

# **The Five Learning Centers on the Trinity River Paddling Trail**

## **Fort Worth Nature Center and Refuge**

9601 Fossil Ridge Road  
Fort Worth, TX 76135

The Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge (FWNC&R) is a natural area comprised of forests, prairies, and wetlands allowing you to step back in time and experience what the Fort Worth/Dallas Metroplex was like in the early 20th century. The inception of the FWNC&R was based on protecting our local watershed. In 1914 when Lake Worth was built, land was purchased around the West Fork of the Trinity River by the City of Fort Worth to protect the quality of drinking water for the Fort Worth community. With great persistence from some local citizens, particularly the Fort Worth Audubon Society, the Park Board designated some land in 1964 to create a wildlife sanctuary and nature preserve for our community and the FWNC&R was born.

At its current state, the FWNC&R covers 3,621 acres and includes over 20 miles of hiking trails, making the park one of the largest city-owned nature centers in the United States. In 1980 it was designated as a National Natural Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior. With the ever growing population of Fort Worth and the surrounding communities, having a place to explore and enjoy the outdoors is important for our residents. The FWNC&R is home to many native habitats to discover on a self-guided or staff-guided hike. Staff members offer many programs throughout the year providing opportunities for our visitors to learn about our natural world.

In addition to education, the FWNC&R is a shining example of land stewardship and was recognized with a Lone Star Land Steward award in 2009 by the [Texas Parks and Wildlife Department](#). Resource management staff work hard to preserve our ecosystems by promoting best practices to enhance the fauna and flora. Managing our bison herd and implementing prescribed burns are two of many ways we ensure our wildlife have a sustainable home.

## **River Legacy**

Main entrance: 701 NW Green Oaks Blvd., Arlington, TX 76006  
Collins Street entrance: 3020 N. Collins St., Arlington, TX 76006  
Science Center: 703 NW Green Oaks Blvd, Arlington, TX 76006

River Legacy Foundation, a nonprofit 501 (c)(3), was formed as a unique public/private partnership with the City of Arlington Parks and Recreation Department in 1988. The

Foundation was started by a group of visionary citizens who saw the potential of a premier park in land donated to the city by descendants of the Gibbins family – Berta Rose Brown and Margaret Rose May. The initial 376 acres was boosted by additional land donations acquired from the Ryan Companies, Perry R. Bass and Texas Industries.

The Foundation secured grants and private donations to help the city begin the development of River Legacy Parks, with phase 1 opening in 1990 featuring trails, river overlooks, picnic areas and a playground. Today, River Legacy Parks is a 1,300-acre urban oasis following the curves of the Trinity River. The Parks' ecological diversity of bottomland forest, wetlands and prairies provides abundant habitat for countless birds, fish, mammals and native plants. River Legacy Foundation continues to work hand-in-hand with the Arlington Parks and Recreation Department to provide funding for the preservation and expansion of River Legacy Parks.

Recognizing a need for an educational facility to ensure future stewards of the parkland, The Foundation began a Nuts About Nature capital campaign in 1995 to build a one-of-a-kind nature center. River Legacy Living Science Center opened to the public in 1996 featuring interactive exhibits, aquariums and terrariums with native animals, environmental education programs, a gift shop and nature trails.

Our key initiative is to educate the next generation of environmental stewards using the resources of River Legacy Parks and River Legacy Living Science Center. Starting with children as young as 3 years old, our environmental education programs expose children to the wonders of nature and their place in it. Through education, we preserve the Trinity River and its unique eco-system

## **Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area**

201 E. Jones St., corner of Jones and Kealy streets,  
Lewisville, TX 75057

The Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area is 2,600 acres of prairies, forests, and wetlands managed as a wildlife preserve by a group of agencies including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the City of Lewisville, the University of North Texas, and Lewisville ISD. Our mission is to preserve and restore native Texas ecosystems and biodiversity while providing opportunities for environmental education, research, and recreation. Our vision: *To heal the land and restore the bond between people and nature, ensuring the preservation of our natural heritage for the future.* Our Mission: *To preserve and restore native Texas ecosystems and biodiversity while providing opportunities for environmental education, research, and recreation.*

The land that we now call LLELA is positioned where the Blackland Prairie mingles with the dry upland forests of the Eastern Cross Timbers. The Elm Fork of the Trinity River, with its surrounding bottomland forests, winds through the middle of these two

ecosystems. This lucky collision makes LLELA a perfect place to find a diversity of wildlife and plants. Well over 360 vertebrate species make a home at LLELA, from river otters to peregrine falcons, along with more than 500 plant species and uncounted dragonflies, butterflies, and other invertebrates. LLELA's urban wilderness is indeed a wildlife hotspot, thriving in the midst of a human population of over 6.7 million, and growing.

But the wilderness here is just a shadow of what once was. The Blackland Prairie stretched uninterrupted over 12 million acres of our state. The Cross Timbers and bottomland hardwood forests covered huge areas until things began to change in the early 1800s. As Americans acted on the urge to expand westward, small towns were established and these settlements grew. Forests were cut. The rich prairie soil was plowed. The river was eventually harnessed. Bison, wolves, cougars, and many other species were eradicated as the environment was changed to meet human needs for food, shelter, water, and commerce. The land that is now LLELA was subdivided among many owners.

Curiously, the taming of the river led to the creation of our urban wilderness. In 1955 the Lewisville Lake Dam was completed, creating a reservoir to supply flood control, drinking water, and recreation. Over 2,000 acres below the dam were set aside for flood control, and the land owners were bought out by the federal government. This land was left idle, and the wild began to creep back in.

In the early 1990s, the potential of this set-aside area was recognized by a group of collaborators from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the University of North Texas, the City of Lewisville, Lewisville ISD, the University of Texas in Arlington, and Texas A & M Agrilife Extension. They saw a place where people could interact with the wildlife and natural ecosystems which were already present, preserving it for the future in the midst of the explosive growth in the DFW area. Even more, LLELA could serve as a place where humans acted to repair historic damage to the land and conduct scientific research. These agencies worked together in a partnership to carry out the LLELA mission.

In 2014, the City of Lewisville, the University of North Texas, and the Lewisville Independent School District began the process of developing a new organizational structure to carry LLELA into the future. LLELA is now operating under a strategic plan developed by all three partners (with approval from and in cooperation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers). Our mission remains the same, and our work continues to improve the habitat quality of this precious land, day by day making it richer, in hopes of giving all North Texans a place where they can connect with what once was, and still is, our natural heritage.

## **Frasier Dam Recreational Area**

9300 Stemmons Fwy,

Dallas, TX 75247

[Frasier Dam Recreation Area](#), was once a neglected 116-acre tract of land along the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. Many people wrote the land off, keeping it out-of-sight, out-of-mind while it was used for illegal dumping for many years,. In the mid-2000's, Container Store Co-Founder, Garrett Boone, walked the area and thought to himself that the land could become a national-park-quality piece of land.

For the last several years, the local nonprofit, Groundwork Dallas, has been clearing the area of litter, illegal dumping, and debris. Over 90,000 pounds of trash have been removed from this area just since 2017. With further improvements, the space has become [a wilderness recreation area](#) that features trails for hiking, biking, and trail running. Groundwork Dallas continues to build more trails, create picnic areas, and add trail signage throughout the site.

You will see animals and birds in this wilderness. Be careful and respect wildlife.

The Frasier Dam Recreation Area is also a favorite of local canoe and kayak enthusiasts. Many put their boats in the water at California Crossing Park and then float down to Frasier Dam Recreation Area. As a safety note, this float trip should only be made when water levels are low and with a paddler who knows where to turn out of the main channel to reach Frasier Dam Recreation Area. Not making the turn would lead a paddler to go over the Dam itself.

While Groundwork Dallas has led restoration and improvement efforts at Frasier Dam, the project has really been taken on by the community. Local corporations, community groups, and students have given many thousands of hours to ready this area for its public opening. The Green Team, a group of 14-25 year olds who participate in outdoor recreation, environmental education, and service work with Groundwork Dallas have been the area's most regular volunteers.

To participate in restoration of the Frasier Dam Recreation Area, search for Groundwork Dallas on [Meetup](#).

## **Trinity River Audubon Center**

6500 Great Trinity Forest Way  
Dallas, TX 75217

Trinity River Audubon Center, located just ten miles south of downtown Dallas, is your gateway to explore the amazing resources of the 6,000-acre Great Trinity Forest. As the largest urban hardwood forest in the United States, this forest supports a diverse community of plant and animal species and contains a unique mixture of bottomland hardwoods, wetlands and grasslands. A part of the City of Dallas-Trinity River Corridor Project, the center's 120 acres sit on a [former illegal dump site](#), now a reclaimed haven

for a vast array of birds and other wildlife in an increasingly urbanized metropolitan area. Five miles of trails lead visitors through hardwood forests, pond, wetland, and prairie ecosystems, and along the Trinity River.

From its inception in 2008, as one of the National Audubon Society's flagship environmental education center in the Central Flyway, Trinity River Audubon Center has been welcoming visitors to its sanctuaries and inviting them to participate in nature education programs. This innovative approach—preserving open space not just to protect wildlife and native habitat from people, but to actively engage people in its conservation through learning and exploration—served as a model for Audubon and other nature education centers nationwide and influenced the development of place-based experiential learning as a highly effective pedagogical practice.

The center itself, designed by 2006 AIA Gold Medalist architect Antoine Predock, is the first LEED-certified building constructed by the City of Dallas Park and Recreation Department. Its green features include a vegetated roof, rainwater collection system, energy efficient systems, and recycled materials.

Visitors have the opportunity to explore hands-on exhibits, [five miles of nature viewing trails](#), our butterfly garden, and a great nature store with unique gifts and nature related items. [Academic programs](#) at the center are designed to address the need for students to improve and strengthen their science and critical thinking skills while introducing them to the wonders of nature.

The Trinity River Audubon Center offers everyone the opportunity to connect to nature and to experience the outdoors year around. Come discover for yourself – you will not be disappointed.

Trinity River Audubon Center is a nonprofit organization supported, in part, by funds from the City of Dallas Park and Recreation Department.