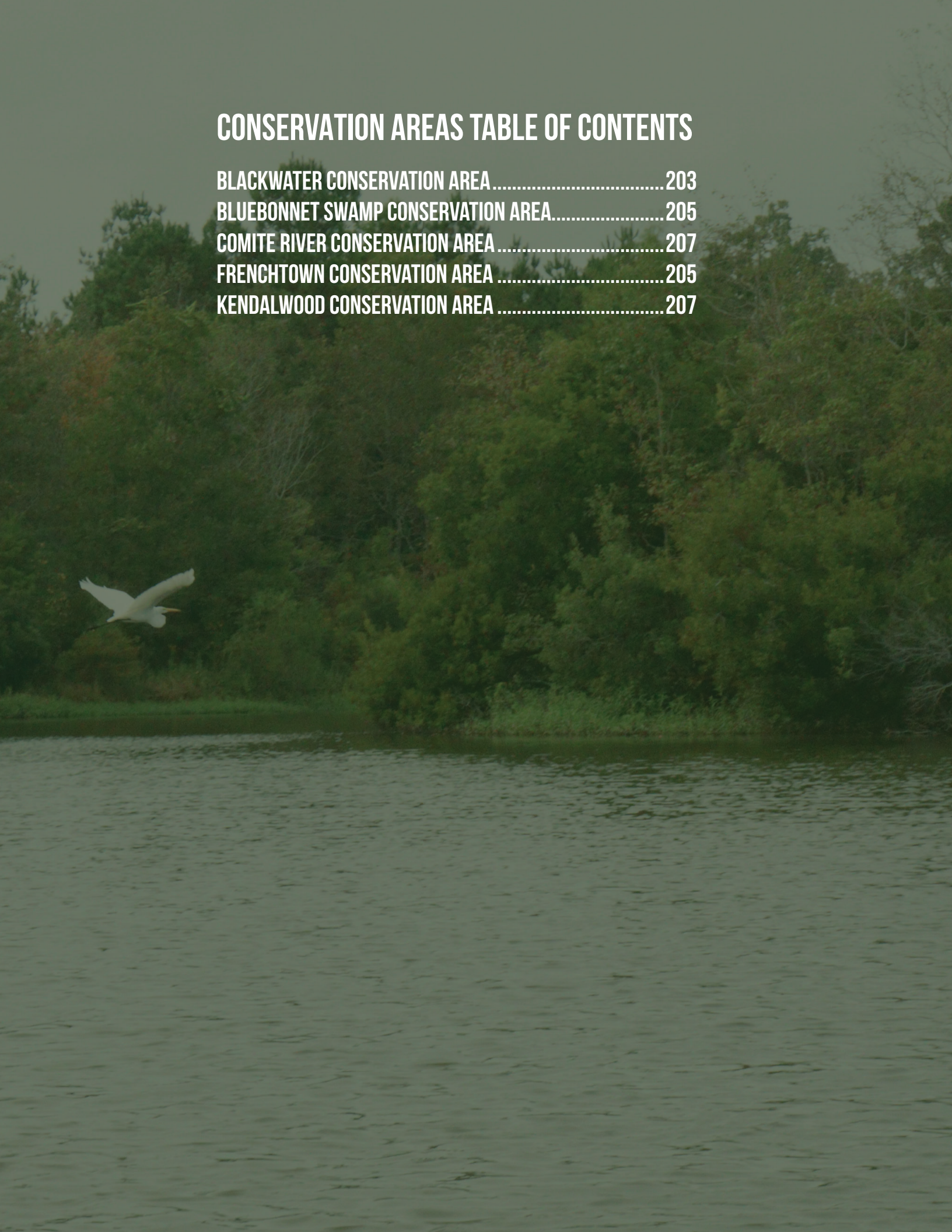


# CONSERVATION AREAS TABLE OF CONTENTS

BLACKWATER CONSERVATION AREA .....	203
BLUEBONNET SWAMP CONSERVATION AREA.....	205
COMITE RIVER CONSERVATION AREA .....	207
FRENCHTOWN CONSERVATION AREA .....	205
KENDALWOOD CONSERVATION AREA .....	207



## INTRODUCTION

BREC is dedicated to protecting habitats, conserving resources, reducing species loss, and promoting recreational and education opportunities for residents. There are five (5) Conservation Areas that serve a double purpose of protecting biodiversity and providing recreational interpretive opportunities to the public with as little impact as possible to the ecosystem. Amenities may include parking, restrooms, potable water, benches, picnic tables, hiking trails, pavilions and for some, Nature Centers or Stations. Overall, BREC has 847.12 acres of land designated as Conservation Areas in 5 separate parks.

With the help of CCD and the Design Division Staff, NRM is continuing to improve BREC's Conservation Areas. The COVID-19 pandemic brought a dramatic increase in hikers, joggers, and nature lovers due to social distancing and quarantine mandates. As a result, BREC has continued its efforts to make trail more accessible year-round and ensure all hiking trails have consistent and updated trail signage. Additionally, focus has been placed on interpreting resources to the public through interpretive signage installations.



# BLACKWATER CONSERVATION AREA

Blackwater Conservation Area is a 57.48-acre ecosystem restoration site located in Central, LA at the intersection of Hooper and Blackwater Road. It is considered an “Ecological Success Story” because with the help of BREC and Army Corp of Engineers, it was successfully transitioned to native healthy ecosystem from a historical river silt mining operation. This Conservation Area contains two large fishing ponds, fishing piers, nature trails, a pavilion with restrooms, and access to the Comite River, one of the largest waterways in the parish. An informational kiosk is located near the parking area features a site map, rules and regulations information, as well as brochures and a place to advertise upcoming events. Interpretative signage is also located along the nature trail and contains educational material about the local ecology and fishing piers are located around both of the ponds allowing for easy access for fishing.

In 2018 Blackwater received a management plan which highlighted its unique features and identified management strategies to better protect the park from impact and educate the public on its resources. One of those management actions was to provide better signage so in 2018 an informational kiosk was added with a trail map. Additionally, improved access to ponds for recreational fishing was called for to reduce erosion and impacts to vegetation so in 2019 seven (7) small fishing piers were constructed around the two ponds. At the same time a boat launch was created for pond management access and future paddling programs. In 2022, the entrance sign was installed which follows the new signage standards. Additional signage updates will take place once the master plan is completed which was started in 2021 and anticipated to be completed in 2023.

## PROJECT DATE

- 2015 - 2019: LSU Coastal Roots Plantings
- 2015: BREC’s First Bioblitz Event
- 2018: Commission Approved Blackwater Management Plan
- 2018: Information Kiosk
- 2019: Water Hyacinth Removal/ Pond Restoration Project
- 2019: Fishing Pier + Boat Launch Installation
- 2021: Eagle Scout Bat Box Project
- 2021: Master Plan started
- 2022: New Entrance Signage





# BLUEBONNET SWAMP CONSERVATION AREA

Bluebonnet Swamp Conservation Area is located in the middle of Baton Rouge along Bluebonnet Boulevard between Perkins and Highland Road and was established in 1997 as the first Conservation Area in the BREC park system. Initially designed to be the hub of conservation education in the parish, the “Swamp in the City” provides easy access to nature in a densely populated part of Baton Rouge. Along with a staffed Nature Center and 9,500 square foot education building, this 102.75-acre conservation area contains a variety of amenities including nature trails, a boardwalk through the swamp, interpretative signage, and a pollinator garden.

In 2018 improvements were made to the parking and site circulation. The work consisted of improvements and upgrade to an existing parking area with permeable parking, directional signage, and landscaping with native plants. A new connection was established to the Education Building and the Porte Cochere project provides covered vehicle drop-off for buses and persons entering the Education Building. In 2020 and 2021 a boardwalk and trail refurbishment project was completed to remedy some erosion issues along the trail and repair section of boardwalk that were failing.

Additionally, around this time a large-scale management strategy against invasive species was begun to begin the process of eradicating paper mulberry from the park. Phase 1 of the operation took place in 2020 ending in 2021 with reforestation planting taking place with the help of outside partner volunteers. Phase 2 began in 2022 and is slotted to be completed in 2023 with a second large-scale reforestation planting. To activate the meadow area a native plant pollinator garden was built and planting with the help of summer campers in 2021.

BREC staff host nature programs throughout the year including nature camps, guided hikes, and

## PROJECT DATE

- 2018: Site Circulation + Parking Improvements
- 2021: Forest Restoration Ph 1
- 2021: Boardwalk + Trail Improvements
- 2021: Native Plant Pollinator Garden
- 2022: Education Building Porte Cochere
- 2022: Interpretive Signage
- 2022: Native Iris Planting
- 2023: Forest Restoration Ph 2
- 2024: Building Repairs + New HVAC
- 2024: Vision Plan Stakeholder + Community Engagement Meetings
- 2024: Vision Plan Report Underway

rotating exhibits. Several natural community types are present including Cypress Tupelo Swamp, Southern Mesophytic Forest, and Bottomland Hardwood Forest. Due to its location in the heart of the city, and its accessibility to LSU and Southern University, Bluebonnet Swamp Conservation Area is also used for scientific research. Current projects include tracking the movement and habits of birds, removing invasive species, and restoring natural communities.

A Master Plan is underway utilizing stakeholder and community engagements combined with site analysis to set the stage for the creation of a variety of experiences that will translate the ecological narrative of connecting people to the place. The Vision Plan Report will mitigate environmental and economic challenges that the swamp currently faces, while building a road map for the evolution of the Bluebonnet Swamp Conservation Area.



# COMITE RIVER CONSERVATION AREA

Comite River Conservation Area is located in Central, LA along Hooper Road and contains a 5.5-mile trail system that provides recreational opportunities for both mountain bike riding and hiking. The trail system contains steep terrain and obstacles making this one of the more popular mountain bike riding trails in East Baton Rouge Parish. This 100.4-acre conservation area also contains several amenities including a parking lot, covered picnic area, a bike cleaning/repair station, and restrooms. BREC's CORE Division maintains the trails and hosts events at this conservation area including mountain bike and trail running races.

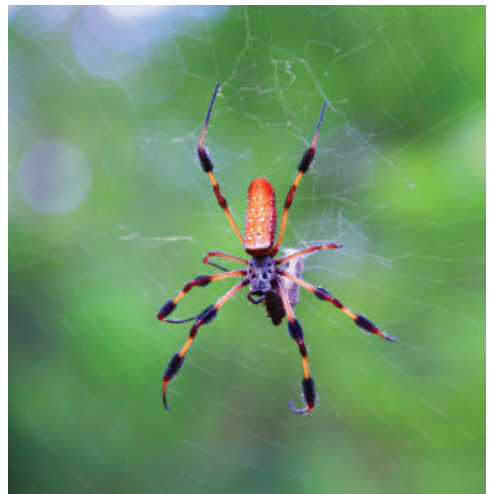
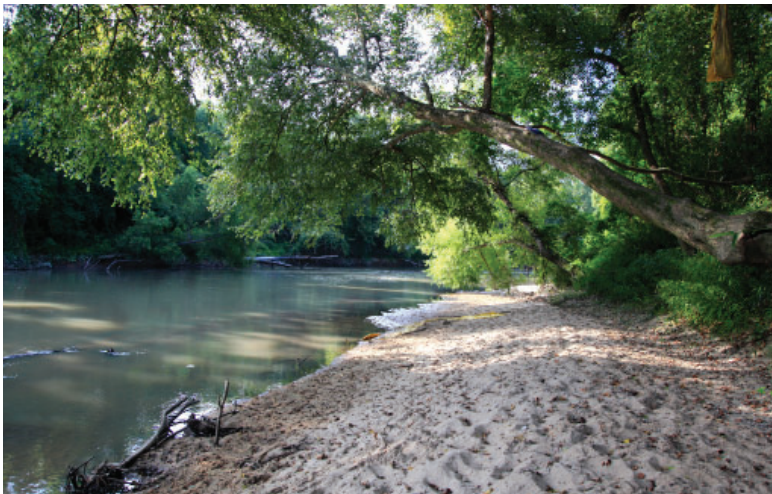
Comite River Conservation Area is bordered by the Comite River and Cypress Bayou and contains a variety of habitats providing accessibility to nature viewing. It also provide access to the Comite River which is a popular hiking destination in the park. Due to its size and connectivity to other natural areas in its vicinity, it likely provides valuable habitat for wildlife and ecosystem services to the surrounding community.

## PROJECT DATE

- 2019: Eagle Scout Bike Repair Station
- 2021: GIS data collection of trails
- 2023: Anticipated signage update







# FRENCHTOWN CONSERVATION AREA

Frenchtown Conservation Area is referred to as “The Land Between the Rivers,” as it is located at the confluence of the Amite and Comite rivers. It is BREC’s largest Conservation Area comprising 495-acres. The habitat includes a mix of rare and common native ecosystems ranging from bottomland hardwood forest to spruce pine hardwood-flatwood forest. Frenchtown currently has over 3 miles of trails which wind around the north and central parts of the park including access to the Amite River beach area, several Amite and Comite River overlooks, and access to Cypress-Tupelo sloughs and swamps.

Site access can sometimes be problematic due to proximity to the rivers and elevation of the land, but the habitats were designed to flood and by doing so, they reduce the impact on neighborhoods and homes downstream. The park is not only important for local wildlife and the conservation of ecosystems, but also for the ecosystem services it provides to surrounding communities.

Frenchtown is a large site that requires planned improvements around wet seasons and access. Historically, focus was placed on getting hikers in and out of the park safely with the inclusion of directional trail signage and loops which provided shorter or more accessible hiking opportunities.

A Master Plan Report was prepared in 2019 to guide future development. During the master plan process, local law enforcement identified issues with accessibility for rescues and patron safety. As a part of Phase 1 of the master plan, in 2022 CCD began the necessary trail improvements to make the main Hardwood Forest Loop accessible by ATV. This will also result in the trail being accessible to hikers during more times of the year due to improved water crossings and raised boardwalk style bridges in wet areas. Frenchtown Conservation Area was the chosen location for the 2023 Bioblitz.

A new Nature Station opening in 2024 will provide meeting space and facilities for events, rentals and conservation based educational activities.

## PROJECT DATE

- 2016: 3-acre Property + Residence Acquired
- 2016: Residence Upgraded to Education Building
- 2016: Bamboo Loop Constructed + Directional Trail Signage
- 2017: Hosted BREC Bioblitz Event
- 2019: Amite River Overlook Trail Reestablished
- 2019: Master Plan Report
- 2021: Directional Trail Signage Updated
- 2021: New Park Entrance Sign
- 2021: ATV Gates Installed
- 2021: Privet Restoration Area Planting
- 2022: Emergency Access Trail improvements to Hardwood Forest Loop
- 2023: Hosted BREC Bioblitz Event
- 2024: Nature Station Opening





# KENDALWOOD CONSERVATION AREA

Kendalwood Conservation Area is located at the southernmost tip of EBRP and contains frontage along Bayou Manchac. The unique natural area includes over 2 miles of trails that wind hikers through native habitat and loop along Bayou Manchac providing great views of the waterways with benches for an easy place to rest.

The 1.2-mile primitive hiking trail loop that was developed by NRM staff and volunteers in 2017. That same year the parking area was expanded to provide additional parking for park users now that the Conservation Area features trails. After the trail was installed, staff worked with volunteers of the Louisiana Hiking Club to install a large, elevated footbridge over the creek to make the trail more accessible.

In 2019, a secondary hiking loop was installed using volunteers to bring people all the way to the bayou and since then, each year additional bog and foot bridges are installed in wet areas and over water crossings to improve trail accessibility. In 2022 staff added benches at the bayou overlooks since the park is so remote and did not have any places to rest along the trail. Future improvements will include continuing to work to make the trail more accessible during wet seasons and invasive species removal projects focusing on *ardisia crenata* in the understory which has been identified as a threat in this habitat.

## PROJECT DATE

- 2015: Entry Parking Developed
- 2016: Arrowwood Trail Loop Constructed
- 2017: Improved Parking Area
- 2017: Large Footbridge Installed with Louisiana Hiking Club
- 2018: Trailhead Kiosk Installed
- 2019: Imashaka Trail Created + Signage
- 2020: New Footbridge on Imashaka Trail
- 2021: New Bog Bridges on Imashaka Trail
- 2022: New Bog Bridges on Arrowwood Loop



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