



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# BABCOCK RANCH PRESERVE RECREATION MASTER PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With support provided by the Babcock Ranch Preserve Management Partners, Babcock Ranch, Inc., Board, and the public at large, the Genesis Group team has prepared this Recreation Master Plan (RMP). The RMP was developed in accordance with the Babcock Ranch Preserve Management Plan which states the following:

“One of the goals of the purchase of the Babcock Ranch Preserve (BRP) is to provide recreational opportunities to the public that are compatible with a working ranch operation.” (*Babcock Ranch Preserve Management Plan, Section 2.9, pg. 37*)

“Managing public access on the BRP will be an adaptive process that will require time and patience in order to strike a balance between visitors’ desired experiences and the needs of this working landscape.” (*Babcock Ranch Preserve Management Plan, Section 3.8, pg. 87*)

“A Recreation Master Plan will be created to guide recreation on the Preserve. Activities that are not compatible with the Recreation Master Plan or with management objectives in this (*Management*) plan shall not be allowed.” (*Babcock Ranch Preserve Management Plan, Section 3.8.1, pg. 88*)

The RMP for BRP is different than plans typically prepared for wildlife management areas, state parks and other state-owned lands. The Preserve was established by the legislature to be financially self-sustaining as discussed in the Management Plan:

“There are competing elements on BRP between the need to be a financially self sustaining working ranch and the protections of resource values related to the management of public conservation lands. These elements are not necessarily opposing in nature, but will have to be balanced in order to meet the intent of the acquisition. These dual needs create fiscal challenges that may limit



managers' ability to implement all elements of the (*Management Plan.*" (*Babcock Ranch Preserve Management Plan, Section 1.4, pg. 14*)

This is understood to mean that public access typical of other public lands will be funded by the revenue generated from fees paid by the public for high quality nature-based recreation opportunities not typically found on other public lands in the State.

Based on input received during the review of this plan, several important points were emphasized:

- The BRP Management Plan is the "officially approved" document and will take precedent over the RMP if there are any inconsistencies.
- The RMP provides a broad overview of recreation opportunities and does not provide site specific design or site specific environmental analysis.
- The RMP is intended to provide guidance for the future recreation activities on the Preserve.
- The RMP provides broad outlines of possible recreational opportunities. The plan does not provide a listing of all recreational opportunities that might be implemented, nor does it imply that everything mentioned in the plan will be implemented.
- The location of trails, campsites, facilities, etc., identified in this RMP is conceptual in nature. Final siting decisions will require:
  - ◆ Identifying those sites with truly outstanding natural features,
  - ◆ Defining the specific high quality nature-based activities and experiences that each feature can deliver, and
  - ◆ Evaluating if and how sensitive habitat and wildlife at each site will be protected.
- The management partners will establish recreation management and operational guidelines that will determine public access controls. The RMP envisions that public access beyond the primary access point and primary trailhead/core recreation area will be carefully controlled and limited by special use or special event permits. Limited special use permits would be issued at a Visitor Center. In addition, consideration could be given to providing the special use permits to pre-qualified guides. Additional access criteria will be established specifically for hunting.



- Implementation of any RMP element will be subject to:
  - ◆ Detailed “ground truthing” and design,
  - ◆ Detailed environmental analysis and permitting,
  - ◆ Further evaluation of potential impacts to the ranching operation, and
  - ◆ The availability of funding.
- Additional analysis will be required to more fully evaluate the potential revenue that could be generated by the recreation opportunities identified in the RMP.
- There is no required implementation time frame associated with any part of the RMP.

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The content and format of the RMP is consistent with the contractual Scope of Services for the project as follows:

### **Section 1 – Project Research**

This section provides a brief overview of the data collected and reviewed, site observations, and stakeholder interviews. Stakeholder interviews included meetings with the Management Partners, Ranch Management, Babcock Ranch, Inc. Board, and Kitson & Partners, along with user group workshops. The meeting agendas and notes were included in the Research Summary Report dated April 15, 2009.

### **Section 2 – Recreation User and Opportunity Analysis**

This section is a detailed analysis of the information collected during the Project Research phase in conjunction with the data collected from other public and private recreation resources in the region (Sections 2A – 2D). Section 2E of the RMP identifies recreation opportunities for the BRP based on the data collected, stakeholder meetings and workshops, site observations, interviews with other resources and the analysis of the information. The recreation opportunities that have been identified are consistent with the Management Plan and include both low impact and intensive recreation uses on the following page:



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### **Recommended Low Impact Recreational Uses**

- Trails (Hiking, Equestrian, and Mountain Biking)
- Hunting
- Primitive Camping
- Remote Improved Campsites (Potentially located at or nearby former hunt camp sites)
- Guided and Self-Guided Nature Study
- Wildlife Viewing

### **Recommended Intensive Recreational Uses**

- Visitor and Environmental Education Center
  - Ecological and Heritage Tours and Events (Wilderness Adventures)
  - Equestrian Facilities and Programs
  - Full Facility Camping (RV, Camper, Tent)
  - Trap, Skeet and Sporting Clays Range
  - Specialty Lodging and Meeting Facilities
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## **Section 3 – Inventory of Existing Recreation Facilities, Activities and Uses**

This section focuses on the BRP and the currently limited recreation opportunities which include:

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- Wilderness Adventures Eco-Tour
  - Eco-Tour Trail – Adjacent to Wilderness Adventures
  - Footprints Trail – Located on the northwest corner of the Preserve
  - Designated Hunting Area – Located on the northeast corner of the Preserve
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In addition to the existing recreation facilities, the Preserve’s network of improved roads and trails (*See Appendix A, Exhibit 1*) will provide access for other unique forms of recreation. The Existing Recreation Resources graphic (*See Appendix A, Exhibit 2*) was prepared to provide a generalized location of the existing recreation opportunities, and the relationships of these opportunities to existing ranch management activity nodes.

This section also identifies (in general terms) the Recreation Opportunity Settings by applying Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) principles to define Recreation Classifications (*See Appendix A, Exhibit 4*) and Recreation Land Use Zones (*See Appendix A, Exhibit 6*).



## Section 4 – Recreation Master Plan

Section 4A (Visitor Experiences, Management Activities, and Infrastructure Needs) provides a detailed discussion of the analysis and approach utilized to develop the RMP. This section also provides detailed descriptions of the recreation elements proposed for the BRP, and includes a summary of standards as guidelines that should be considered when implementing recreation opportunities. The RMP is recommended for implementation in two phases. Phase I includes recreation opportunities that can be implemented with minimal capital investment and minimal impact to the existing ranch operations and natural features. Phase II recreation opportunities will require much greater capital investment and more detailed planning, natural feature evaluation, design and permitting prior to implementation. The recreation elements suggested for each phase are as follows:



## Phase I Recreation Opportunities

Note: There are no required implementation time frames specified for any recreation opportunity identified in the Recreation Master Plan.

<b>Visitor Access</b>	Utilize existing Tucker's Grade that has direct access to Wilderness Adventures from State Road 31. It is understood that this roadway is located on Kitson's property and that appropriate access rights have been provided to continue use of the roadway.
<b>Interim Trailhead/Visitor Staging</b>	Utilize Wilderness Adventures parking area and facilities as the interim visitor center and trailhead. Event overflow parking can be provided on an adjacent pasture. Trails can be accessed from this trailhead. Consideration should be given to upgrading the existing facilities provided at the Wilderness Adventures site to accommodate additional visitors and for compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) codes. Visitors planning an extended stay on the ranch would register, select campsites and depart from this trailhead (hiking, bicycle or horse). It is recommended that vehicular access into the core of the ranch should be restricted and/or controlled through special access permits.
<b>Trails (Hiking, Equestrian and Mountain Biking)</b>	<p>A series of trail loops for hiking, equestrian and mountain bikes are recommended (<i>See Appendix A, Exhibit 7</i>). The trail loops could follow established ranch roads/trails or could be located off of the existing roads/trails to provide a more isolated experience. The prerequisites to locating trails should include the mapping of outstanding natural and historic features, defining the experiences and activities that each feature will provide, and evaluating how sensitive areas will be protected.</p> <p>As trail use increases over time, trail separation may be considered to avoid user conflicts. Looped trails could be phased over a period of time to accommodate use and ranch operations. Minor maintenance will be required on the less traveled trails. Color coded trail blazing should be completed and trail maps prepared. Visitor's could utilize the trails for day use or extended excursions.</p>
<b>Hunting</b>	A three tier hunting program has been recommended for the Preserve. This program can be implemented at almost any time. Some Tier 2 Hunt Camp improvements will be required to provide the enhanced experience desired. ( <i>See Appendix A, Exhibit 8</i> )
<b>Former Hunt Camps/ Modestly Improved Campsites</b>	<p>Former Hunt Camps should be evaluated for re-use potential as modestly improved remote campsites. Utilizing the former Hunt Camp areas will minimize additional impacts to the environment. If the former Hunt Camps do not provide the best isolated high quality natural camping experience, other sites should be considered in the general vicinity to provide close access to nearby trails and access for maintenance vehicles and potentially special use permit access. The existing hunt camp facilities should be demolished and the debris removed (except for Jack's Camp log cabin and the Governor's Camp bunkhouse). The log cabin at Jack's Camp and the Governor's Camp bunkhouse should be secured and stabilized to prevent further degradation. The former Tick camp is in the best condition of all camps. This site should be evaluated as a potential continued use cabin site.</p> <p>If the former hunt camps are not utilized the prerequisites for locating new improved campsites are consistent with locating trails. Improved campsites should include 3 - 4 graded shell pads suitable for a</p>

<b>(Continued) Former Hunt Camps/ Modestly Improved Campsites</b>	camper or tent, a self-composting or vault toilet, and a non-potable water source. These facilities can be utilized by those seeking a remote isolated wilderness camping experience or during hunting season to accommodate the Tier 2 hunters. (See <i>Appendix A, Exhibit 7</i> )
<b>Primitive Campsites</b>	Primitive campsites are recommended at strategic locations adjacent to the trail network to provide remote isolated camping experiences. Primitive campsites should include a simple cleared area and fire ring near a reliable non-potable water source. In addition, consideration should be given to providing self-composting or vault toilets at each site. (See <i>Appendix A, Exhibit 7</i> )
<b>Upgraded Primitive Campsites</b>	Depending on the use, experience and projections for use, consideration should be given to upgrading the primitive campsites to include raised platforms and screened enclosures. This will extend the potential seasonal use of the trails and associated primitive campsites.

## Phase II Recreation Opportunities

Note: There are no required implementation time frames for any recreation opportunity identified in the Recreation Master Plan.

<b>Visitor Access</b>	<p>It is recommended that future visitor access to the Preserve is provided along Tram Grade. This is the existing entrance for all Ranch operations, includes the iconic gateway, provides a superior visitor driving experience and is located on Preserve property.</p> <p>This access roadway would extend from SR 31 to a point just west of the Ranch Operations Center then turn south to the Wilderness Adventures Trailhead and then northeast across the Tucker's Grade Bridge to the proposed Visitor and Environmental Education Center. Several improvements will be required including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pavement widening to allow for two way travel,</li> <li>• New paved roadway constructed to bypass the Ranch Operations Center and community,</li> <li>• Potential improvements to the Tucker's Grade bridge, and</li> <li>• New paved roadway extending to the proposed Core Recreation Area.</li> </ul> <p>It is recommended that vehicular access to the ranch beyond the Core Recreation Area should be restricted and controlled through special use permits.</p>
<b>Core Recreation Area</b>	<p>Several recreation opportunities have been identified for this area. More detailed planning analysis, and design will provide the opportunity to prioritize and phase the proposed improvements to fit available funding. The Core Recreation Area should include the following facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visitors Center (reception, museum, and environmental education),</li> <li>• Relocated Wilderness Adventures,</li> <li>• Trailhead accommodations for all potential visitors and trail users,</li> <li>• Full facility camping,</li> <li>• Specialty lodging and meeting facilities,</li> <li>• Overflow event parking,</li> <li>• Picnic areas, and</li> <li>• Nature walks and boardwalks (including a connection to Cypress Lodge).</li> </ul>

<b>Sporting Clays and Archery Range</b>	It is expected that this recreation opportunity will be located at the abandoned range site and that a concessionaire will most likely take responsibility for the operation of the new range. Therefore, this facility could be upgraded and placed back into service at any time.
<b>Oil Well Grade Trailhead</b>	A third trailhead is recommended primarily for use by equestrians that intend to utilize the trail network located in the northeast section of the Preserve. This trailhead could also be utilized during hunting season. This remote trailhead should provide facilities for equestrian users including a large fenced and gated area for trailer loading and unloading, potable water source, hitching posts, self-composting or vault toilets, group picnic shelter, and an information kiosk with maps. A special use permit should be required to utilize this trailhead.
<b>Primitive Backcountry Cabins</b>	Primitive log cabins, similar to Jack's Branch Cabin, could be considered in remote backcountry locations to support hut-to-hut guided hiking. Such primitive cabins could be constructed on piers, include screened enclosure, composting toilet, pitcher pump, and fire ring.

Section 4 also includes a brief description of carrying capacity and guiding standards to monitor



visitation and to control impacts on the BRP. In addition, a preliminary fee structure has been suggested.

## Appendix – Map Series

The Appendix includes the maps that have been prepared to support the RMP as follows:

- **Exhibit 1: Existing Roads, Firelanes, and Trails** – This exhibit identifies the existing paved, graded and primitive roads/firelanes and trails that are located on the Preserve.
- **Exhibit 2: Existing Recreation Resources** – This exhibit identifies the existing recreation areas and opportunities on the Preserve in general terms.
- **Exhibit 3: Regional Recreation Context Map** – This exhibit identifies the location of the nature-based recreation areas in the general vicinity of Babcock Ranch Preserve.
- **Exhibit 4: Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Classifications (ROS)** – This graphic divides the Preserve into specific classifications based on the criteria outlined in the ROS framework.
- **Exhibit 5: Soil Series Classification** – This exhibit identifies the soils on the preserve based on their characteristics. This graphic is also included in the Management Plan.
- **Exhibit 6: Recreation Land Use Zones** – This graphic provides a breakdown of the Preserve into four general zones that rate the recreation opportunity from highest to lowest.
- **Exhibit 7: Recreation Resources Plan** – This exhibit identifies the proposed trail network and the locations of trailheads and potential campsites.
- **Exhibit 8: Hunting Zones** – The proposed hunting zones are identified in three tiers on this exhibit. Tier 2 is further broken down into defined hunting areas.

## Summary

In summary, a thorough analysis has been conducted and the recreation opportunities for the BRP have been carefully considered to minimize any disruption to the overall ranch management, provide a host of unique and desirable recreation experiences that are consistent with the management plan, and provide a reliable revenue stream to help support the overall operation of the Preserve.

