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Alliance to Apply For State Trail Construction Funds

Those of you who regularly read this newsletter know that the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance is dedicated to restoring and preserving the ecological and historical integrity of Bayou Bartholomew and its nearly one million acre watershed within the state. We are achieving this task through an assortment of activities including the purchasing of hardwood trees to restore riparian areas, publication of educational literature, hosting of educational workshops, and sponsorship of trash cleanups throughout the watershed. However, an equally important goal of the BBA is that of providing public access to areas of special interest along Bayou Bartholomew. People who live on or near this unique stream have known for decades about the special charm it possesses. Many residents have stories of a favorite swimming hole from their childhood or of a secret crappie fishing or duck hunting hole. Others tell of years past when residents of small communities near the bayou would have Sunday afternoon picnics under the shade of towering oak and cypress trees.

The average person living in a city or on property distant from Bayou Bartholomew has little opportunity to experience the scenery and wildlife it has to offer. The Alliance has an opportunity to change that in Jefferson County. In May, the BBA plans to submit an application to the Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) for over \$100,000 in grant money to fund the construction of a trail along Bayou Bartholomew. If funded, the trail will be within the city limits of Pine Bluff.

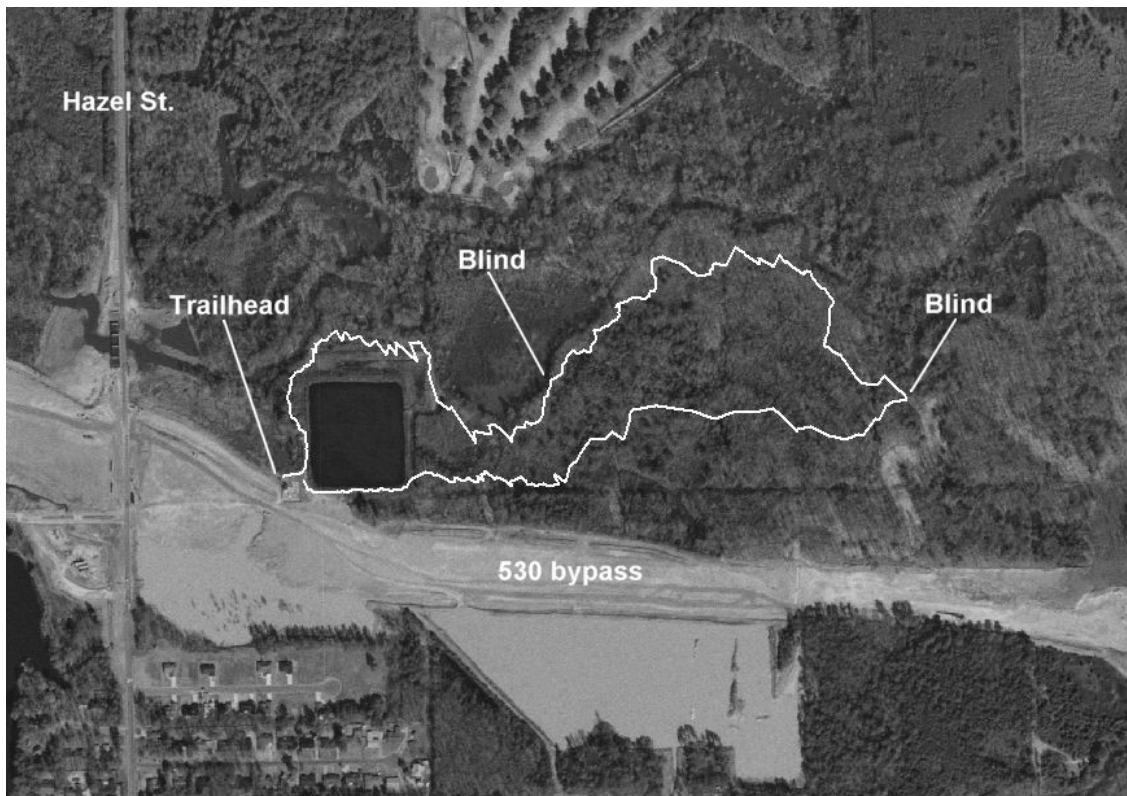
The proposed site of the trail is on city and Arkansas State Highway Commission owned lands within the forested corridor lying between the bayou and the Interstate 530 Bypass. The trailhead will be located near the old sewage treatment pond that was reforested by dozens of junior high student volunteers last winter. The trail, constructed of compacted gravel, will wind almost 1.8 miles in a loop through several different habitat types. Much of the trail will be located in low areas dominated by bottomland hardwoods along the bayou, while other portions will take the traveler through mixed pine/hardwood stands or dense areas of recent forest regeneration. Several tributaries and boggy areas will be traversed using wooden bridges and boardwalks. Along the route there will be two areas available for resting and viewing wildlife. One viewing blind will be constructed alongside a beaver-created wetland of several acres in size. Here observers will be treated to the site of an active beaver lodge and a great blue heron rookery (colony-like nesting site), as well as the chance of viewing migrating waterfowl during the winter. Another observation blind will be constructed near an oxbow lake narrowly connected to the bayou. Here visitors will have a chance to see aquatic mammals, bald eagles, ospreys, turtles, waterfowl, wading birds, and an assortment of other water oriented species.

See **Trail** on p. 2

Trail - continued

In addition to its recreational values, the trail will also be utilized as a teaching tool for local students and other interested citizens. Interpretive signs along the route will point out particular species of trees and other plants. Other signs will discuss the native wildlife and point out the importance of preserving wetland areas like those that surround the trail.

The BBA is very excited at the prospect of providing this trail to the people of Pine Bluff and the entire state. The site lends itself perfectly to the task of providing both recreational and educational outings to people who normally have little exposure to the outdoors. It is a fortunate coincidence that such a wonderful slice of nature can be found within the boundaries of a large city. Of course, the dream of developing this trail can only come to fruition if the BBA receives the grant from the AHTD. As a stipulation of the grant, the Alliance must provide 20% of the cost in the form of donations (cash or materials) or in-kind labor. The total cost of the project will be about \$120,000, meaning that the BBA must garner \$24,000 in pledged donations before the grant deadline of May 11, 2001. The planning stage and grant application is complete except for the acquisition of the 20% match money. This is where interested citizens, businesses and foundations can help to make this worthwhile project a reality. If you are interested in donating cash, materials, or labor to help us meet our matching requirements, please contact us soon! Of course, any donation will be contingent upon the BBA's successful reception of the grant. Because of the close deadline for submitting the grant application, anyone who is interested should call (870) 879-4808 to contact the Alliance Coordinator, Bill Layher.



A map depicting the proposed location of a trail along Bayou Bartholomew in Pine Bluff.

We Need Your Help

by Bill Layher, BBA Coordinator

Like all causes and efforts, it's hard to accomplish much work without funding. We have been extremely fortunate in many areas of gathering funds. Through grants from the Environmental Protection Agency and the Arkansas Soil and Water Conservation Commission, the monies to fund the coordination of the Alliance has been provided through next year. However, most of the BBA's core activities rely on the generosity of foundations, corporations, local businesses, and individuals. Many of you have graciously supported our efforts to date. We are hopeful you or your business might support the restoration and conservation of the Bayou Bartholomew in the future. Let me take a moment to give you some idea of the costs we foresee in the coming year.

To print and mail out 1,000 newsletter copies, it takes \$1,440. Four copies per year cost the BBA a total of \$5,760 to send them to you. If each recipient donated \$10, we could ensure the newsletter for almost 2 years!

The BBA has provided 3/4 million trees to landowners to restore the Bayou's banks and wetlands, covering nearly 50 miles of stream bank. We have applied for grants from foundations to help fund this reforestation but such grants often require a local match. We are hoping to raise \$20,000 this year to match other funding sources. Each \$1 will plant five hardwood tree seedlings. One hundred dollars will plant 500 trees!

To haul trees, look at, review, and plan restoration efforts on parcels of land, conduct inventories, coordinate with state and federal agencies, etc, we travel a lot of miles and make many phone calls- in fact the two expenses average a combined \$600 cost per month. This adds up to over \$7,000 per year.

In Pine Bluff, we are hoping to build a trail system. To receive nearly \$100,000 in federal money, we need to raise more than \$20,000. As you can see, funding is important.

Some things we do don't cost a lot, except time. Volunteers have picked up nearly 100 tons of trash from the Bayou and we're still working.

If you would like to donate to this conservation cause in your own back yard or would like more information, please contact the BBA coordinator or president. The future will be better for your efforts. The Bayou Bartholomew Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization. Donations are tax deductible.

WRP Funding in Trouble

Recently the current Federal Administration has announced plans to end funding for the Wetlands Reserve Program in 2002. This would deal a striking blow to the BBA's reforestation activities and to the pocketbooks of landowners wishing to participate in this program. Many farmers have found it to be profitable to enroll marginal farmland (often former wetlands) in this wetland restoration program. The removal of funding would be a step backwards for conservation efforts. Landowners often can't afford to pay the bills and still look after the environment without such programs. The program has been so successful that there are often many more applicants than current funding can support. Total loss of WRP funding certainly isn't the answer. Contact your representative and senator or write a letter to the president to let them know how you feel.

You can contact the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance by writing, calling, or e-mailing:

Board Members

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A great blue heron and great egret rookery towers above a beaver pond located along the proposed trail in Jefferson County. This and many other sites may be made accessible to the public with the help of your donations.

Send to: Bayou Bartholomew Alliance, 7233 Camden Cutoff Rd, Pine Bluff, AR, 71603

To Restore Bayou Bartholomew I Would Like

to donate _____ **(a tax deductible donation) to be used for**
(circle one)

- tree planting
- educational programs
- trail construction
- newsletter publication
- general funds to be used wherever needed most
- a memorial gift in memory of _____

to donate time as a volunteer
(circle one)

- to plant trees
- to clean up Bayou Bartholomew
- trail clearing/construction
- wherever I am needed

Name _____ **Phone** _____

Address _____

Creature Close-up

Each year along Bayou Bartholomew and elsewhere, a mass migration of feathered creatures journeys to Arkansas or passes through en route to other places. This statement probably conjures up images of huge flocks of ducks and geese making their way to their wintering grounds in Arkansas from their northern breeding grounds. While that spectacle is amazing in its own right, you'll have to turn your eyes to the south each spring if you wish to welcome the travelers that I speak of. They don't receive nearly the attention of their larger, migratory cousins due to their diminutive size and often secretive habits. These birds are known collectively as neotropical migrants. These small "songbirds" spend their winters as far south as South America and return north each spring to nest.

To the untrained eye many of these birds can at first appear as just one of hundreds of small birds that fill the tree tops and brushy vegetation near Bayou Bartholomew. Closer inspection, however, can yield the sight of some of the most colorful birds in North America. Many groups of birds are classified as neotropical migrants, including finches, tanagers, and warblers. Most prefer wooded habitats and can be difficult to spot, much less identify, without careful observation.

Unarguably, the most decorated example of these birds is the painted bunting, a type of finch. While the female is uniformly colored green, the male sports bright red underparts and rump, a green back, a purple head, and a red eye-ring. Amazingly, they can still be difficult to spot unless they perch in the direct sunlight. These birds nest in the south-central United States as far north as Missouri. In the fall they migrate to the Bahamas, Cuba, or as far south as Panama.

Another group of gaudy colored birds are the tanagers. One that you will likely see in Arkansas is the summer tanager. At first glance the males of this species might resemble a male cardinal due to their bright red coloration. They can be distinguished by their lack of a black face, red bill, and feathered crest atop the head. The female of this species is colored an olive-green. They breed throughout the southern and east-central United States and return as far as southern Mexico each fall. These little birds prove beneficial to people because of their summer diet, a major portion of which is flying insects.

Perhaps some of the most commonly observed neotropical migrants are the yellow and prothonotary warblers. The male yellow warbler, as its name implies, is colored bright yellow with a greenish back and rusty streaks through its chest. The prothonotary warbler is colored golden-orange with blue-gray colored wings. The females of both species are more dull in coloration. Both species frequent thick forested areas near streams or other water bodies. They are sometimes referred to as "wild canaries" because of their striking coloration. The prothonotary warbler nests throughout the southeast United States while the yellow warbler nests throughout North America. Both travel as far as northern South America in the fall.

These often inconspicuous little birds can add a lot of color to a warm summer afternoon's fishing trip on the bayou. You may have to strain your eyes a little to find them, but the reward is worth the effort. For more information on bird watching or identification, purchase a field guide or contact Claire Holmes of the Three Rivers Audubon Society based in Pine Bluff at (870) 534-2083.



Yellow Warblers

Conservation Easements: Can you have your cake and eat it too?

Numerous federal programs have helped restore habitats altered from man's past activities. Before we knew better, wetlands were drained in an attempt to farm land that only produced a crop perhaps one in every three to four years. Logging removed trees from the banks of streams. We've since learned that wooded stream banks protect them from erosion and that wetlands store floodwater, while both provide needed habitat for many creatures.

Much of the land clearing and draining was prompted by the federal government. Recently, through programs like the Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP), the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), and others, many of these past mistakes have been partially corrected with funds being made available to landowners to replant stream banks and restore wetlands. However, one dilemma still exists. How can we keep wooded stream banks and wetlands that have not been destroyed or severely altered from being so?

The Bayou Bartholomew Alliance at its most recent board meeting approved the development of a conservation easement program. This program is used by many conservation groups such as the Nature Conservancy to protect habitats in perpetuity. An individual can donate certain landowner rights, such as harvesting timber, while retaining ownership of the land. Say, for example, you are a landowner with property along Bayou Bartholomew. Your property consists of several miles of forested streamside, including a small cypress/tupelo brake. You and your family have hunted and fished on this property for decades, and you intend to keep it in your family for the enjoyment of yourself and future generations. You could sign a conservation easement with the BBA that says no timber harvest will take place within a settled upon number of feet from the stream or the brake. The value of that timber can be appraised, and that dollar amount can be credited to your federal income tax. Essentially, the landowner receives the value of the timber in the form of a tax credit while retaining ownership and trespass control in addition to preserving the habitat that made the area attractive to fish and wildlife in the first place.

Conservation easements are very flexible and each one is negotiated separately. If you have a wetland or riparian area along Bayou Bartholomew or within its watershed and want to learn more about conservation easements, call the Bayou Bartholomew Alliance Coordinator,

Bayou Bartholomew Alliance
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