



THE BOOMER

Quarterly Newsletter

Volume 7 Issue 3

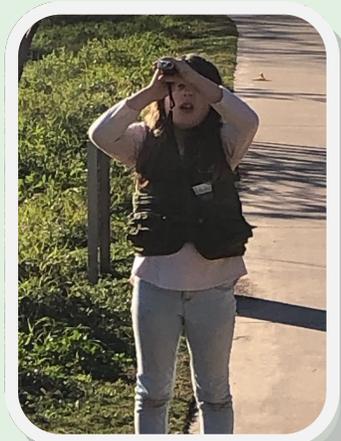
Booming-N-Blooming is Just Around the Corner

The 25th annual Attwater's Prairie Chicken Festival, *Booming-N-Blooming*, is scheduled for April 13th and 14th, 2019. The 2 day event is held at Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is located 6.5 miles northeast of

Eagle Lake, TX off of FM 3013, or south from Sealy on Highway 36 to FM 3013 and traveling west for 10 miles.

The event will include Attwater's prairie Chicken viewing opportunities, ref-

uge tours, guest speakers, native American dance performers, complimentary refreshments, guided walking tours and much more. A more detailed flyer and event schedule will be sent at a later date. Hope to see you there.



Wildlife watching in an urban setting

Volunteer from Home and Help Save a Species

The Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge is a small, but growing, all volunteer nonprofit organization. If you have ever thought you might like to help with our mission but time or distance have held you back, we may have the answer you have been looking for. We are soliciting volunteer help in two areas. Both positions can be handled, on your

schedule and from the comfort of your own home....where ever it may be. We are looking for someone with the willingness and background to be this organization's web master. We are planning to expand our web site's function and you can get in on the ground floor.

We are also looking for assistance in grant writing. This

person would be an integral part of the development team. Both of these positions would work closely with a Friends board member. If you would like to know more or have an interest in either opportunities, please contact: Gary Woods, garykwoods@sbcglobal.net or alternatively, Ron Jones, oldpartnersguy@gmail.com

Inside this issue:

<i>Festival Coming</i>	1
<i>Volunteer at Home</i>	1
<i>APC Update</i>	2
<i>Nature Tourism</i>	3
<i>Houston Co. Steps Up</i>	4
<i>Wild Film Tour Appreciation</i>	7
<i>Govt. Shutdown Impacts</i>	9

Our Mission:

The mission of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge is to support the purpose and objectives of Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR and promote the recovery of the Attwater's prairie chicken and the Texas native coastal prairie ecosystem for this and future generations.

Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge, P.O. Box 212 Eagle Lake, Texas 77434

<http://www.attwater.org/>

Did you know?

- A 2017 USFWS survey report shows 103.7 million Americans (16 and older) participated in hunting, fishing and wildlife activities.
- 86 million of those participated in wildlife watching.
- Wildlife watching expenditures totaled \$75.9 billion.
- 15% of those expenditures were trip related.

APC UPDATE

An Ark for Prairie-Chickens ?

Michael E. Morrow, Wildlife Biologist, APCNWR

Dire predictions of impacts to our planet resulting from climate change are of concern to many. Most climatologists are in general agreement that our planet is getting warmer, and will continue to do so into the foreseeable future. Total annual precipitation in the contiguous 48 states has increased an average 4% (0.2% per decade) since 1901, and the incidence of extreme weather events has increased (Figure 1; U.S. EPA 2014; <https://science2017.globalchange.gov/chapter/7/>). Heavy rainfall, especially during the critical April–May reproductive period for Attwater’s prairie-chickens, has frustrated recovery efforts in recent years on what seems like an annual basis. And of course, the catastrophic amounts of rain dumped by hurricane Harvey nearly wiped out Attwater’s populations in the wild, in addition to the untold misery inflicted on human populations. It *seems* that extreme weather is the new “norm” for much of the U.S., and indeed many parts of the world. This has led some, myself included, to wonder if climate change has affected extreme precipitation patterns to the point

that weather might play an increasingly important role in driving our chances of successfully restoring Attwater’s prairie-chicken populations in the wild. The late Dr. John Toepfer used to remind me often that “perception is reality until you check the facts.” So I spent a few days looking at historic precipitation patterns to evaluate whether our local precipitation patterns over the last century fit the perception that extreme pre-

cipitation events are becoming more frequent in our area.

Let me say from the outset that I am not a climatologist – so take that into consideration as you read on. With that said, I looked at data from Columbus, Texas (15 miles west of the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge) from 1904–present

<https://beaumont.tamu.edu/climaticdata/>.

Cont. on P.5

Observed U.S. Trend in Heavy Precipitation

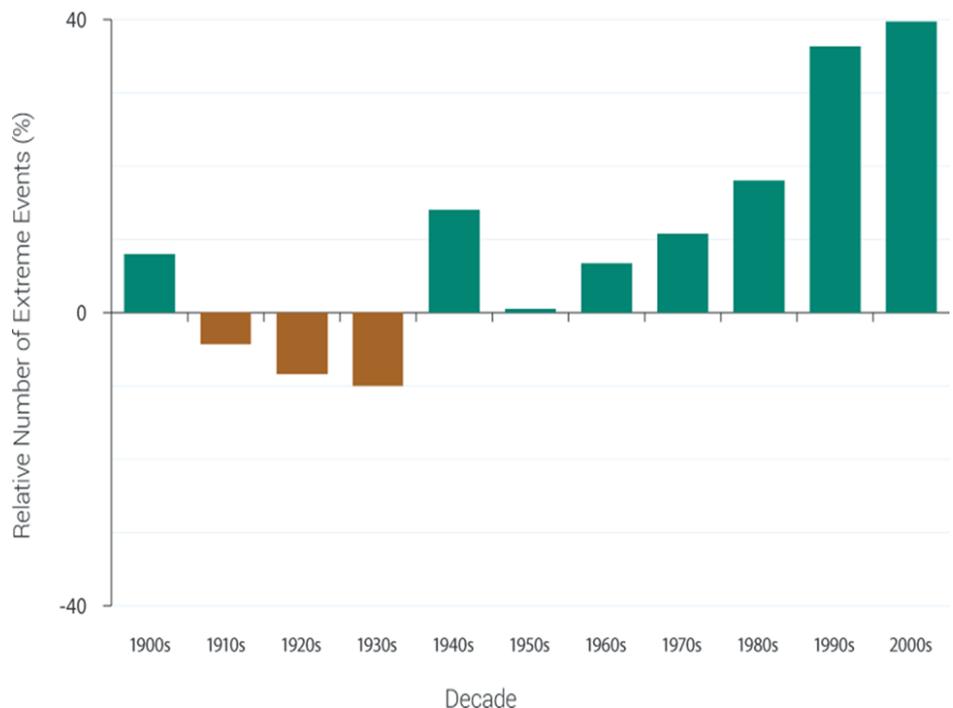


Figure 1. Data: www.globalchange.gov/browse/multimedia/observed-us-trend-heavy-precipitation.

Nature Tourism Dollars Matter

By Mary O. Parker

What do Eagle Lake, Rockport, Fort Davis and Austin have in common, besides the fact that they're in Texas? All four benefit from nature-tourism venues.

Most readers will be familiar with the city of Eagle Lake since it's the closest place for visitors to Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge to fuel up vehicles and stomachs. The annual Booming N Blooming Festival alone attracts up to 350 visitors to the Refuge in a single weekend. While most stem from Texas, Ron Jones, Past President of Friends of APCNWR, says that past attendees have included folks from 17 states and five countries—including the UK and Australia. If just half of them spent \$20 in Eagle Lake it would've enriched the local economy by \$3500.

According to Mary Parr, Mayor of Eagle Lake, "Eagle Lake definitely benefits from having the Refuge nearby." And, while the city has yet to collect data on visitor numbers and the amount of money they spend in the community, Parr states, "We *do* know it has a positive economic effect."

Drive an hour or so east of Eagle Lake and you'll come to Rockport, another city that benefits from nature-tourism dollars. The star of its

show is the endangered Whooping Cranes (*Grus americana*) that winter there, specifically in the estuaries and bays near Aransas National Wildlife Refuges. Each autumn, once juveniles are able to make the trip, the cranes migrate to the Texas Gulf Coast from Canada's Wood Buffalo National Park, a journey of nearly 3,000 miles!

The best way to see North America's tallest birds is by boat as the Whooping Cranes' favored locations offer no foot or auto access. Kevin Sims, captain of the *Jack Flash*, a boat popular with nature photographers, says, "In winter-time when it should be slow [for

outdoor activities] we're our busiest."

Sims and his wife Lori, who is captain of her own boat (the *Lady Lori*), own Aransas Bay Birding Charters. The husband-wife team guides approximately 700 people a year, folks who travel from all over the world. Their business is one of three boat-based guiding services in Rockport. Together, the three guide more than 2,000 nature tourists annually. "And when folks come to see the cranes," Sims adds, "they stay in our hotels and eat at our restaurants."

Head eight hours west and you'll come to Fort Davis. Like Eagle Lake, this small city (population 1,200) serves as a refueling station for tourists. Located near both Davis Mountains State Park and the McDonald Observatory.

Cont. on P. 6



Above: Whooping crane at Aransas NWR Photo by: © jeff parker/ExploreinFocus.com

Houston Company Steps Up

In 2017 the Friends group was able to provide a walk-in freezer to the refuge through a cooperative agreement with the Texas Coastal Program. This new, larger unit, allows for the storage of a larger volume of frozen vegetables, which are fed to the APCs while in the release pens. It also allows for volume purchases as a cost saving and has more efficient access for staff.

Scott Thompson, owner of The Lee Thompson Company has graciously agreed to provide one of his expert

technicians, to give the freezer an annual checkup, prior to start up.

It is a critical piece of equipment during the release season and knowing it is ready to go each year is important. Now thanks to the generous support of a Houston

company, the staff has one less worry as they work to save this species.

We want to thank Scott and his staff for providing this important service and look forward to continuing this valuable partnership.

<https://www.leethompsonac.com/>



Membership Application

Yes, Please enroll me as a Friend of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

New Membership -or- Renewal Date: _____

Name (s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone _____

Annual: \$15 Student or Senior (62 or older), \$20 Individual, \$30 Family

Make checks payable to: Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge and mail to:

Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

P. O. Box 212

Eagle Lake, Texas 77434

You can also join on-line at: <http://www.attwater.org/beafriend/>

APC Update cont. from P. 2

Although the dataset spans more than 115 years, there were no records for 1917–1947. However, there were daily records for the remaining 84 years. I compiled data on total rainfall, rainfall/event (i.e., successive days of rain with no break), and the number of days that it rained for each year. I also compiled similar data for the Attwater’s April through June nesting and brood rearing period. I then used linear regression to evaluate whether there were any trends over the 115-year period. Visual inspection of the data suggested that there was likely a change in the protocol for collecting rainfall data beginning in 1966. Number of days with rain before 1966 was abruptly fewer (Figure 2), suggesting that perhaps a change in collection protocol may have occurred at that time. Therefore, I restricted analysis of rain frequency (not amount) to 1966–2018. To make a long story short and spare you the gory details, none of the regression analyses revealed a statistically significant trend. Visual inspection of the data shows that rainfall in our area is highly variable, with annual totals ranging from 19.8–

71.2 inches (Figure 3, p.8)! Although there appears to be a slightly upward trend in average total rainfall, that trend was not statistically significant given the large year-to-year variability. Rainfall during the April–June reproductive period showed similar patterns, with rainfall ranging from 2.4–35.8 inches each year. No linear trends were apparent for the number of rainy days each year, although the 10-year running average is suggestive of a longer term oscillation in rainfall patterns (Figure 4, p.8). No linear trend was discerned either statistically or visually in rainfall/event. Finally, I plotted probability of occurrence for extreme rainfall events by roughly decade-long periods

(Figure 5, p.8). These curves suggest little change in the probability of extreme events through time.

This is good news for the Attwater’s prairie-chicken recovery program, and I must admit, a bit of a surprise for me. The Attwater’s evolved in this highly variable weather environment, and it appears from my basic analysis that there have not been major shifts in precipitation patterns, at least over the last 100+ years. I guess we tend to remember the bad storms, and forget about the good weather in between. And, it affirms Dr. Toepfer’s adage that “perception is reality until you check the facts”.

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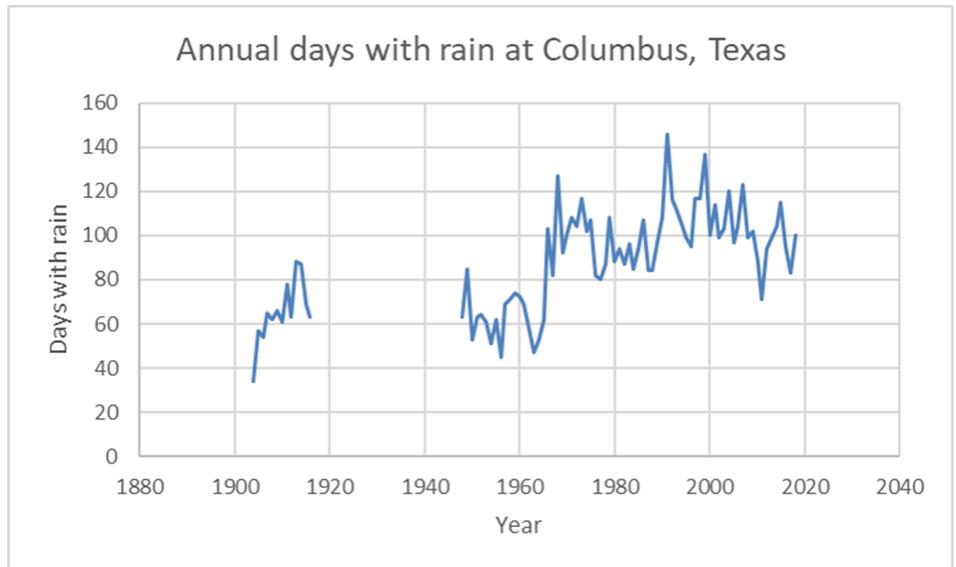


Figure 2. Data source: <https://beaumont.tamu.edu/climaticdata/>.

“You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.”

C. S. Lewis

Nature Tourism cont. from P.3

Fort Davis receives thousands of visitors annually.

Attendees at observatory star parties—an outdoor event, which takes place year-round—account for a chunk of that. “Spring-break crowd sizes can exceed 1,000, but the typical star party has about 200,” explains Frank Cianciolo, Senior Programs Coordinator for McDonald Observatory’s Frank N. Bash Visitors’ Center.

Folks come here to appreciate some of the darkest skies in the continental U.S. As the world’s grown brighter, west-Texas has worked hard to hold tight to its starry heavens, in part to protect the research done at the observatory, but also because dark skies have become a major nature-tourism attraction throughout the world.

Long before the words “nature-tourism” grew as familiar as they are today, the late Texas Governor Ann Richards convened a task force to examine the topic. By late 1994, the State Task Force on Texas Nature Tourism produced a report that served as the guidepost for developing what is today a multi-billion-dollar-a-year industry.

Since then, an increasing number of towns and cities have added nature-tourism to their economic development tool-kit. That’s a smart move that’s continued to

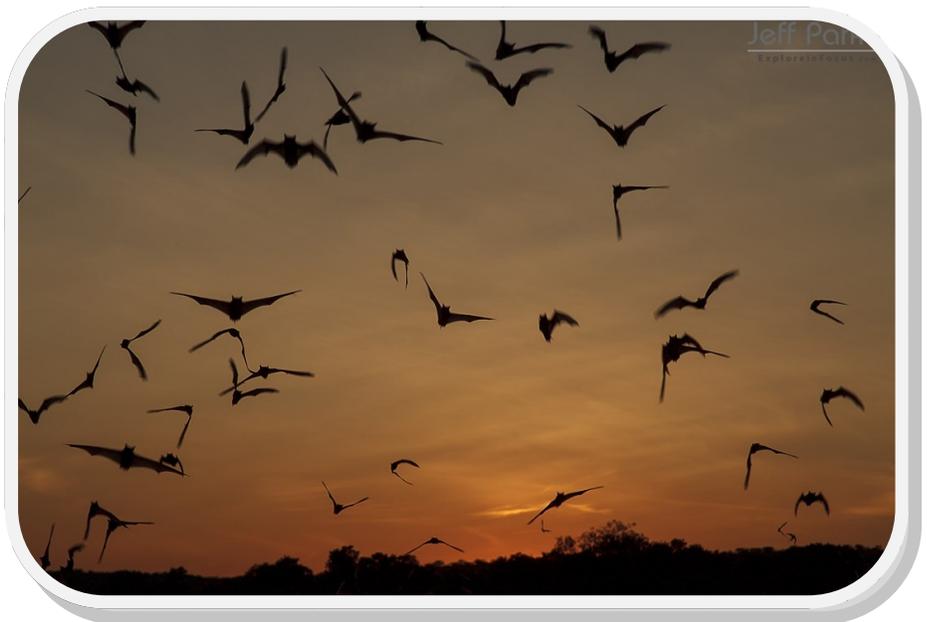
grow smarter, especially when it comes to wildlife watching. The 2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, a bi-annual report issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, found that nationwide participation in wildlife viewing increased by 20% between 2011 and 2016. The report also shows that wildlife-watching participants belong to a demographic group with large amounts of disposable income.

An important part of the nature-tourism definition is that it conserves the environment while improving the welfare of the local people. And, as Parr notes, improving the welfare isn’t just about money. “Having the Refuge near our community encourages community pride,” she adds.

In Eagle Lake, that pride has sparked additional nature-oriented efforts and community support. For example, Parr reports, “This past year [2018] was the first year Eagle Lake participated in the Christmas Bird Count. Alleyton Resource Company, the Eagle Lake Chamber, Revitalize Eagle Lake, and Friends of APCR all joined together to host a dinner to celebrate the conclusion of the count. We had about 60 people there! And we met a lot of people, like birders, we normally wouldn’t have been in contact with.”

About 100 miles north, you’ll find a surprising source of community pride. The Congress Avenue Bridge in Austin, just 10 city blocks from the Texas State Capitol building, is home to the world’s largest urban bat colony.

Cont. on P. 7



Above: Mexican free-tailed bats take to the sky above Austin, Texas.

Photo by: ©Jeff Parker/ExploreinFocus.com

Nature Tourism cont. from P. 6

In late-summer, nearly 2 million Mexican free-tailed bats (*Tadarida brasiliensis*) swoop from concrete crevices to skim across Lady Bird Lake in search of dinner. (Factoid: The colony eats between 10,000-20,000 pounds of insects per night, including tons—literally!—of agricultural pests.)

The spectacle and the number of tourists both peak in August thanks to what Susan Kwasniak, spokeswoman for the Austin-

based Bat Conservation International (a.k.a. “Bat Con”), calls “a one-two whammy.” She explains, “By then all the pups are out and also that’s typically when it’s hottest and driest and the bats know they have to forage for longer periods of time so you’ll see them when there’s still plenty of daylight.”

Today, 100,000 visitors flock to Austin annually to watch the show, bringing their pocketbooks with them. Bat-colony related proceeds deliver more than an esti-

mated \$12 million a year in nature-tourism dollars.

Back in Eagle Lake, while we don’t know the exact amount that the Refuge contributes to the community’s coffers, we do know it’s nowhere near \$12 million. But that’s okay. Says Parr, “We’re very fortunate to have it so close to our community.” And no matter the amount, in a city of only 4,000 people, every dollar counts. And, in some ways—e.g., local pride, species’ conservation—each nature-tourism dollar counts twice.

Wild Texas Film Tour Helps Spread the Word

When the Wild Texas Film Tour closes its 2019 schedule in Corpus Christi, Texas, it will have visited 15 Texas cities and introduced thousands of people to the effort to save the Attwater’s prairie chicken.

We want to thank Ben Masters and his staff, at Fin and Fur Films,

for including our film, “Little Grouse on the Prairie” on the tour. The Film brings awareness to the plight of the Attwater’s prairie chicken and the great partnerships working together to recover the species. If you missed the tour and would like to see the film, visit our website <http://www.attwater.org/>

the SXSW Conference and Festival in Austin, Texas, March 8-17, 2019. For more information on the film visit:

<http://theriverandthewall.com/>

For more information on SXSW visit: <https://www.sxsw.com/>



You can see Ben’s latest feature film, “The River and the Wall” at



You can make a difference ?

AmazonSmile donates to Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge when you do your shopping at :

smile.amazon.com/ch/45-0720176



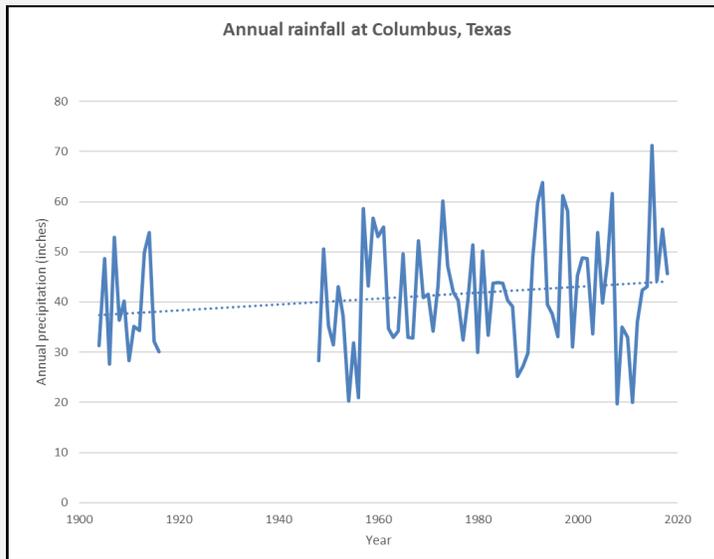


Figure 3

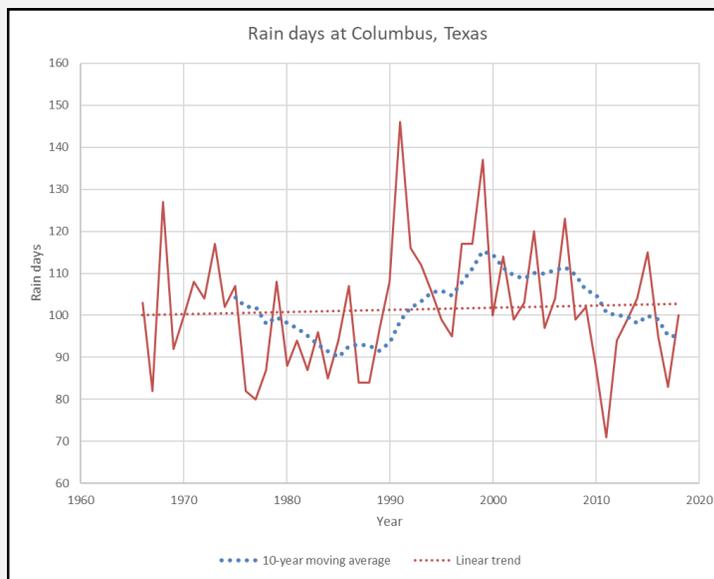


Figure 4

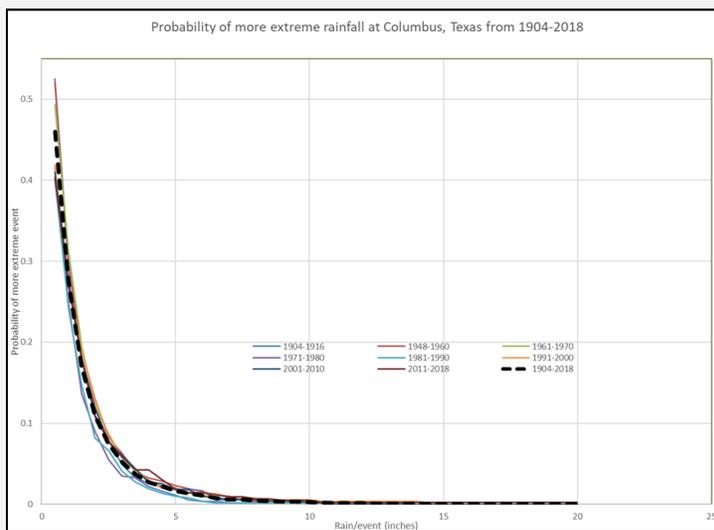


Figure 5

Government Shutdown Impacts

There are no winners in a government shutdown and this most recent one was no exception. With the staff at Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR barred from the refuge, vital work went undone and the staff hours lost can't be regained. Habitat management work such as prescribed fire may miss the schedule and invasive species treatments can go undone. Gains become losses. Scientific investigation comes to a halt and data gaps can result. In the instance of Attwater refuge, radio collared birds go untracked and birds can move out of range, not to be located again. Mortality signals are not received and information on a bird's demise is lost to the database. Was it disease, a predator, weather related, it will never be

known. At the very least, man-days are lost and work goes undone. This past shutdown was 35 days long and included 22 workdays. For the Refuge's 6 person staff, that is 132 man-days or the equivalent of a full time employee working for 6 months. That does not include the lost man hours of interns and volunteers so valuable to the refuge.

Hoping to make this past shutdown the last, a group of 9 Republican senators have introduced S. 104, The End Government Shutdowns Act. This bill would stipulate that in the event that Congress fails to approve a spending package before a funding deadline, an automatic continuing resolution at current spending levels would take effect.

In a statement, Senator Rob Portman, R-Ohio, who introduced the bill, said that shutdowns are not only disruptive for federal workers and the citizenry they serve, but they are a waste of money. "Shutdowns inevitably cost taxpayers more money once the government reopens," Portman said. "[Moving] forward, we should end government shutdowns for good. This legislation will accomplish that goal, providing lawmakers with more time to reach a responsible resolution to budget negotiations, giving federal workers and their families more stability, and ensuring we avoid disruptions that ultimately hurt our economy, taxpayers and working families."

To learn more about this legislation, visit: [S. 104](#)

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