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texas parks & wildlife news

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT • AUSTIN, TEXAS 78744

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NEW PARKS DIRECTOR HIRED BY TP&WD

Government Document
MAY 29 1980
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AUSTIN - James D. Bell, a Texas native who has spent the past two years as director of the Allegheny County Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation in Pennsylvania, has been named director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Parks Division, effective May 12.

As director of the Pennsylvania agency, Bell administered 11 parks comprising 12,000 acres in the Pittsburgh metropolitan area.

From 1973-77, Bell operated a parks and recreation planning and consulting firm in McLean, Virginia. Prior to that he was director of the Fairfax County Park Authority in Virginia, which administered six types of parks in the metropolitan area of Washington, D.C.

Born in Fort Stockton, Bell graduated from Odessa High School in 1954 and received a bachelor of science degree in park administration from Texas Tech University in Lubbock in 1960.

Bell said one of his major objectives with the department will be to increase the identity of the Texas state park system both nationally and locally. "Texas already has a number of very remarkable facilities in its state park system, and more are in the planning stage," Bell said. "I think there's a lot we can do to promote public awareness of these outstanding resources."

Bell said he intends to visit a large number of state parks to help him determine how to maximize use of personnel and facilities within the park system.

"I believe we need to work on encouraging year-round use of the park system," Bell noted, pointing out that visitation in many state parks is good only during the peak summer and holiday periods.

Bell is married and has three children.

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HUNTING LICENSE
SALES INCREASE

AUSTIN -- Sales of resident hunting and fishing licenses are ahead of last year's pace, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department said.

During the first six months of the 1979-80 fiscal year which began Sept. 1, 1979, the department posted gains in hunting, fishing and combination hunting/fishing licenses over the first half of 1978-79.

Department officials were encouraged by the rise in resident hunting license sales, which had declined somewhat in 1978-79. The 313,977 hunting licenses sold represented a gain of 1,048 over the same period in 1978-79.

Resident combination hunting/fishing licenses for the six-month period gained by 41,803, which amounts to a revenue increase of \$355,694 over the first six months of 1978-79.

Resident fishing license sales, which set a new revenue record in 1978-79, continued to increase, with 449,152 bringing in \$1,800,289 revenue. This represents an increase of more than 11,000 licenses and \$46,000 revenue over the first half of 1978-79.

Archery stamp sales also showed a significant increase of 2,879 stamps and \$8,804 revenue over 1978-79.

Officials attributed the rise in hunting license sales to generally favorable weather conditions early in 1979 which boosted production of quail, turkey and deer for the 1979-80 hunting seasons.

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QUEEN ISABELLA FISHING PIER
TO BE SHORTENED

AUSTIN - The Queen Isabella State Fishing Pier between South Padre Island and the City of Port Isabel will be cut to facilitate boat traffic.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission recently authorized expenditure of \$75,000 to cut a 50-foot section from the pier at the high span.

The project will involve removing the 50-foot section of pier, constructing barricades and rerouting an emergency water line. Bids will be solicited by the Parks and Wildlife Department as soon as the necessary permits have been secured.

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TEXAS STATE RAILROAD
NOW IN OPERATION

DALLAS - The popular Texas State Railroad, which makes excursion runs between Rusk and Palestine in East Texas, is currently operating on weekends only.

Plenty of seats are available throughout May, according to a Parks and Wildlife Department spokesman, because additional rolling stock and a third steam locomotive were added this year.

One train operates from the Rusk depot and the other operates from the Palestine terminal. They each travel about seven miles out, make a turn-around and return in about an hour and a half.

Open-air coaches are available on each train this year, which offer a breezy view of the East Texas pineywoods. Both trains also pull an ice cream parlor car for snacks and lunch.

The expanded summer schedule will begin May 24. Each train will make daily runs, five times a week; the railroad will be closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

The 14-mile round trip costs \$4 for adults and \$2.50 for children three through 12. Reservations are recommended, and may be made by calling (214) 683-2561.

Camping and picnicking facilities are also available adjacent to the depots in Palestine and Rusk. For information about these city-operated facilities, call (214) 683-5126 in Rusk and (214) 729-6066 in Palestine.

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TIME TO RESERVE
STATE PARK CAMPSITES

AUSTIN - With the summer vacation season approaching, many Texans will be planning to spend time in state parks.

Prospective overnight park visitors who want to be assured of accommodations should be aware that cabins, campsites and group shelters are operated on a reservation basis in parks with these facilities.

To make a reservation, it is necessary to call, write or apply in person to the individual park. Reservations are not mandatory, but advisable to be assured of a campsite upon arrival.

No reservation fees are charged; however, a user fee is charged based on the type of facility occupied. Reservations cannot be made more than 90 days in advance for cabins or campsites, and requests will be accepted as late as 5 p.m. for occupancy by 8 p.m. Group facilities may be reserved for any date during the current calendar year.

Reservations made in person will be confirmed in writing, and telephone or mail requests received three days or more in advance of occupancy also will be confirmed in writing.

All reservations must be claimed by 8 p.m. on the first day of occupancy. In case of a delay, late arrival privileges will be granted if the visitor calls the park on the arrival date before 8 p.m.

Specific campsites or shelters cannot be reserved, but if a specific location is desired on arrival it will be honored if it is not occupied and if it will accommodate the visitor's equipment.

For specific information on facilities available in the state park system, write the Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, Texas 78744, or call toll-free 1-800-252-9327 for a free Texas State Park Information brochure.

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BAY SHRIMPING
SEASON OPENS

AUSTIN - Prospects are not encouraging for bay shrimpers as the annual bay shrimp season opens this week (May 15), according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Biological surveys show most Texas bays are below average in brown shrimp production this year, with the exception of Matagorda Bay, which may be somewhat above average. Cool spring weather generally slowed growth rates of shrimp, and cold snaps during early April may have caused some mortality, particularly in Galveston Bay, according to Shellfish Program Director C. E. Bryan.

Department law enforcement officials point out that shrimpers should be aware that shrimping is prohibited in a number of small bays, coves and estuaries along the coast designated as shrimp nursery areas. Trawl operators should check with local game wardens or department offices to determine nursery area locations.

An exception to the nursery area shrimping ban allows persons who hold valid bait shrimp dealers licenses and who maintained fixed places of business adjacent to the nursery areas prior to Aug. 27, 1979, to operate not more than two licensed bait shrimp boats during any given day in waters adjacent to that place of business.

Texas bays are designated as major or bait bays. The holders of bay shrimp boat licenses are restricted to fishing major bays during the open season, and their daily limit is 300 pounds per boat.

The holders of bait shrimp licenses are allowed to fish the year round both in major bays and bait bays, and their limit is 150 pounds per day. Holders of a sport shrimp trawl license may use one 20-foot shrimp trawl in major or bait bays, and their limit is 15 pounds per person per day in major bays. Two quarts of shrimp per day per person is allowed in bait bays, limited to four quarts per boat for use as bait at any time of the year.

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GULF SHRIMP SEASON
TO CLOSE JUNE 1

AUSTIN - The shrimp season for Texas' territorial waters in the Gulf of Mexico will be closed from June 1 to July 15, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission is authorized by an amendment to the 1975 Texas Shrimp Conservation Act to change the opening and closing dates if necessary to protect the small brown shrimp which migrate from the bays to the Gulf.

Biological surveys have indicated there is no early mass emigration of brown shrimp to the Gulf, so no change was recommended from the statutory June 1 closure, according to Shellfish Program Director C. E. Bryan.

The closed Gulf season is designed to protect the brown shrimp until they reach the minimum harvest size of 39 whole shrimp per pound or an average length of about 4½ inches, Bryan said.

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TP&WD INVESTIGATES
TILEFISH POTENTIAL

AUSTIN - A little-known fish species off the Texas Gulf Coast holds considerable promise for commercial harvest, according to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Tilefish are a significant commercial food species off the New England coast, but as yet have not made an appearance in the Texas market, according to biologists Terry J. Cody and Billy Fuls of Rockport.

To determine the feasibility of tilefish fishing off the central Texas coast, a research team aboard the vessel Western Gulf recently set a series of one-fourth-mile longlines at depths of 380 to 1,370 feet.

A significant number of sets produced tilefish ranging in size from one to 20 pounds, with the average at 5.6 pounds, Cody said.

Cody pointed out that the commercial potential of tilefish in Texas was first recognized in the late 1960s when the National Marine Fisheries Service conducted exploratory cruises. In 1978, the Texas A&M University Marine Advisory Service investigated tilefish and grouper areas off the northern Texas coast.

The Texas A&M project found several areas that were commercially productive and indicated a considerable amount of favorable habitat should exist off Port O'Connor, Corpus Christi and Port Isabel, Cody said.

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JEWFISH CHALLENGE
HEAVY TACKLE

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AUSTIN - Gulf Coast anglers who like to feel a healthy pull on the end of their line should try catching a jewfish.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department biologist Ken Rice of Sebastian said while most of the larger specimens are taken from deep waters, some venture into near-shore areas during the spring and summer.

Jetty fishermen using heavy tackle and whole live or dead fish or crab for bait are the most likely to tangle with jewfish, which may attain sizes of several hundred pounds.

The thrill of catching a sizable jewfish would be rewarding, Rice said, and the fish also are good table fare.

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GUADALUPE RAINBOW TROUT
STILL AVAILABLE

AUSTIN - The annual rainbow trout stocking program at the Guadalupe River below Canyon Dam is over, but plenty of fish remain for the catching.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department crews placed 6,000 commercially produced rainbows along a six-mile stretch of the river during late March and early April. Many of these fish were unusually large for stockers, weighing as much as two pounds.

Trout program leader Pat Hutson of San Marcos said these larger trout are more difficult to catch than most hatchery fish, and many remain in the river after a month.

The department had to purchase the commercial fish after problems at a federal trout hatchery in Arkansas caused a reduction in the number available for stocking in Texas. Only about 30,000 were released in the Guadalupe this year, instead of the usual 100,000.

Reports circulating that there will be a May stocking are not correct, Hutson said, and no more trout will be stocked until next November.

Hutson said it was unfortunate the number of fish stocked had to be reduced, but the addition of the commercial fish is giving anglers a chance at larger size rainbows.

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DECLINE SEEN IN
BOAT REGISTRATIONS

AUSTIN - Soaring fuel costs, high interest rates and decreasing loan availability apparently are pushing the state's boat industry into stormy waters.

Slumping sales of boats, particularly the larger models with more powerful motors, are reflected in boat registration data compiled by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "Registrations of new boats in the 16- to 26-foot class are down considerably," said boat registration chief John Ebell.

At the same time, registration of smaller, more economical boats is on the rise, Ebell said, which indicates many boat owners are "downsizing" to rigs less expensive to operate and which do not require large towing vehicles.

Ebell speculated that much of the shift has been from fiberglass hulls to lighter aluminum models. These boats generally can get by with smaller outboard motors, and most can be towed behind a compact car, he added.

Manufacturers of fiberglass boats apparently have been hit by several negative factors, including increases in costs of fiberglass resin used in construction. Also, interest rates are up, loans are more difficult to obtain and gasoline prices have become severe enough to discourage many prospective pleasure boat buyers.

A number of small boat manufacturing firms in Texas have been forced out of business this year, and one of the state's largest recently laid off 400 employees. Production at that company has fallen from 34 boats per day to only 10 per day, and large inventories are piling up for dealers to purchase.

The Department of Energy's proposed ban on weekend recreational boating may be partially responsible, even though the proposal was recently withdrawn. "It had a devastating effect because it scared the banking industry," Ebell said.

From a buyer's perspective, large recreational boats are gas-guzzlers and are becoming too expensive to operate. A large, high-performance outboard boat may average only two to three miles per gallon.

A 20- to 25-foot offshore boat can easily consume 50 gallons in one weekend, and the buyer must have a fairly large vehicle to pull the rig. A small compact car cannot tow the load.

Other examples of the decline can be seen at public boat ramps. At a popular boat launch near Port O'Connor over a recent holiday, only 15 boats were put in the water. "That compares with as many as 150 on the same holiday last year," Ebell said.

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BOAT REGISTRATIONS, cont'd.

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But there are some good points to temper the market slump of recreational boats -- it is a "buyer's market." Many dealers are offering significant discounts and sales on new boats, and good deals can be made on second-hand merchandise.

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GREENBELT LAKE OFFERS
UNMATCHED VARIETY

(Second in a series, with map)

AUSTIN - Good fishing holes may be few and far between in the Texas Panhandle, but one exists near Clarendon in Donley County.

Lake Greenbelt, in fact, may be one of the best fishing spots in the state for variety. It boasts not only the usual native sport fish species such as largemouth bass, crappie, sunfish and channel catfish, but also imported northern pike, walleye and rainbow trout.

One of the features which makes Greenbelt a good fish producer is its relatively abundant aquatic vegetation--a commodity in short supply in many West Texas reservoirs.

Vegetation may be the reason Greenbelt holds the state record for northern pike, with an 18-pound, two-ounce fish caught in 1975. Pike are fond of weedy areas, and utilize flooded vegetation in the spring for spawning.

Northern pike are caught most easily in the spring, and usually are located in reasonably shallow, weedy areas. Silver spoons and spinners are the preferred artificial lures.

Another nonnative species stocked at Greenbelt by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is the walleye. The department started stocking walleyes there in 1974, and reproduction confirmed in 1978 apparently helped boost populations.

The best walleye fishing usually is in early spring, when the fish make their appearance in shallower water along rocky shorelines and the dam rip-rap.

During the rest of the year, walleyes stay fairly deep, especially during daylight hours. Live minnows, earthworms or combinations of live bait and spinners are popular. The daily limit is five, with a possession limit of 10.

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GREENBELT LAKE, cont'd.

Rainbow trout are stocked periodically by the Greenbelt Municipal and Industrial Water Authority during the winter months on a put-and-take basis. They are caught on a variety of live bait and small artificials, and there is no size limit. However, the daily limit is five, with a possession limit of 10.

Larger than average size crappie often are caught at Greenbelt by fishermen using live minnows or small jigs. As with other lakes, crappie are more concentrated in shallow areas during the spring spawn, but they can be caught throughout the year.

Not to be overlooked is the lake's largemouth bass fishing, as department surveys and bass tournament results indicate a good population, including some in the six- to nine-pound class. Fishing around submerged structures or vegetation is best, varying the depth with the season.

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LAKE GREENBELT

