

# The Friends of Brazoria National Wildlife Refuges Grant Application to Houston Endowment, Inc.

## Description of Organization

### *Nature of Work*

The Friends of Brazoria National Wildlife Refuges (Friends) was created as a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization in 1994 to support and assist the Brazoria National Wildlife Refuge Complex in the operation and development of its refuge programs. The Refuge Complex has since been renamed as the Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex. The Friends actively pursue donations to provide facilities and materials at the Refuges and recruit and participate as volunteers in habitat improvement, natural history experiences, community outreach education programs, environmental education programs, fund-raising, and facility improvements.

The programs and facilities offered at these refuges and supported by the Friends are located in southern Brazoria County within a 50 - 70 mile distance of Houston. A recent survey indicates that 37% of our visitors are from the Houston metropolitan area since we are the closest National Wildlife Refuge with coastal marsh, prairie and woodlands to Houston.

### *Mission*

The Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges was formed to promote public appreciation of the wildlife resources of the Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex covering more than 85,000 acres of coastal habitat. Improving public access and facilities at these refuges is a major part of our mission. The Friends believe public education, refuge improvements, and volunteer efforts are critical to conservation of these important coastal wildlife resources.

### *Achievements*

The Friends have made significant contributions to the Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuges since 1994 including over \$210,000 in funds raised for 40 projects and programs including the following examples:

- ▶ **Migration Celebration** - A Spring birding Festival held annually since 1998 to bring the public to the Refuges and raise awareness of the migratory bird resources at the Refuges.
- ▶ **Family Day** - Held at Brazoria Refuge each Fall to promote public awareness of the opportunities available for public enjoyment of the Refuge.
- ▶ **Establishment of Volunteer Village** - Assisted the refuge in the construction of a campground for recreational vehicles to attract "Winter Texans" as volunteers.
- ▶ **Brazoria Refuge Gate**- Purchased an electric gate to control visitation hours at Brazoria Refuge which enabled the Refuge to be opened every day rather than intermittently when staff was available.
- ▶ **Equipment for the Discovery Center** - Cost Share Grant \$7,000
- ▶ **Binoculars** - Donation from Eagle Optics - \$2,400

- ▶ **Build trails, decks, boardwalks and benches at Hudson Woods Unit** - Funded by a grant from the Texas Recreational Trails Grant Program by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - \$21,765
- ▶ **Hudson Woods / Northside Environmental Education Initiative** - Phase I and II grant from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation's Nature of Learning Program - \$7,844
- ▶ **Moccasin Pond Observation Platform** - 2004 Dow Community Grant Program \$4,800
- ▶ **Big Slough Discovery Center Equipment** - Coastal Management Program (CMP) \$46,720 administered by the General Land Office of Texas. This grant will furnish much of the equipment needed in the newly constructed Discovery Center at Brazoria Refuge.
- ▶ **Discovery Center Environmental Education Program** - Provide volunteers to staff eight learning stations at the twice weekly school trips by children from Brazosport and Angleton Independent School Districts
- ▶ **Bird Banding** - Provide volunteers to work with Refuge staff to band birds
- ▶ **Pest Plant Control** - Provide volunteers to assist in pest plant removal
- ▶ **Provide Visitor Services** - Provide volunteers to assist visitors at the Discovery Center and on the Auto Tour Loop
- ▶ **Contributions from Donation Box** - \$300
- ▶ **Proceeds from Silent Auction at Migration Celebrations** -- \$1,300
- ▶ **Walmart Match for Silent Auction** - \$500
- ▶ **Donation from Fourth Graders at Bess Brannen Elementary School** -- \$300

### **Statement of Issue Being Addresses**

Historically, the Friends have been rather successful in securing funding for refuge improvements, but on fairly small scale projects in the \$500 -\$5,000 range. In the past, we have been able to accomplish these projects with the working capital which we had on hand. More recently, our projects have increases in scope and funding. Currently we are working on three projects which ultimately stem from federal funding (see attached chart of current grants). These projects all require upfront expenditures on our part with reimbursement upon submission of receipts to the managing agency.

As of February 28, 2005, we had about \$20,560 in our general operating account, from which we manage these and other projects. Almost 50% of these funds ( \$9,800) is committed to other projects. That leaves about \$10,000 to manage these three reimbursable grants. While some of the expenditures for these grants has been done and reimbursed, it is estimated that an additional \$ 61,900 will need to be spent by the end of this calendar year to complete these grants. It will be extremely difficult to turn our \$10,000 over fast enough to accomplish all of this work on time.

### **List of names and qualifications of people who will be in charge of project**

Ron Bisbee - Vice-President of the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges

Person responsible for the reimbursement fund

Qualifications: Retired Project Leader for Texas Mid-Coast National Wildlife Refuges and responsible for a multi-million dollar

Budget now a volunteer member of the Friends  
Richard Hickner - Treasurer of the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges  
Person responsible for accounting for the money for the Friends  
Qualifications: Treasurer of the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges for  
three years. Former president of the Friends and  
founding president of the Friends

### **Description of Proposed Project**

The Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges requests a grant in the amount of \$20,000 to be used to establish a revolving reimbursement account to accomplish three current projects as well as an undetermined number of future projects of a reimbursable nature. These projects will all focus on providing facilities and programs to improve public use and environmental education activities on refuges in the Texas Mid-Coast Complex.

▶ **How will the project address the identified issue?**

The project will alleviate the cash flow problem which has developed with the securing of reimbursable grants.

▶ **Where will the project make a difference?**

The project will allow the Friends to expand their grant writing to add additional facilities to the Refuges by freeing up money to work with grants requiring reimbursement.

▶ **Whom will it target? How will it impact them?**

The currently funded reimbursable grants target the general public who visit the refuge and organized school programs which visit the refuge for hands on experience in environmental education. These grants are constructing facilities like trails, boardwalks, restrooms and observation decks. They are also purchasing equipment and displays for a newly constructed visitor contact station called the Discovery Center at Brazoria Refuge. Future use of these revolving funds will be of a similar nature.

▶ **When will the project begin and end?**

The revolving account will be established when the funds are received. It is anticipated that this fund will be adequate for the next three years, but it should continue to be utilized into the foreseeable future. The Friends would like to reserve the right to utilize these funds for a specific project after three years if they are no longer needed for revolving reimbursement purposes.

▶ **If the project already is under way, what has been accomplished so far?**

The following is the current status of the existing reimbursable grants:

The Friends has spent and been reimbursed for almost half of the Hudson Woods Trail grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Approximately \$5,800 has been spent and reimbursed toward the Discovery Environmental Education Grant from US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Since February 28, we have spent about \$4,100 toward the Big Slough Discovery Center Equipment Grant from the Coastal Management Program but none has been submitted for reimbursement.

▶ **How will the project will be evaluated?**

The project will be evaluated by documentation of the expenses and reimbursements for grants. Each grant has specific reporting requirements which evaluate the project.

▶ **What are the expected milestones and outcomes?**

When these three current reimbursable projects are completed, we expect this revolving fund to be fully restored and ready to use for some new projects. The Friends expect that over \$200,000 more in grant funds will be secured over the next five years resulting in considerable improvements in Refuge facilities.

Our flagship project, for which we have begun to raise funds, is the construction of a screened pavilion at the Discovery Center at Brazoria Refuge. This facility would be a gathering area for school groups of up to 150 students that come out for environmental education field trips. The facility is needed to provide shelter on rainy days and protection from mosquitoes. This facility is estimated to cost about \$190,000.

It is hoped that our increased ability to work with reimbursable grants and the experience gained in working with Houston Endowment, Inc. might help make this project a reality in the next few years.

▶ **How much will the project cost?**

The Revolving Reimbursable Account Project will cost \$20,000.

▶ **How much does the organization need from Houston Endowment and over what period of time?**

The Friends need \$20,000 immediately from Houston Endowment for this project to provide a reimbursement account for reimbursement grants over the next three years.

▶ **If the project is ongoing, how will it be sustained after Houston Endowment's funding ends?**

This project is ongoing and will be sustained by the Friends by continuing to expend and replenish the reimbursement account as grants are received and completed.