



INTERPRETIVE GUIDE

# LAKE TAWAKONI STATE PARK



ESCAPE TO THE LAKE AND LEAVE YOUR WORRIES BEHIND. JUST FIFTY MILES EAST OF DALLAS, AN OASIS AWAITS. IMAGINE: THE SHADE OF TALL TREES, BIRDS CHIRPING, AND THE WATER GENTLY LAPPING ON THE SHORES OF LAKE TAWAKONI. SOUND TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE? COME SEE FOR YOURSELF WHY LIFE IS BETTER OUTSIDE.



## THANK YOU FOR VISITING!

While enjoying this natural beauty, please remember that everything you see in the park is protected. Artifacts, rocks, plants, and animals (even snakes) are all part of the region's rich cultural and natural heritage. Help us keep recreational use sustainable for the future and protect these resources by leaving things as you find them.

### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- ♦ Bonham State Park  
1363 State Park 24, Bonham, TX 75418  
(903) 583-5022
- ♦ Cedar Hill State Park  
1570 W FM 1382, Cedar Hill, TX 75104  
(972) 291-3900
- ♦ Purtis Creek State Park  
14225 FM 316, Eustace, TX 75124  
(903) 425-2332

Lake Tawakoni State Park  
10822 FM 2475, Wills Point, TX 75169  
(903) 560-7123 ♦ [www.tpwd.texas.gov/laketawakoni](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/laketawakoni)



Life's better outside.®



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## A DROP IN TIME

A heavy raindrop falls from the sky and lands with a splash into the Sabine River. It's more than 5,000 years in the past; the lake, buildings and park roads don't exist. The drop of water flows downstream, until rough hands plunge into the river, splashing the drop onto the riverbank. In search of resources, prehistoric peoples frequented the banks of the Upper Sabine River for thousands of years.

The same water droplet that splashed into the Sabine helped water the crops planted by descendants of those prehistoric peoples. Shifting from nomadic life to raising crops and living in a fixed location allowed populations to grow, and complex societies developed. Among the many tribes that settled in this area were the Tawakoni, for whom the lake is named. Our same droplet, having watered the crops, now escapes from a leaf and reenters the atmosphere as vapor through the process of transpiration.

By the end of the nineteenth century, almost all the native groups in the area had been forcibly relocated to Oklahoma, and the first attempts at large-scale agriculture by Anglo settlers started in the early twentieth century. Formerly vaporized, our water droplet joined others in the air, creating a cloud. This cloud might have shaded a tenant farmer or sharecropper, as they tilled the land, farming corn or cotton.

Pressure builds in the sky, causing the clouds to swell with water droplets until they can hold no more; precipitation happens, and the water droplets start to rain down again. By this time, it's 1960 and the Iron Bridge Dam has been constructed, stopping the Sabine's flow and forming Lake Tawakoni. Flooding this much land is not without cost, but the benefits are vast: flood control, water for recreation and agriculture, and a clean supply of drinking water for the city of Dallas.

Access to water has brought people here for thousands of years; how can you help protect this extraordinary natural resource for the next thousand?

The Iron Bridge Dam restricts the flow of the Sabine River, forming Lake Tawakoni. Photo by Ine Burke, Edgewood, Texas.



## RESTORING THE PAST



**L**ake Tawakoni State Park lies within the Post Oak Savannah. Historically, this region was open grassland, dominated by native bunch grasses and forbs with scattered clumps of trees, primarily post oaks. Forested areas were generally restricted to bottomlands along major rivers or creeks – typically areas protected from fire.

These landscapes require two major forces to exist: frequent fire and grazing bison. In the past, recurrent fires ignited by either lightning or Native Americans served as the major force molding the savannah landscape. Typically, the fires spread across the countryside eating up grasses until flames reached the river bottoms and fizzled out. By suppressing invading woody species and stimulating the growth of prairie grasses, fire helped maintain the plant communities of the Post Oak Savannah. Large herds of bison roamed, consuming large quantities of grass, trampling organic matter and stomping seeds into the disturbed soil, ensuring the future growth of those plants.

Early settlers used the savannah to graze livestock, like horses or cattle, and farmed crops, like cotton, in the fertile soil. Farmers and ranchers cleared and tilled the land, all but eliminated the use of fire, resulting in a high density of smaller trees where pockets of native grasses once stood.

Today, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is restoring these native grasslands by incorporating prescribed fire back into the landscape, removing encroaching woody species, and supplementing native species where possible.

