



Volunteer Handbook & Policy Manual

PO Box 58828 Houston TX 77258
281-474-2551

www.abnc.org www.abncvols.org

"We believe that appreciation and understanding of the Creator's world of nature, the love of its creatures, and the inspiration we derive from its beauty and perfection constitute a vital phase of life."

...Armand Yramategui

Welcome! And thank you for taking time to learn about volunteer opportunities at Armand Bayou Nature Center.

Armand Bayou Nature Center is one of the largest urban wilderness preserves in America, protecting multitudes of native plants and animals and providing a unique refuge for the human spirit. We depend upon the generous donations of time, talent, and treasure made by our volunteers to accomplish our important mission. Because our volunteers do such wonderful work, Armand Bayou Nature Center has become a respected regional center for environmental education and a widely recognized leader in habitat restoration. The efforts of our volunteers translate directly into a better quality of life for this community with citizens that are healthier, happier, and smarter.

Our adult volunteer opportunities include conservation field work, informal outdoor education, animal care, upkeep of our facilities, and much, much more! We have need of almost every skill a volunteer can offer, and we benefit from almost every life experience you might share. Some volunteers come for just a day of service; others have been volunteering here for almost four decades. Some volunteers use what they learn at Armand Bayou Nature Center to prepare for future employment; others apply the skills gained from full careers to serve as our mentors and leaders.

Like so many of our volunteers, I hope you will find your passion at Armand Bayou Nature Center. I hope you will meet many new people and find new friends here. And I hope volunteering at Armand Bayou Nature Center will be fulfilling and memorable.

With humblest and heartfelt gratitude for YOU,

Tim Pylate
Executive Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	About ABNC	
	A. Armand Yramategui and the History of ABNC.....	4
	B. Mission Statement	6
	C. Organizational Structure (8) (Staff/Contact Info).....	7
II.	Volunteer Handbook	
	A. About Volunteering.....	8
	B. Becoming a Volunteer.....	8
	C. Volunteer Responsibilities and Requirements.....	8
	D. Orientation & Training.....	9
	E. Tracking Hours.....	9
III.	Policies & Procedures	
	A. Equal Volunteering Opportunity.....	11
	B. Background Checks.....	11
	C. Privacy Protection.....	11
	D. Harassment.....	11
	E. Conflict Resolution.....	12
	F. Verbal Conduct & Public Relations.....	12
	G. Confidentiality.....	12
	H. Resignation & Termination.....	12
	I. Volunteer Safety.....	12
	J. Personal Property.....	13
	K. Periodic/Exit Reviews.....	13
	L. Other ABNC Policies.....	13
IV.	Recognition	13
V.	Volunteer Acknowledgement Form	14
VI.	Photograph and Publicity Release	15
VII.	Volunteer Opportunities and Descriptions	16

ABOUT ABNC

ARMAND YRAMATEGUI AND THE FOUNDING OF ARMAND BAYOU NATURE CENTER

Armand Bayou Nature Center had its beginnings in 1965 when the City of Pasadena annexed a 100-foot strip of land along Middle Bayou. During the next few years, several citizens began to realize the unique quality of Middle Bayou, the only remaining bayou in the greater Houston area still in its natural state. One of these citizens, Armand Yramategui, Curator of the Burke-Baker Planetarium, convinced others of the importance of this waterway and surrounding land as a refuge for wildlife and as a place that needed to be forever protected.

In January 1970, on the night before he was to present his plea to the Houston City Council for acquisition of parkland, and two days before he was to urge the Harris County Commissioners to create a Parks and Recreation Department, Mr. Yramategui was tragically murdered. His friends and fellow citizens rallied to the cause and made the presentation on his behalf. In addition to asking that the area be preserved, they asked that Middle Bayou be renamed Armand Bayou in his honor.

For his "unselfish dedication and inspiring leadership to preserve wild lands and wildlife and improve man's environment," Armand Yramategui was posthumously awarded the U.S. Department of Interior's Conservation Award, bestowed by Interior Secretary Walter J. Hickel, October 17, 1970.

A few months after Armand's death, a campaign was underway by citizen's groups and schoolchildren to obtain funds from corporations and from private donations to buy land to create Armand Bayou Park. Because of the high price, the land had to be bought in parcels. Recycling drives, rummage sales and raffles were held. Schoolchildren baked cookies and gave the profits to "save Armand Bayou". The campaign gained momentum when it was learned that Friendswood Development Company, planned to develop the land all along the bayou.

One of the leading supporters of the push to acquire land was Hana Ginzburg. She wrote hundreds of letters, made equally numerous phone calls, begged, pleaded or whatever it took to get corporations, groups, and individual citizens to contribute to the preservation of Armand Bayou.

At the same time Hana was working tirelessly to solicit contributions, she was also arranging tours of the area for prominent people to show them first-hand the land was worth saving. One of her co-workers was Nancy Wood, who helped organize the first group of volunteers to lead people through the woods along Armand Bayou. Nancy, along with Mary Lou Morrow, was also instrumental in creating the first volunteer guidebook. At that time, the volunteers were known as B.I.G.s - Bayou Interpretive Guides.

By 1972, Pasadena had been able to purchase 955 acres with the help of a matching Housing and Urban Development grant. Harris County purchased 991 acres with a matching grant from the U.S. Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, as well as assisted in the purchase of 225 acres purchased with contributions to the Armand Bayou Fund. Later, Pasadena sold several of its tracts to Harris County so that all land south of Bay Area Boulevard would be under one governing body. Funds were exhausted before the remaining 1000+ acres could be acquired. That land today is Friendswood Development Company's Brookwood subdivision.

After the acquisition of over 2100 acres of land, Armand Bayou Nature Center, Inc. was formed. This corporation, headed by a Board of Trustees, entered into an agreement with Harris County to provide educational programs for the general public and to develop a wide range of stewardship programs to return portions of the land to health. In addition, the corporation agreed to construct educational facilities and trails for use by the public.

In 1976, the Interpretive Building was dedicated. In 1982 the Roberts-Hansen farmhouse, formerly located in Kemah, was donated and moved to its present site on the nature center grounds to help demonstrate life on a turn-of-the-century Gulf Coast farm. The farm exhibit, named in honor of Jimmy Martyn, whose love for the land kept it from being sold to developers, was expanded with the "barn-raising" done by volunteers and staff at the Martyn Farm Fall Festival in 1982.

Volunteers contributed again in 1984 when they helped to build the greenhouse at the nature center. Originally intended as a retail business, the greenhouse has served as a site for classes, and now used by Stewardship Volunteers for habitat restoration.

Armand Bayou Nature Center receives monetary support from many sources. In recent years, contributions from individuals, corporations and foundation provide about 25% of the funds to operate the center. Government and non-government grants add another 40%. Armand Bayou Nature Center earns 25% of its annual expense budget directly from program and class fees. Member dues, special events and admissions make up the remaining 10% of revenues.

As a non-profit organization, the nature center also relies heavily on volunteers to help fulfill its mission of environmental education and stewardship. Today volunteers serve as interpretive guides, provide demonstrations, help with special events, instruct children's classes, assist with stewardship programs, and provide additional services to help support the operation of the center and its programs.

In 1987, the State of Texas established the Armand Bayou Coastal Preserve to protect almost 300 acres of "environmentally significant" waterway, and designated the nature center as the managing cooperator. In 1994, Friendswood Development Company donated 600 acres northeast of the intersection of Red Bluff and Kirby to Harris County, bringing the total area under Armand Bayou Nature Center management to 2,500 acres. In 2014, Harris County added the 24 acre Nature Preserve in the upper watershed to the management agreement

ARMAND BAYOU NATURE CENTER MISSION STATEMENT & VISION

Armand Bayou Nature Center Mission

The mission of Armand Bayou Nature Center is twofold:

- ▶ To preserve the wetlands prairie, forest and marsh habitats with which we have been entrusted.
- ▶ To provide opportunities for people to experience the Armand Bayou habitats and the importance of preserving these vanishing habitats.

Armand Bayou Nature Center Vision

"Reconnect People with Nature".

The objective of Armand Bayou Nature Center, Inc. is stated in the organization's by-laws as follows:

ARTICLE III PURPOSE

The purpose of this corporation is to establish a conservation center within the County of Harris, State of Texas, where land and people can be re-united for scientific, cultural, recreational and educational pursuits. The Armand Bayou Nature Center, Inc. is organized for such educational, scientific, historical and charitable purposes within the meaning of Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954.

ARTICLE IV OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the corporation shall be as follows:

- a. To acquire or lease undeveloped lands and establish thereon educational facilities
- b. To develop natural history and conservation education programs with schools, colleges, hospitals, youth groups and adult organizations that will develop an understanding and appreciation of natural resources
- c. To cooperate with national, state, county, municipal and private natural resource agencies in providing an outdoor laboratory in which to demonstrate natural resource problems and management techniques
- d. To provide opportunities for individual and family pursuit of hobby or more serious interest in natural resources
- e. To provide trails and facilities so that individuals and family groups may visit the center for the recreation and enjoyment of being in the outdoors

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Armand Bayou Nature Center Inc. is a private, nonprofit corporation. The management of the affairs of the corporation, the determination of its policies and activities, the control and disposition of its properties and the bylaws of the corporation are vested by law in a volunteer **Board of Trustees** consisting of a maximum of fifty members. The Board of Trustees meets bimonthly. At the annual meeting held in January, new board members are elected from the membership.

The Board of Trustees elects a president, first vice president, second vice president, secretary and treasurer to serve on an Executive Committee. There are also various committees formed to advise the Board of Trustees and Executive Committee. The board hires an **Executive Director, who hires all employees.**

The Armand Bayou Nature Center Foundation is a separate supporting non-profit, established to manage endowment funds to benefit Armand Bayou Nature Center, Inc.

Volunteer Board

Chairman	Vice Chair	Secretary	Treasurer
Weekend Education	Weekend Trails	Weekday Education	
Outreach	Facilities	Gardens	Stewardship
		Bayou Foliage Editor	Webmaster

The Volunteer Organization is managed by volunteers, for volunteers and the nature center. The officers of the organization are elected annually by the volunteer membership.

The *Bayou Foliage* is a monthly volunteer newsletter. All volunteers are encouraged to contribute information to the newsletter by leaving articles and information in the *Bayou Foliage* mail basket or emailing the editor.

Volunteer meetings are held on the second Thursday of each month **except June and July** in the auditorium. From 6:30 to 7:00 p.m., there are refreshments and socializing. Continuing Education programs begin at 7:00 p.m. Announcements of the scheduled speakers are included in the *Bayou Foliage*. The business portion usually begins at 8:00 p.m.

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

About Volunteering

The United States Department of Labor defines “volunteer” as an individual who donates services, usually on a part-time basis, for public service, religious or humanitarian objectives without promise, expectation, or receipt of compensation.

Volunteers help the Armand Bayou Nature Center fulfill its mission of education and stewardship by:

- Serving as interpretive guides to lead public tours
- Providing demonstrations of natural and cultural subjects for its visitors
- Helping with special events that have cultural, recreational, or educational significance
- Assisting with stewardship programs that maintain and enhance natural resources
- Instructing classes which introduce children to environmental and cultural subjects
- Providing additional services that support the operation of the center and its programs

Becoming a Volunteer

1. Fill out an application, being sure to indicate which positions you are interested in assisting.
2. Submit application to the Executive Director who will be reviewing for a background check and passing on to the Volunteer Coordinator to contact you with any further questions and information.
3. ABNC understands that volunteers are active people with a variety of commitments, however, we ask that you review your schedule and make a realistic time commitment during the volunteer application process to ensure the success of the projects you will take on.

Volunteer Responsibilities & Requirements

- Must view volunteering as a professional commitment
- Must be a positive representative of ABNC during all public events/volunteering opportunities
- Understand and follow all ABNC policies and procedures
- Communicate effectively orally and in writing
- Able to meet all deadlines on given projects
- Maintain contact with Volunteer Coordinator and let them know of any conflicts with volunteering
- Provide your own transportation to ABNC property and/or events
- Keep contact information (address, phone, email) up to date
- Be flexible and open minded about tasks, willing to accommodate as situations change on a given day
- Attendance is crucial to our success. Please let the front desk know if you cannot make a scheduled shift as soon as possible.

- All volunteer hours will be logged through the volunteer website or the log book in the volunteer office. All information needed to complete this is listed next.

Orientation & Training

Official orientations for volunteers are scheduled in February and September, but we allow recruits to start any time, with our “buddy” system as training continues throughout the year.

Tracking Hours

What counts as volunteer hours?

Any time spent doing unpaid work in any capacity for the nature center.

Why do I need to log my hours?

There are several reasons for keeping a record of volunteer hours, the main ones being:

- It is our way of knowing you are an active volunteer.
- Active volunteers are covered under ABNC liability insurance.
- Volunteer hours are a performance indicator for the various governing bodies.
- Volunteer hour totals are an important factor for grant applications.
- Only those with hours logged are invited to the appreciation dinner

How do I log my hours?

There are currently two methods of logging hours available, either on our volunteer website www.abncvols.org or in the volunteer log book.

To log them on the website follow the instructions on the home page of the volunteer website. **If you have a problem using the volunteer website, please email webmaster@abncvols.org.**

To log in the volunteer book – there are two books, one in the volunteer office inside the admissions building and one in the facilities office. Take a fresh preprinted sheet and write your name at the top, then just log your hours before you leave. (More information below).

Please log your hours for each month by the first weekend of the following month, this eases the burden on tracking changes. Please round up your time worked to the nearest 15 minutes.

I've been told that I don't need to log my hours?

This may have been the case at one time but now we need you to record your time on a regular basis for the reasons given above. This also applies to hours you may be logging for other organizations, such as Master Naturalist Hours.

How do I find out what category to log my hours to?

Below is a list of the categories that we ask you log your hours to. Both the volunteer website and the sheets in the volunteer log book have these categories set up, you should either post or write your hours against the correct category and then give a brief description of the activity, for example:

Category: Education Description: Trail Guide

Some categories will overlap, such as Stewardship, and Education: Earth Day. Use your best judgment as what you actually did and what it best fits.

Our monthly meetings have 2 codes: Speaker portion is Continuing Education / Business portion is Administration if it lasts longer than 15 minutes.

Visitor Services

Front Desk Coverage, Greeters, Cultural and Natural History Demonstrations, Interpretative Trail Guides, Owl Prowls, Bat Hikes, Firefly Friday, Photo Hike, Unpaid Outreach Programs, Canoe Guides and Deck Hands

Education

Class and Field Trip Instructors, Paid Outreach Programs, Scout Programs

Stewardship

Prairie Pandemonium, Trash Bash, Burns, Stewardship Fridays and Saturdays, Animal Care, Bird Count

Facilities

Building Maintenance, Grounds Clean Up, Gardening, Mowing, Trail Maintenance

Special Events

All activities relating to **Annual Gala** and **Martyn Farm Harvest Festival** only

Continuing Education

Monthly meeting speaker section, Volunteer Orientations, Continuing Education Classes, Buddying

Bayou Interpretative Guides (BIG)

This section is for hours to qualify for the BIG patch, all trails guides, cultural and natural history demos, outreach, deck hand and canoe guides. Hours must be entered in the department area and BIG area.

NOTE: Continuing Education is counted separately to hours spend volunteering.

If you have any questions regarding this information or any questions in general, please the Volunteer Coordinator.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Equal Volunteering Opportunity

ABNC recruits and enrolls volunteers without regard to race, age, sex, religion, color, national origin, or physical ability. Special accommodations may be made upon request.

Volunteers between the ages of 14 to 17 are covered under our Volunteer Program; contact Heather@abnc.org in our Education Department.

Background Checks

ABNC requires background checks for all staff and volunteers.

Privacy Protection

ABNC is committed to maintaining your privacy and will not give out your personal information, including but not limited to email address, phone number, and home address, except as required by law.

Harassment

ABNC is committed to providing a volunteer environment free of unlawful discrimination and harassment. It is illegal to harass others based on sex, sexual orientation, age, race, national origin, disability, medical condition or any other basis made unlawful by federal, state or local law or ordinance or regulation. This policy applies to all persons involved in the operations of the ABNC, including employees, board members and volunteers, as well as by any person doing business with or for ABNC. Unlawful discrimination and harassment in any form, including verbal, physical, sexual, and visual conduct, threats, demands and retaliation are prohibited. Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Conflict Resolution

In the event of a conflict with another volunteer or staff member, which you feel is unresolved, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator immediately to discuss the issue. There will be no discrimination against those who wish to voice a complaint and it will be kept confidential. If your conflict relates to the Volunteer Coordinator, please contact the Executive Director about the issue.

Verbal Conduct & Public Relations

Please refrain from commenting in a negative way about ABNC while volunteering with us. Profanity or hateful speech will not be tolerated while you are volunteering with ABNC at a public event or on site.

Confidentiality

While volunteering, you may come across confidential information about ABNC, including but not limited to, information relating to its operations or activities, employees, business partners and volunteers. Please keep all proprietary and private information in confidence. You understand that this obligation does not prevent you from disclosing information in compliance with the law.

Resignation & Termination

Should a volunteer wish to resign please notify the Volunteer Coordinator in writing. ABNC holds the right to evaluate your volunteer status at any time and dismiss any volunteer they feel violates ABNC policy and procedure. Grounds for dismissal include, but are not limited to the following:

- Lack of logged service or training of at least 28 hours within a one year period
- Inappropriate behavior or misconduct
- Violation of ABNC policies or procedures
- Under the influence of alcohol/drugs while volunteering
- Theft of property or illegal, unsafe, or violent acts
- Unwillingness or inability to support and further the mission of ABNC

Volunteer Safety

Volunteer safety is important to ABNC, and we are committed to providing you a safe volunteering experience. However, some activities come with inherent risks the volunteer should be aware of and work to avoid. Volunteers must comply with ABNC safety and health policies and practices, and all federal, state, and local laws.

Personal Property

ABNC does not assume responsibility for the loss, damage, or theft of personal belongings, and volunteers are strongly advised not to carry unnecessary amounts of cash or other valuables with them when they come to volunteer.

Other ABNC Policies

Driving: You are not required to have a personal vehicle in order to volunteer for ABNC, however, if you have one you may be asked to use it in order to transport materials to and from events. All operators of a motor vehicle while volunteering with ABNC must be qualified to drive with proof of driver's license and insurance, and drive safely. Operators must have sufficient knowledge about vehicle handling, demonstrated by a safe driving record, so as to protect employees, volunteers, and the public from an unsafe driver.

Computer Use: ABNC owned computers are provided for the use of staff, with one designated as shared by volunteers in the Volunteer Office, which is to be used in order to further the mission of ABNC and complete assigned tasks. Volunteers are prohibited from viewing sexually explicit web sites, web sites depicting violence, or any other web sites that could be offensive to others. All ABNC-owned equipment is liable to be monitored at any time and without warning and volunteers should not expect any

privacy in their use of the same. Please handle equipment with care, ensuring its safe and proper operation and storage.

Data: The use of ABNC's electronic communication systems, including computers, e-mail access, voice mail, telephone systems, fax machines, and all forms of internet access is for ABNC business and for authorized purposes only. ABNC owns the rights to all data and files in any computer, network, or other information systems used by ABNC.

Recognition

Volunteers play a crucial role in the success of Armand Bayou Nature Center, and many of the rewards to be gained from volunteering cannot be obtained elsewhere. ABNC allows people to gain knowledge about the inner workings of an environmental and educational non-profit, introduces volunteers to like-minded people, and provides a sense of satisfaction from hard work. In addition, ABNC likes to recognize volunteers periodically for their service provided the volunteer accepts and welcomes this recognition.

Volunteer Acknowledgement Form

I, _____
Please Print

acknowledge that I have read and understand the volunteer handbook and am familiar with all of Armand Bayou Nature Center's policies and procedures. By signing this document I acknowledge, understand, accept, and agree to comply with the policies and procedures laid out in the volunteer handbook provided to me. I understand that this handbook is not meant to cover every situation that may arise during my time as a volunteer, but is meant as a general guideline to which I will adhere. I understand that ABNC may revise, supplement, or rescind any policies or portion of the Handbook from time to time as it deems appropriate, and I agree to comply with such policies as they are changed.

Signature _____

Date _____

Armand Bayou Nature Center
Photograph and Publicity Release

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

My name and signature on this document authorizes Armand Bayou Nature Center to use my name, image, voice, and/or appearance, or that of my child named below, as may be found in any photographs, video recordings, audiotapes, digital images and similar forms taken or made on behalf of Armand Bayou Nature Center programs and/or activities for public relations purposes without payment or any other consideration.

Name: _____

If under 18, Parent's Name: _____

Address: _____ Phone: (____) _____

City _____ State: ____ Zip Code: _____

SIGNATURE: _____ **DATE:** _____

The information on this form is collected exclusively for and is needed to obtain your consent for the use of your photograph/image/audio recording. The information will be used by the Armand Bayou Nature Center only for the purpose of verifying that proper consent has been provided. If you have any questions about the collection, use or disclosure of this information by the Nature Center, please contact: Executive Director, Armand Bayou Nature Center, PO Box 58828, Houston TX 77258 281-474-2551 or email abnc@abnc.org.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Education

Trail Guides – Guide visitors on interpretive trail walks through the forest or prairie. Guided canoe trips on Armand Bayou are twice a month on Saturdays.

Farm Exhibit Interpreter – Provide information and directions to visitors at the Hanson House and Martyn Farm.

Farm Demonstrator – Give visitors visual and specific information about 19th century farm life.

Natural History Demonstrator – Give visitors visual and specific information about local natural history.

Weekday Teacher – Teach children’s classes offered in the current Eco-Adventures Brochure. Natural history and farm topics are covered.

Outreach – Take ABNC’s educational offerings off-site, share information about ABNC with the public through booths and exhibits.

Visitor Member Services – Provide information and welcome visitors on weekends.

Stewardship – Provide special assistance to ABNC by participating in preserve/wildlife habitat management and restoration. There is a “Friday Prairie” group meeting each week, and Stewardship is scheduled mornings of the first and third Saturdays.

Facilities – Provide building, equipment and grounds maintenance and repairs. The Guardians of the Gardens meet the fourth Saturday of each month.

Animal Care Specialist – Assist in the proper care and husbandry of all captive animals at ABNC.

The Volunteer Manual describes each of the above positions in more detail.

More to consider:

Special Events – Assist by helping with or coordinating ABNC’s yearly events:
Annual Gala, Prairie Pandemonium, and Martyn Farm Harvest Festival

Volunteer Newsletter

Bayou Foliage is produced monthly to keep our corps up-to-date and in-the-know.

Volunteer Website

www.abncvols.org is the place to find information and log your hours.

Photography

Walk with Lyman Brown to find amazing scenes we walk by every day.

Monday Mob

Most Mondays (except during EcoCamp) a group meets in classroom 3 to inventory items on site, sort documents, and prepare to create into digital format so that we have an archive of our history.