the maintenance of the equipment,

and is a huge cost savings for the individual, who otherwise would have to purchase their own equipment. Many of these trailers and equipment were donated from local businesses or bought with grants from conservation organizations.

If you are interested in prescribed burning but don't know where to start, please contact your local TPWD biologist and your prescribed burn association. If you are not sure about prescribed burning, these groups provide a great way to gain experience and will help you decide if burning is right for you.

Prescribed burn associations are important to the future of prescribed fire. Please get involved with your local burn association to insure they can provide assistance that is so greatly needed. If an association does not cover your area, please reach out to a neighboring association and your biologist. Many times, they will know people in your area that are using prescribe fire and a network can be established. Both TPWD and the Prescribed Burn Alliance of Texas can assist you and provide framework to establish a burn association in your area.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department:
https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/wildland_fire_management/

Coastal Bend Prescribed Burn Association:
<http://www.prescribedburn.org/>

Prescribed Burn Alliance of Texas:
<http://pbatexas.org/>