

Armand Bayou Nature Center

Armand Bayou Nature Center Coastal Tall grass Prairie Management Prescribed Burn Program and Prairie Restoration Project

Description of the Nature Center:

The Armand Bayou Nature Center ("ABNC") is a 2,500 acre wildlife refuge and wilderness preserve in the center of a highly urbanized area between the Johnson Space Center and the Bayport Industrial District. ABNC protects remnants of this region's original ecosystems including wetlands, bottomland forest, and tall-grass prairies. This environmentally significant area has been designated as one of only four Texas State Coastal Preserves and is home to more than 370 species of birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.

Additionally, ABNC lies along the largest migratory bird route in North America and it is a crucial stop over for migrating birds. ABNC is the recipient of the Lone Star Land Steward Award sponsored by Texas Parks & Wildlife Department recognizing excellence in wildlife habitat management and conservation on private lands.

Description of the Project:

The tall-grass prairie was once a common ecosystem in Texas and the United States. Today more than 99% of this habitat has been lost and the remainder is highly fragmented. ABNC manages 650 acres of tall grass prairie wetland. Two hundred-fifty acres are in need of restoration. Prescribed burning is one stewardship tool used to maintain a tall grass prairie ecosystem. If the prairie is not maintained, it can be destroyed by invasive species which primarily include the Chinese Tallow tree and other woody plants. Historically, prairies were managed by grazing, natural fires set by lightning, or fires set by Native Americans to aid in their hunter-gatherer lifestyle. ABNC must employ prescribed burning methods and can not use more natural stewardship tools due to its location in the center of a highly urbanized and industrialized area. ABNC's Stewardship Coordinator, who directs the Prescribed Burning program has been certified by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to conduct prescribed burns. SEP monies will be used to pay for the labor and materials costs associated with conducting prescribed burns, mowing, removing non native trees, and for planting native trees and plants.

Environmental Benefits:

The Coastal tallgrass prairie managed at ABNC is largely wet prairie. These prairie wetland complexes play a critical role in nature. They provide numerous ecosystem services including storm water detention and purification and wildlife habitat. The focus of the restoration effort has been to control non-native invasive plants and restore the native plant community. This effort will result in increased ecosystem functionality. ABNC actively manages over 650 acres of this valuable wet prairie habitat. The role of fire in grassland systems is critical. Grasslands are considered by most experts to be a fire dependent plant community. Fire contributes to the overall prairie health by suppressing invasive brush species, increasing soil fertility and promoting prairie plant vigor. ABNC will quantify benefits by reporting the amount of unwanted species removed.

Eligible Areas and Counties:

This project may receive a contribution from the following:

Harris County; San Jacinto River Basin; San Jacinto Major Watershed