

Refuge

CONTINUED FROM COVER

"So wildlife wise, it's still a good picture of what the Columbia Bottomlands historically looked like," Sanchez said.

That term refers to a very distinct type of terrain and the vegetation within it, said Shane Kasson, also with the fish and wildlife service.

"It's a bottomlands hardwood habitat that's only found in this part of Texas," he said. "In this part of the state, live oaks evolved to handle the moist environment. It makes them very unique."

Only about 5 percent of old-growth Columbia Bottomlands still exist, Kasson said. This particular tract of land isn't part of that pristine 5 percent, but it's reasonably close, he said.

"It's probably been logged once, and underbrushed once, but there's still a lot of old trees in there, and it was never grazed much," Kasson said.

"The cattle stayed on the road side of the bayou predominantly," he said of the half of the preserve that lies between Old Angleton Road and Bastrop Bayou.

That part of the preserve is where its 2.4 miles of trails are located — one is handicap accessible — and is the only part open to the public, Sanchez said. A future goal, however, is to build a walkway across the bayou and put in more trails on the side that had the least impact from man, she said.

An upgrade that will be

taking place in the more immediate future will be the installation of what Sanchez called "an iTrail."

With the assistance of a group of fifth- and sixth-grade schoolchildren from throughout the county, the fish and wildlife service is producing a series of educational videos about the preserve, she said.

At various points along the trail, electronic access to those videos will be made available that will explain features of the forest, Sanchez said.

"People will be able to use their smart phones to scan the QR codes and see the kids videos," she said. "It'll definitely be something that'll be installed in December or in January at the latest."

As for how the fish and wildlife service acquired the land in the first place, Dow External Communications Manager Trish Ritthaler said the company is continually reviewing potential uses for the property it owns.

"There's pieces of property all over the place that Dow bought for development," she said, but added that option was ruled out in this case. "We determined the best thing to do with it was donate it to the refuge."

At 338 acres — and inside of Lake Jackson — it wasn't a small donation, either.

An exact estimate of the property's worth wasn't available, but "It's significant," Ritthaler said. "It's easily in the million-dollar range."

It didn't take long, Sanchez said, for the fish

and wildlife service to decide what they were going to do with the property.

"From the very beginning we knew we were going to open it for public use," she said.

The Dow Woods Unit is open to the public every day from sunrise to sunset.

Alan Nieschwietz is a reporter for The Facts. Contact him at 979-237-0151.

BRAZORIA COUNTY

Special to The Facts

LAKE JACKSON

College eyes new revenue streams

The administration at Brazosport College will formally ask permission from the board of regents to include as an annual goal the acquisition of

\$1.2 million in additional income from grants and facility usage fees.

The stated timeline for this goal is August 2012.

Also at the meeting, the board will view a demonstration on the structure of the online Composition and

Rhetoric course, name a trustee to represent the college in the Community College Association of Texas Trustees and receive a construction update.

For information, call the college at 979-230-3000.

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