

Volunteers

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“We’ve been really concerned about the state park system here in Texas,” Steve said. “The financial conditions for most of these places are dire. That’s why we think it’s important to be a strong advocate and continue grass roots education.”

In April, the Mondls helped coordinate a forum on the straits of Texas state parks at the University of Houston, to which they invited over 150 legislators to hear proposals for secure and dedicated park funding. A few showed up.

“If we don’t get more funding now, the parks are going to lose a lot of good employees,” Jan implored. In December of last year alone, over 70 park employee positions in the State of Texas were eliminated due to lack of funds. Currently, Texas ranks 49th in the nation for state park funding.

“It’s necessary to take action now,” Steve said. “We need everyone to be advocates. Go find out who your representative is, and write them a letter calling for ‘secure and dedicated funding,’ and then tell a friend to do the same.”

An immediate concern for the couple is the imminent possibility that soon, the train departing from Rusk State Park to Palestine and back that they have already grown to love in their short time here will cease to run.

“They’re talking about making it a static display,” Jan said, “simply because we won’t have the maintenance funds to keep it running. I have kids from school groups ask me about that all the time, and it’s just heartbreaking, because our real motivation is to try and make them smile. Kids shouldn’t be concerned.”

Steve and Jan will be able to reassess the plight of the Texas State Railroad when they return to it after Thanksgiving to help with the Victorian Christmas train.

Until then, they are on to their next task, undoubtedly plucked from volunteer sites on the Internet among the myriad “volunteers wanted” ads circulating since the decline of park funding. But they will never forget their time in Texas.



Steve and Jan Mondl, Resident Volunteers or RV'ers at trailhead of Rusk State Park Nature Trail. Volunteering to give back service to America. Follow along with the Mondls on the web and read their Newsletter, "Traveling Along with Steve & Jan" at www.mondl.us

PHOTO: MICAH BATEMAN

“Texas friendly is spoken here,” Steve said. “And we’ve really been enjoying the Piney Woods especially. It’s literally been a breath of fresh air since being surrounded by petrochemical plants in South Texas.” Jan smiled. “Best of all,” she said, “is that we’ll be leaving here like we leave every park we visit – with the warm feeling that we’ve accomplished something.”

As the campfire by their RV smoulders now and smears smoke into the ambient pine scent, Steve and Jan know – as with every place they visit – they’ll take a little piece of East Texas with them.

“We make new friendships and forge new ideas,” Jan said. “It really helps you to appreciate life.”