



*A group of “villagers” gathers to review the day’s prescribed burning activities in support of the Refuge’s land management program. FWNC&R Staff Photo.*

## IT TAKES A VILLAGE

*By Rob Denkhaus, Nature Center Manager*

**I**t takes a village to support a nature center. Granted, that’s an adaptation of a hackneyed quote, but it is true. I write this while firmly entrenched in “budget season,” that time of year where I study the migration of funds into and out of the Nature Center’s coffers. The sources of those funds serve to illustrate the “village” concept as operating money comes from the City of Fort Worth, the Friends of the Nature Center, and thousands of visitors from throughout the city, region, and even world.

But the village concept extends far beyond financial resources to include the partnerships that are so vital to the Nature Center's operation. Earlier this week, Natural Resource Management staff conducted a series of prescribed burns to improve the health and condition of approximately 35 acres of prairie, savanna, and forest. These fires were conducted in partnership with the Fort Worth Fire Department, which provided necessary equipment and manpower to ensure safety. This partnership, initiated in 2011, expands annually to provide land management assistance to the Refuge and training opportunities for Fort Worth firefighters.

Partnerships were the topic of discussion in January when the Nature Center, in cooperation with the local Texas Parks and Wildlife Urban Wildlife office, hosted a meeting of more than 30 biologists and land managers representing 18 different organizations from around the region. The meeting's goal was to facilitate collaborations that will benefit the entire North Central Texas region. One of the early outcomes of this effort is a partnership between the Nature Center, the City of Fort Worth Urban Forestry Division, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, and the Texas Forest Service in combatting an emerging emerald ash borer crisis.

We also have long-standing partnerships with many of the local volunteer organizations in the region. Fort Worth Audubon Society has provided funding, volunteer support, and ornithological expertise since the Nature Center was born in 1964. Texas Master Naturalists have provided thousands of volunteer hours performing service of every kind. CCC Legacy Chapter 123, the Texas Bison Association, the DFW Herpetological Society, and a myriad of other organizations all support the mission, activities, and programs of the Nature Center.

Over the years, we have seen nature centers across the country come and go, but the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge lives on, growing, maturing, and advancing along an evolutionary path to become the best nature center that it can be. Lacking the financial, in-kind, sweat equity, and moral support of our "village," the Nature Center could never have achieved its current status—National Natural Landmark, Lone Star Land Steward, Lone Star Legacy Park, and more.

So, on behalf of Nature Center staff, I would like to thank everyone that is a part of our village, helping raise and nurture the Nature Center to reach its full potential.