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By KEELEY MOREE

- Leader & Times

With the first day of Spring just days away, crews at Arkalon Park have already been hard at work preparing the ponds, campgrounds and trails at the park for both visitors and wildlife.

In addition to regular maintenance, fishing enthusiasts and guests will find new features installed this year when the park gates open for the public on April 1.

Arkalon Park advisory board member Tracy Gutierrez explained that the entrance of the park past the railroad tracks will be completely renovated with young trees and a new wooden sign to welcome visitors.

“Right off the entry there will be an informational booth that will have photos of some of the campgrounds and different parts of the park so if you come off the highway, it’s not like you’re just pulling into someone’s pasture,” Gutierrez said. “You can pull up and say, ‘Hey, there’s a green shaded area down by the river, let’s go check it out.’ It will invite people on in.”

Gutierrez mentioned that a team is also working to help those looking to find the park on a device such as a TomTom or Garmin navigation system to be able to search the park's location.

One area receiving special attention will be Wriston Marsh, where ducks, geese and other water fowl spend their summers.

"We'll be tearing out the old pier," Gutierrez said. "We're taking the wooden one out and Panhandle Oilfield Services has donated a new walkway for us. We're going to be installing that new walkway here in a couple of weeks."

"We're also planning to make a walking path all the way around the marsh," Gutierrez added, explaining that the path will be made of packed mulch. "At the outlet of the marsh there will be a little bridge you can walk across. It's approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  to one mile around the marsh, so it will be a nice walking path."

Crews have been working to trim branches to prepare for the path, and Gutierrez said the Anadarko company has opted to install benches for visitors to watch and feed the wildlife.

Gutierrez explained that the goal at each fishing pond is to free up more shoreline space for anglers. Part of that goal has been fulfilled through the "Adopt a Pond" program implemented last year. So far both Anadarko and Basic Energy employees have adopted bodies of water to help maintain at the park.

The Arkalon council is also addressing the issue of restroom facilities.

"I took about 50 4-H kids fishing last year and found that when one of them had to go to the restroom, you have to drive clear over to the campgrounds," Gutierrez explained. "So what we're doing is putting up a temporary port-a-potty at the very first pond, so that cuts the distance in half. It will also be handicap accessible."

Gutierrez concluded that there will hopefully be many more projects put into action in the future as donors and volunteers express interest in making Arkalon Park a pleasant place to spend time.

“We came up with a one-year plan, two-year plan and a five-year plan and one of the plans for the first year is we would like to plant more than 100 trees a year down there. Black Hills’s tree program is going to be directed to the park this year,” he said. “I think the community is going to get on board with us and start doing special projects here and there to make it a place to go.”

For more information about the Adopt a Pond program, contact Debbie Giskie at City Hall, (620) 626-2206.

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