

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE

*Interpretive Guide to:*

# SHELDON LAKE

STATE PARK AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
LEARNING CENTER



## A LAND TRANSFORMED

Before the arrival of European or American settlers, these parklands were a lush coastal prairie with a carpet of flowers and grasses up to eight feet tall. Shallow wetlands and marshes dotted the prairie. Thousands of animal and plant species thrived in the diverse habitat. After Texas independence in 1836, farms and ranch land replaced much of the prairie and almost all of the marshland. During World War II the U.S. government built Sheldon Reservoir (today's lake) to provide water to the defense industry. In the 1950s, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department purchased the land and developed it into a refuge for migratory waterfowl, a public fishing lake and a fish hatchery. Part of the land was farmed. After the hatchery closed in 1975, the land began to revert naturally to forest, ponds and marshes.

## HABITAT RESTORATION

Species adapted to life in a pond or forest form an interdependent food web of plants and animals. When "invasive" or "exotic" plant or animal species are introduced to these habitats, the food web and habitat are altered as the invasive species displace native plants and animals. At Sheldon Lake, staff and volunteers work to control invasive species such as tallow trees, privet shrubs and fire ants. The staff also works to control aquatic species such as salvinia, water hyacinth and nutria. Staff and volunteers plant native trees to mend damaged woodlands. Land that has been farmed for 150 years is being restored as coastal prairie and wetlands. Seeding or transplanting of appropriate plants, plus weeding, mowing and controlled burns, will restore these habitats over time.



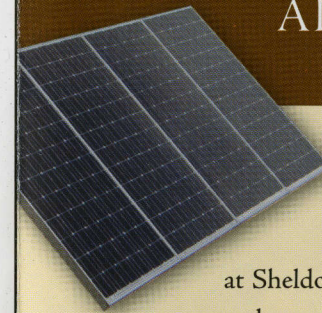
## WETLANDS ARE IMPORTANT

Creating and protecting wetlands at Sheldon Lake is vital to the habitat restoration effort and to the educational mission of the learning center. The learning center ponds and Sheldon Lake rely on rain and runoff for their life-giving water. These ponds provide natural storage for floodwaters and habitat for aquatic plants. The plants filter pollutants from the water and provide a habitat for aquatic invertebrates, fish, birds and alligators. Unfortunately, urban development surrounding the park reduces runoff, and the resulting pollution lowers water quality. Park staff and volunteers are working to protect the surrounding watershed so that there will be a Sheldon Lake for the future.

Park staff and volunteers restore wetland habitat at Sheldon Lake.



## ALTERNATIVE ENERGY



Alternative energy, green building and conservation methods

at Sheldon Lake State Park demonstrate ways people can save energy and reduce the pollution caused by burning fossil fuels to make electricity.

Photovoltaic cells and a wind turbine produce electricity to supplement the electrical power used in the pond center building. A solar hot-water heater uses the sun's energy to warm water for hand-washing in the rest rooms. A geothermal field uses the constant 74-degree temperature underground to heat or cool the pond center more efficiently than conventional methods.

"Green building" practices use energy-efficient design, recycled or reused materials, water conservation, rain harvesting, and other methods to reduce energy consumption and damage to the natural environment.

Recycling, composting and native plant gardening displays at the learning center also demonstrate ways to reduce trash while saving electricity and water.





Urban youth discover the natural world at Sheldon Lake.

SHELDON LAKE STATE PARK AND ENVIRONMENTAL LEARNING CENTER IS A 3,000-ACRE HAVEN FOR WILDLIFE SURROUNDED BY THE HIGHWAYS, RAILROADS AND INDUSTRY OF HOUSTON. ITS PONDS AND WETLANDS TEEM WITH BIRDS, TURTLES, AQUATIC PLANTS AND ALLIGATORS. LAKE SHELDON PROVIDES DIVERSE WILDLIFE HABITAT WITH EXCELLENT BIRD-WATCHING, CANOEING AND FISHING OPPORTUNITIES. A FORMER FISH HATCHERY "GONE WILD" FORMS THE CORE OF A 40-ACRE NATURE LEARNING CENTER FEATURING ACCESSIBLE TRAILS, BRIDGES AND DECKS. THESE AMENITIES ENABLE SCHOOLS, YOUTH GROUPS AND CITY FOLKS TO ENJOY AN OUTDOOR EXPERIENCE CLOSE TO HOME.



## SHELDON LAKE

You are visiting a nature preserve and learning center. Help us protect the plants and animals that live here and ensure your own safety by respecting park rules:

- Stay on designated gravel trails.
- Keep back from the water.
- Walk slowly and quietly.



Fishing helps students discover pond ecology.

Call the learning center to schedule your school, scout or youth group for our exciting hands-on field study activities including wildlife discovery, pond ecology, fishing and alternative energy.

Join us as a volunteer to share your love of nature with others!

The Sheldon Lake Environmental Learning Center is open to the public Tuesday–Sunday, from 8 a.m.–5 p.m.

Sheldon Lake State Park & Environmental Learning Center  
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