

Get Hooked on Fishing

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AUSTIN, Texas — Fishing in a Texas state park has never been easier or more economical than it is today thanks to the Free Fishing in State Parks program.

A popular program for four years, Free Fishing in State Parks — waiving the fishing license and stamp requirements within state parks — has been extended through Aug. 31, 2007. Park visitors can enjoy free fishing at more than 50 state parks. “By eliminating the requirement for a fishing license and fishing stamps while inside a Texas state park, this program gives residents and non-residents yet another great reason to visit a Texas state park” explained Bryan Frazier, promotions coordinator for state parks. The license-free angling applies only to fishing inside a state park from the bank, a pier or from a boat if done in a body of water totally contained within the boundaries of a state park, such as Buescher State Park’s lake. State parks along the coast also participate to encourage fishing from the beach and wade fishing. State park entry fees, however, still apply. All state fishing regulations, except the license and stamp requirements, remain in effect. In addition to free fishing at parks across the state, youth fishing clinics, fishing derbies and other family-oriented fishing events are on tap this spring and summer at some 25 state parks across the state. The events not only are lots of fun, according to Ann Miller, Aquatic Education coordinator for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, but they also teach fishing skills to children and help instill in them the importance of aquatic stewardship. One of Miller’s angler education instructors is Bill Brooks who coordinates Free Fishing at State Parks events at both Bastrop and Buescher state parks in central Texas. Last year, more than 200 youngsters participated in the events, learning the “how-tos” of fishing and got to try their luck at hooking a fish. “We’ve had great success with this program,” Brooks said. “We supply rods, reels, hooks and even some refreshments. At noon, we hold a raffle to give away fishing equipment and tackle boxes.” Brooks says parents check in their children (ages 6 to 13) at 10 a.m. Youngsters then proceed to five different stations to learn such things as how to tie a knot, how to identify different fish, how to cast and how to be safe on the water. Then, the young anglers can try their hand at landing a fish, many of them for the first time. This year up to a dozen state parks will have a fishing event coordinator on board to organize and run multiple fishing events in each of these select parks. In addition, kids participating in this year’s Free Fishing in State Parks events will receive free “Family Fishing Packs” containing a “how-to” informational booklet, a “Fishing is Fun” book, a photo holder refrigerator magnet and a laminated freshwater and saltwater fish identification card. Prizes will also be handed out at the events, thanks in part to participating sponsors. Redi-Lure, for example, has donated hundreds of tackle boxes for prizes. Rods and reels, other fishing equipment and “Life’s Better Outside” water bottles and visors can also be won at many of the fishing events. “With the increased number of events planned for this year, we decided it was a great opportunity to provide informational materials and increase the number of prizes at these events as a way to encourage kids to get more involved in fishing,” said Darcy Bontempo, TPWD marketing director. State parks hosting fishing events this year, in addition to Bastrop and Buescher, are: Blanco, Bonham, Brazos Bend, Caddo Lake, Caprock Canyon, Cedar Hill, Fairfield, Eisenhower, Galveston Island, Huntsville, Inks Lake, Lake Arrowhead, Lake Livingston, Lake Texana, Lake Whitney, LBJ, Martin Dies, Jr., McKinney Falls, Palmetto, Purtil Creek, Ray Roberts Lake and Washington-On-the-Brazos. Adults and youngsters alike are expected to attend the “Texoma On The Fly” fly fishing expo at Eisenhower State Park north of Denison on Lake Texoma on June 23. Persons wanting to learn more about this increasingly popular sport, how to tie their own flies and cast effectively will hear from some of the top fly fishers in Texas, according to event coordinator and certified fly fishing instructor Steve Hollensed. For more information, call the park at (903) 463-4696. A complete list of the coastal and inland state parks offering free fishing opportunities and upcoming Free Fishing In State Parks events can be found on the TPWD Web site or by calling (800) 792-1112.