

Gate Entrance Changes

Rob Denkhaus, Nature Center Manager



Reflecting the changing fall landscape, the Nature Center has instituted new entrance policies and fees for visitors as of October 1. Larry Sallee Photo.

On behalf of the staff of the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge, I want to thank our visitors for their patience and understanding during our reopening process. From online reservations to specific hours of entry and hourly visitor limits, it has been a challenge to design and implement a reopening plan that accounts for the safety and other needs of visitors, volunteers, and staff, and we appreciate everyone's support throughout the process. That support, through visiting, actually helped set a monthly attendance record in August as more folks visited than in any previous August!

We are pleased to announce that, beginning October 1, several changes were implemented for visitors. First, the good news...

As of October 1, ALL Nature Center WEEKDAY visitors can enter the Refuge without obtaining an online reservation. Just to be clear, online reservations are still required on weekends and holidays for ALL guests, including members, until further notice.

We realize that ActiveNet, the City of Fort Worth's online reservation system, is cumbersome, but it has allowed us to safely manage the number of visitors, reducing the likelihood of disease transmission occurring among Refuge visitors, staff, and volunteers. By analyzing past visitation trends, we feel confident that unfettered weekday admission during the fall will not increase the potential for disease transmission.

We are carefully considering the steps required to remove the online reservation requirement on weekends as well, so please bear with us as we move through the process.

On September 22, the Fort Worth City Council approved two

changes to the Nature Center's non-member fee structure: a \$1 increase to the adult gate fee—raising it from \$5 to \$6—and the addition of a \$1 per dog gate fee. **FRIENDS MEMBERS WILL BE ABLE TO BRING THEIR DOGS TO THE PARK FOR FREE.** These changes mark only the second fee increase since the introduction of an entrance fee in 2006.

While no one appreciates increased admission fees, we feel that the additional dollar is justified based on our benchmarking analysis of fees levied by similar facilities across the state. Also, the addition of amenities such as the boardwalk and Cross Timbers trail access as well as Friends of the Nature Center-funded new facilities and improvements at Greer Island and the almost-completed Lotus Marsh Pavilion are good examples of what can be accomplished using admissions revenue. We are also about to embark on the largest project on the Refuge to date with the \$3 million boardwalk completion project.

The addition of a dog entrance fee for non-members, while somewhat controversial, is in response to the increasing number of dog visitors and their impact. Most natural areas surveyed do not permit dogs (or any domestic animals) on their grounds. The nominal fee is a means of managing the number of dogs while recouping some of the costs required to mitigate their impact on the environment.

These fees went into effect October 1, but we are waiving the dog fee until November 1 to better inform visitors of the new fee.

Thank you again for your past and ongoing support. We hope to see you on your next visit to the Refuge!