

TRAVEL LOG

INSIDE:

- ★ Fort Worth museum becomes new home to Texas' largest steel beam from the fallen World Trade Center
- ★ Two-week, SXSW event injects about \$167 million into Austin's economy
- ★ Schlitterbahn in New Braunfels and Galveston earn distinctions as World's Best Waterpark and Indoor Waterpark

COURTESY OF TPWD/ALAN FISHER



Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is assessing the damage to the Lost Pines ecosystem after massive wildfires consumed about 95 percent of Bastrop State Park.

TRAVEL NEWS

BEYOND the loss of lives and property, the **Bastrop Complex Fire** has had a **significant impact not only on the iconic and highly popular Bastrop State Park but also on much of the entire Lost Pines ecosystem.** The fire, which began north of the park on Sept. 4, claimed two lives, destroyed more than 1,500 homes and changed the lives of thousands in Bastrop County.

"Texas Parks and Wildlife has been experiencing an outpouring of concern from citizens, conservationists and nature enthusiasts worried about the ecological impact on the park and the ecosystem it anchors," says Todd McClanahan, park superintendent. "People have been offering money, trees and wildflowers—even wildlife. We'd like to ask the public to be patient while we assess the impact of this disaster and determine what TPWD needs to do, but

we have set up a system for the public to offer assistance."

While few areas within the park escaped the fire, most of the Civilian Conservation Corps-constructed buildings and other park infrastructure were saved.

"There will be remarkable changes in the landscape," says Greg Creacy, natural resources and regional wildland fire coordinator for state parks. "TPWD staff and cooperating scientists are focusing on assessing and documenting these effects."

In the short term, however, TPWD personnel are still mopping up after the fire—dealing with smoldering stumps and yet-unburned fuel. Flare-ups are still a threat, especially with the continuing drought and red-flag fire conditions. Additionally, there are many hazardous trees to deal with—hundreds of which will continue to smolder and fall during the coming months.

The Lost Pines area is among the

more unique ecosystems in the nation, and Bastrop and Buescher state parks contain some of the best examples of the southwestern-most extent of the loblolly pine.

"The genetics of these pines are unique," says David Riskind, director of natural resources for state parks.

"To provide for the long-term recovery and restoration of this plant community, we need to use only the genetic stock from this area. Unfortunately, no seedlings of this type are available at this moment, so we do not want to introduce plants foreign to Bastrop. The same goes for grasses and wild flowers."

Creacy says TPWD will be assessing fire effects to determine the most seriously impacted sites and what the best strategies are to bring about maximum stabilization and recovery.

"Another focus will be protecting sensitive habitats like the Houston Toad breeding ponds," he says.

The Lost Pines are considered the last stronghold of the endangered amphibian, which once could be found in 14 Texas counties.

Donations to help with the ecological restoration of Bastrop State Park may be sent to: Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, Bastrop Recover Project-Habitat Restoration, Attn: Cashiers, 4200 Smith School Road, Austin, TX 78744. For checks, write Bastrop Recover Project-Habitat Restoration on the memo line.

To offer time or specialty items for restoration and stewardship of the park, send contact information to david.riskind@tpwd.state.tx.us.

BASTROP UPDATE

AFTER THE harrowing experience and great loss by the **Bastrop-area wildfires**, the **community is on the mend and hopeful that visitors will return.**

On Sept. 20, Buescher State Park re-opened to the public. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is hopeful that visitors will take advantage of the Lost Pines experience at the park, noting that generated revenue—typically about \$1 million a year—will help to offset the revenue lost from Bastrop State Park.

Bastrop Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Susan Weems Wendel says "Bastrop County is alive and well," adding that the "downtown areas are still perfect ... they just need customers. Shops and restaurants are all open for business."

She says the shelters are now empty, neighborhoods are opening up again, cleanup has begun and wind has carried away most of the smoke. "We are on the mend, and out of the ashes will come a stronger Bastrop."

COURTESY OF FORT WORTH MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND HISTORY.



"Bent, but not broken" reads the epitaph on the wall above the largest World Trade Center beam in Texas, now at the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History.

JUST DAYS before the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, the largest World Trade Center beam in Texas was moved inside the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History's atrium in time for a tribute to the first responders, those who lost their lives, and the enduring American spirit. The special event also launched the "9/11 Tribute" exhibit that will be on display through Nov. 6 before being moved outside for a permanent installation near the museum's main entrance.

The 6,500-pound, 36-foot beam once supported the three floors (101-103) just two stories above the center of the impact zone of the North Tower on Sept. 11, 2001. Comprised of three steel columns, three stories high and bolted together, it is one of the few recovered pieces that the National Institute of Standards and Technology has been able to trace to its exact location within the tower.

To get the structure into the museum, a crane was used, the front doors of the museum's main entrance were removed and more than 15 craftsmen guided the beam into the museum for the exhibit.

The exhibit will tell stories of Fort Worthians who were inspired to do more for their community and their nation after the tragic events.

"The museum is deeply honored that we will be able to provide the community with a tribute site that

pays homage to 9/11, the people who perished in the attacks, and the brave men and women who served as first responders on that tragic day," says Museum President Van A. Romans. "As a history museum, ours is an appropriate venue for such an important American artifact, and we are delighted to make it possible for our guests to have access to it."

For more information on the exhibit visit www.fwmuseum.org/world-trade-center-beam-1.

SHOWING little signs of the sluggish economy, this year's South by Southwest Interactive, Film and Music Festivals and Conferences official registrant numbers surpassed last year's by 40 percent, fueling a surge to Austin's economy.

Based on an economic impact analysis by Greyhill Advisors, total attendance of the 2011 SXSW conference and festival reached approximately 126,000 people. Add in those who took part in the other, free SXSW shows and events, and the total attendance for SXSW 2011 stood at more than 286,000 people, making SXSW directly and indirectly responsible for injecting approximately \$167 million into the Austin economy.

The internationally renowned conference gave the city's hospitality industry a financial boost with two profitable weeks linked to SXSW's direct booking of more than 10,500 individual reservations totaling

more than 47,500 room nights—an increase of more than 20 percent over the previous year.

Those two weeks encompassed nine days of industry conference activities, a four-day trade show, a six-night music festival featuring more than 2,000 artists on more than 90 stages, a nine-day film festival with 300 screenings in seven venues, three nights of free concerts at Auditorium Shores, a four-day poster art show featuring 100 top artists, a two-day guitar show, a three-day gaming arcade, a new two-day fashion event and a new three-day educational conference.

In addition to expenditures and attendance, the 2011 SXSW economic impact analysis also considered the value of related media coverage. This year, SXSW achieved 260 million broadcast, print and online impressions. The combined value of SXSW media coverage was estimated at \$38 million.

Looking forward to 2012, SXSW's Executive Director Mike Shea says, "the 25th anniversary will be a tough act to follow, but the wave of early online registrations looks promising for all our events. We're hoping for another solid year on the economic front and some exciting creative surprises."

For more information, visit www.sxsw.com.

THE GREATER Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau — with its approximately 80 employees—is moving from its City Hall location to newly leased space at 4 Houston Center, in the 1200/1300 block of Lamar.

The bureau's real estate broker Dan Boyles told the *Houston Business Journal* that the move, sparked by the City of Houston asking them to leave their current space by February, will serve the CVB well because they will now be together, rather than spread throughout City Hall.

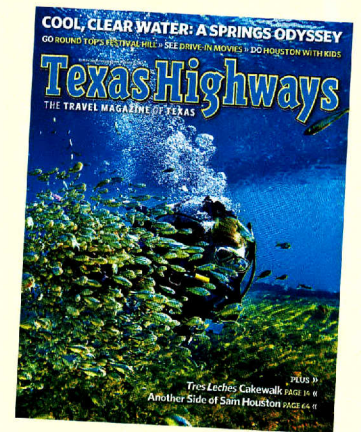
"Our entire organization will be on the same floor, which will increase our efficiency and make interdepartmental collaboration a lot easier," says Greater Houston

MAGAZINE AWARDS

TEXAS HIGHWAYS and *Texas and Parks and Wildlife* magazines took home several awards from the 2011 International Regional Magazine Association conference held in Reno-Tahoe, NV, last month.

Based on 2010 publications, *Texas Highways* won a Gold for Single Photo (*Dive In!*, August), Silver for Art Direction of a Single Story (*Flights of Fancy*, December), Bronze for Photographic Series (*True, Texas*, September) and Bronze for Overall Art Direction (40,000-plus circulation). The magazine also netted an Award of Merit for Special Focus (*True, Texas*, September)

Texas Parks and Wildlife magazine won a Silver for Special Focus



(*Water*, July), Bronze for Travel Feature (*Primeval Paradise*, April), Bronze for Cover (January) and an Award of Merit for Department (*Keep Texas Wild*).

Convention and Visitors Bureau President and CEO Greg Ortale.

The Harris County-Houston Sports Authority plans to share some of the CVB's space.

THE DALLAS-Fort Worth International Airport is offering its **social network followers special deals at airport concessions** as part of a recently launched program.

Using any smartphone and the location-based mobile applications Foursquare and Facebook Places, customers who check in via social networking at any of DFW's five passenger terminals will have access to special concessions deals offered within a few yards of their location. Initial deals include offers at 85 different locations within the airport.

"This program allows DFW concessionaires to place information directly into the hands of passengers, just when they are looking for it," says Jeff Fegan, CEO for DFW Airport. "It will give our customers a great snapshot of what is nearby, so they can make more educated decisions about their purchases."

The program is one of the first of its kind in the airport industry. According to a recent airport survey, 84 percent of passengers use smartphones. Thirty-six percent of those use location-based social networking apps to "check in" at certain places.

WORLD'S BEST

SCHLITTERBAHN Waterparks and Arlington's Six Flags Over Texas received top international honors from **Amusement Today's Golden Ticket Awards**, including a 14th consecutive win for Schlitterbahn Waterpark Resort in New Braunfels as **World's Best Waterpark** and a fourth consecutive win for Schlitterbahn Galveston as **World's Best Indoor Waterpark**.

Nicknamed the "Academy Awards of the Amusement Park Industry," the Golden Ticket Awards are presented annually by *Amusement Today*, an international industry magazine based in Arlington. The winners are determined by the results of an international survey conducted among hundreds of well-traveled enthusiasts and amusement park aficionados.

Along with top waterpark and

COURTESY SCHLITTERBAHN



Rides like this Congo River Expedition helped Schlitterbahn Waterpark Resort in New Braunfels maintain its status as Best Waterpark in the World.

indoor waterpark wins, Schlitterbahn scored World's Best New Waterpark Ride for The Falls at its New Braunfels location.

Schlitterbahn New Braunfels also was honored with several top-five rated distinctions including second, third and fourth in the World's Best Waterpark Ride category for Master Blaster, The Dragon's Revenge and Congo River Expedition.

"Every year we hold our breath and wait for the Golden Ticket results. Our team goes to great lengths to make sure we are offering the best park experiences imaginable," says Terri Adams, chief operating officer for Schlitterbahn Waterparks and Resorts.

Six Flags Over Texas is home to the industry's Best New Ride of 2011 — the new Texas Giant, which also debuted at No. 6 on this year's list of best steel coasters in the world, the second highest debut in the Golden Ticket Awards' history.

Steve Martindale, Six Flags Over Texas park president, says, "The original Texas Giant led the pack for many years and enjoyed a strong allegiance among coaster enthusiasts. Our goal was to merge that legacy with 21st-century technology in the form of the Iron Horse steel track design," he added. "The result was a win-win. Everyone who rides the new Texas Giant loves what we've created — literally the smoothest wooden coaster anywhere in the world."

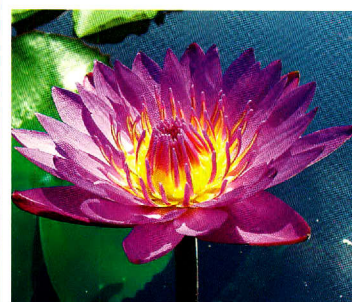
Though not tops, other Texas attractions made a notable showing. SeaWorld San Antonio was second in the Best Marine Life Park category. First place went to SeaWorld Orlando. Kemah Boardwalk was among the top-five candidates for Best Seaside Park.

Six Flags Fiesta Texas received just 2 percent fewer votes than the winning Dollywood in Pigeon Gorge Tenn., for Best Shows. Fiesta Texas also ranked second to Epcot in Orlando, Fla., for Best Outdoor Show production.

Full Golden Ticket results are available at www.goldenticketawards.com.

IN THE PRESS

THE NEW YORK *Times* spotlights one of San Angelo's claims to fame — its **International Waterlily Collection**, and



San Angelo's International Waterlily Collection receives national attention.

the man behind the blooming attraction, Ken Landon.

"It might seem incongruous for this little city in west central Texas plagued by heat, drought and wildfire to have a world-famous collection of waterlilies. But here in Civic League Park, floating in a series of six raised pools next to San Angelo Central High School, are hundreds of hardy and tropical waterlilies blooming day and night," the article reads.

The collection, which is open to the public for free, has its most active flowering period from April through October.

The New York Times adds, "Pink, deep red, sky-blue and yellow, they rise over floating round pads that are bright green, bronzed or speckled maroon. And anyone can see — and sniff — them free."

Landon told *The New York Times*, "I've got some of the rarest lilies on the planet Earth. They don't even exist in their country of origin."

One of Landon's creations, the Texas Dawn/Nymphaea, was recently designated the Official Water Lily of the State of Texas by the 82nd Texas Legislature

For more information, visit www.sanangelotexas.org.

IN THE RANKS

MEETINGS and Convention magazine took note of **Five Wacky Fall Festivals** in the nation, among them the **Boogie Woogie Fire Ant Festival** slated for Oct. 7-8 in Marshall.

Explaining its choice, the magazine explains, "We're talking about the red imported fire ant, so named because it was accidentally brought into the States in the 1930s aboard a South American freighter docked in Mobile, Ala., and now infests much of the South. And it stings. So, heck, let's gather at the historic Courthouse Square in downtown Marshall and celebrate the critter with a fire-ant calling contest, "gurning" (ugly face-making), a diaper derby (don't ask), lots of food and much more."

Other entries included the World Chicken Festival in London, Ky.; Banner Elk Woolly Worm Festival in Banner Elk, N.C.; World Championship Punkin Chunkin in Nassau, Del.; and the Chitlin' Strut in Salley, S.C.

For more information, visit www.marshall-chamber.com.

*Compared to last year

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VISITOR NUMBERS as of August 31, 2011			
TRAVEL CENTER	Month Visitors	Percent Variation*	Year-to-Date Visitors
AMARILLO	8,204	-3.41	63,680
ANTHONY	5,244	-9.88	43,160
CAPITOL	5,441	-26.00	53,320
DENISON	25,922	-8.25	215,803
GAINESVILLE	17,970	-24.27	168,148
LANGTRY	2,358	-23.19	32,367
LAREDO	6,373	-23.36	51,405
ORANGE	34,840	-4.43	292,973
TEXARKANA	11,508	-46.82	82,903
VALLEY	9,168	+19.25	34,741
WASKOM	25,630	-11.39	224,900
WICHITA FALLS	13,986	-9.23	112,241
CENTER TOTALS	166,644	-13.23	1,441,413
			-13.81

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TEXAS TRIVIA

Pepper, Texas for one week each June?

What Texas town also is known as Dr Pepper, Texas for one week each June?

Dublin, Texas, is home to the oldest Dr Pepper bottling plant in the world. The plant opened in 1891, six years after the drink was invented in nearby Waco.

The bottling plant is known for using cane sugar to sweeten its drinks, rather than the corn syrup that is used by most bottlers. Tours of the plant, museum and Old Doc's Soda Shop have long been popular attractions.

For information, visit www.dublindrpepper.com.

TEXAS TRIVIA