

Programming in a Pandemic

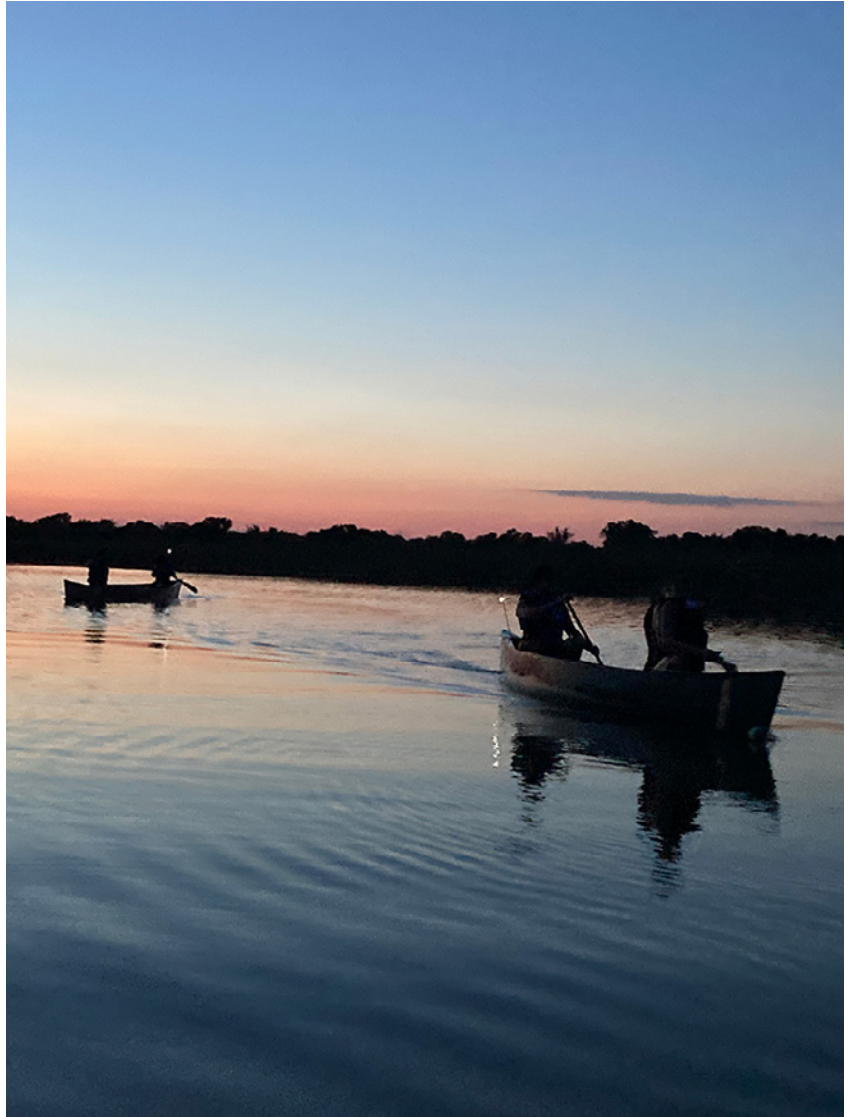
Kenneth Nalley, Naturalist

Leading hikes, teaching education workshops, guiding aquatic tours—these programs have always been a staple at the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. Since the current pandemic has created such disruption to our lives, our programs, in my opinion, have become even more valuable. Granted, our programming looks very different, but we are still doing everything we can to offer high-level outdoor education for our guests.

Take our hikes, for instance. We have moved our weekend programming to weekdays and are currently offering, at a minimum, one hike and one program each weekday. When we first started to lead hikes again, we weren't sure if anyone would attend due to mask requirements while hiking in the summer heat. We have been pleasantly surprised, however. Attendance has exceeded expectations, and people who come on our guided hikes have been more than willing to comply with the safety guidelines we have established. Yes, it's uncomfortable hiking in a mask, but people are happy to be here, and we are happy to be doing what we love again.

My new personal favorite program is our canoeing and kayaking tours. Having the ability to give people a full-immersion experience on one of the most beautiful sections of the Trinity River is a true blessing. Taking a canoe trip to Lost Lake and experiencing the sights and sounds of our native wildlife can take your mind off the current chaos. The Full Moon Paddle takes that premise even further. Paddling toward the setting sun as the frogs start to croak and crickets begin to chirp has a calming effect that is difficult to put into words. These days, I make a point to stop the tour, close our eyes, and enjoy this total immersion in nature that we can experience in our own backyard.

It's safe to say that our programming has taken on an even deeper level of meaning for our staff and visitors. With so many aspects of normal life turned upside down, I am thankful that nature has become a mechanism of comfort and stability for many. My hope is that this new-found connection to parks and our natural world will last far longer than any of our current problems.



The quiet waters of the Trinity and the setting sun foster tranquility for tour participants during the pandemic. FWNC&R Staff Photo.