

# WELCOME!

## Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute's Board of Directors



# History of the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute

*The mission of the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute is to promote public awareness, appreciation, and concern for the natural diversity of the Chihuahuan Desert region through research and education.*

The Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute (CDRI) was founded in 1974 as a research organization dedicated to gathering and disseminating knowledge about the Chihuahuan Desert region. Although the largest of the North American deserts, very little was known about the natural history of the Chihuahuan Desert region. An enthusiastic, small, and mostly volunteer Institute staff immediately began an aggressive research and education program that involved everything from studying the nesting behavior of golden eagles to taking teachers on rafting trips down the Rio Grande.

In the late 1970s, the Board and staff achieved a major goal with the purchase of 507 acres of grassland and volcanic rock outcrops near Fort Davis, Texas. Destined to become the headquarters of the CDRI, staff and volunteers worked diligently to turn the landsite into a facility that would support scientific research and serve as an educational tool. Over the next two decades, an arboretum featuring trees and shrubs of the Chihuahuan Desert region was planted, a 1400 sq. ft. greenhouse containing one of the world's largest collections of Chihuahuan Desert cacti and succulents was established, and an adobe visitors' center with exhibit space, administrative offices, and a gift shop was built. The landsite, known as the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center and Botanical Gardens, is open to the public Monday through Saturday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

In addition to operating the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center and Botanical Gardens, the CDRI hosts an internationally-respected scientific symposium on the natural resources of the Chihuahuan Desert region every five years and provides competitive scholarships and grants to students conducting research in the desert.



Over the past ten years, the CDRI has achieved some major accomplishments:

- Creation of a mission statement, strategic plan for 2012-2016, and a facilities master plan.
- Establishment of a Permanent Endowment Fund, currently valued at approximately \$1.9 million.
- Development of an education program that includes life-long learning opportunities, programs for science teachers, a youth program, and interpretive exhibits. Educational programs were given to approximately 1,220 people in 2012.
- Growth in volunteer contributions from 398 hours per year in 2000 to over 3,400 hours in 2012. Volunteers assist with special events, education programs, landsite management, and administrative tasks.
- Adoption of a Living Plant Collection Policy and accessioning of the CDRI's living plant collection.
- Establishment of the first Director of Research position to serve as the focal point for research activities at the CDRI.
- Design of an architectural prototype for the new Research and Education Building, as part of an upcoming Capital Campaign.

The future looks bright for the CDRI. As a new board member, we encourage you to take a leadership role in helping the CDRI reach its full potential by developing policies to place the CDRI on a firm foundation, and assisting with fundraising to move the master plan from a vision to reality.



# Current Projects

## ❖ Facilities Improvement

This year we completed a major renovation of the main greenhouse to improve the light and climate for our valuable cactus collection and built a small greenhouse for the young cactus. Creating optimal conditions for our exclusive collection of native specimens is crucial in preserving and keeping them healthy and maintaining our contribution to research and sustainability of the Chihuahuan Desert species.

CDRI was one of a handful of recipients of a Green Mountain Energy grant to erect a Solar Array. The eye-catching solar panels are powering the Nature Center and will offset our energy costs. This installation provides an opportunity to model sustainable stewardship and the benefits of renewable energy to the public.

## ❖ Education

Our life-long learning program features field trips, workshops, and lectures that help enhance the knowledge of the Chihuahuan Desert region for adults, teachers and students throughout the year. Young adult programs offer a variety of hands-on-learning opportunities focusing on desert ecology, field research techniques, and water in the desert. Special education field days such as *The Earth Rocks!!!* and *Bugs, Bugs, Bugs*, as well as our summer day camps, encourage elementary-aged children to explore nature and its wonders. Curricula for *The Earth Rocks!!!* is aligned with the Texas state standards, thus enhancing our students' classroom knowledge.

## ❖ Research

Habitat conservation is an important approach to the conservation of rare plants; should we also be conserving the habitats needed by the pollinators of these plants? Under a grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife, the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute and Director of Research, Dr. Cathryn Hoyt, are studying floral visitors to rare plants, which ones are truly effective pollinators, and how we can work with conservation partners to protect both the plants and their pollinators. In the course of her work, Dr. Hoyt documented the first U.S. record for the Spotless Comma butterfly and extended the range for a fairly rare bee into the Davis Mountains.

## ❖ Mining Exhibit

A group of dedicated CDRI Board members, some former miners, erected, funded and maintain the exhibit that showcases mining history in this region.

## ❖ Volunteering

When we say we 'could not do it without volunteers,' we mean it! We have over 150 people volunteering close to 6,000 hours. They assist in every aspect of making the Nature Center available to the public, including keeping the Botanical Garden in top shape, maintaining our 4 miles of trails, setting up for special events, teaching during our education field days, working at the Visitor Center, and stuffing envelopes. One of our primary goals is to accurately fit our volunteers to the jobs at hand – which keeps them happy and coming back.



# Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards

## **Determine the organization's mission and purpose**

A statement of mission and purposes should articulate the organization's goals, means, and primary constituents served. It is the board's responsibility to create the mission statement and review it periodically for accuracy and validity. Each individual board member should fully understand and support it.

## **Select the executive director**

Boards must reach consensus on the executive director's job description and undertake a careful search process to find the most qualified individual for the position.

## **Support the executive director and review his or her performance**

The board should ensure that the executive director has the moral and professional support he or she needs to further the goals of the organization. The executive director, in partnership with the entire board, should decide upon a periodic evaluation of the executive director's performance.

## **Ensure effective organizational planning**

As stewards of an organization, boards must actively participate with the staff in an overall planning process and assist in implementing the plan's goals.

## **Ensure adequate resources**

One of the board's foremost responsibilities is to provide adequate resources for the organization to fulfill its mission. The board should work in partnership with the executive director to raise funds from the community.

## **Manage resources effectively**

The board, in order to remain accountable to its donors, the public, and to safeguard its tax-exempt status, must assist in developing the annual budget and ensuring that proper financial controls are in place.

## **Determine, monitor, and strengthen the organization's programs and services**

The board's role in this area is to determine which programs are the most consistent with an organization's mission, and to monitor their effectiveness.

## **Enhance the organization's public standing**

An organization's primary link to the community, including constituents, the public, and the media, is the board. Clearly articulating the organization's mission, accomplishments, and goals to the public, as well as garnering support from important members of the community, are important elements of a comprehensive public relations strategy.

## **Ensure legal and ethical integrity and maintain accountability**

The board is ultimately responsible for ensuring adherence to legal standards and ethical norms. Solid personnel policies, grievance procedures, and a clear delegation to the executive director of hiring and managing employees will help ensure proper decorum in this area. The board must establish pertinent policies, and adhere to provisions of the organization's bylaws and articles of incorporation.

## **Recruit and orient new board members and assess board performance**

All boards have a responsibility to articulate and make known their needs in terms of member experience, skills, and many other considerations that define a "balanced" board composition. Boards must also orient new board members to their responsibilities and the organization's history, needs, and challenges. By evaluating its performance in fulfilling its responsibilities, the board can recognize its achievements and reach consensus on which areas need to be improved.

# Individual Board Member Responsibilities

## **Attend all board and committee meetings and functions, such as special events.**

The board of directors meets twice a year. The Annual meeting is held the last weekend of February; the second meeting is held in late October or early November. Special events include Membership Night during the Annual Native Plant Sale (held the last weekend of April); the Annual Members' Appreciation BBQ and Benefit Auction (held in early August); and the Open House over Thanksgiving Weekend.

## **Be informed about the organization's mission, services, policies, and programs.**

## **Review agenda and supporting materials prior to board and committee meetings.**

Material for meetings is posted on the CDRI website two weeks in advance of the meeting. Visit [www.cdri.org](http://www.cdri.org); *About: Board Only* and enter the password *members*. You will find the most current board manual, information about meetings, and 'Action Items' for the board.

## **Serve on committees and offer to take on special assignments.**

*The Executive Committee* consists of the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and 3 at-large members appointed by the President.

*The Audit Committee* oversees the audit which is conducted every other year. The books were last audited for FY2011 and will be audited for FY2013.

*The Permanent Endowment Committee* oversees the management of the CDRI's endowment fund.

The *Finance Committee* monitors the CDRI's financial records, reviews and oversees the creating of financial statements for the board, reviews and recommends an annual budget, and helps the board understand the organization's finances.

*The Board Governance Committee* identifies, recruits, and nominates persons to serve as members of the board of directors; drafts and recommends board policies as needed; and provides development opportunities for board membership.

*The Botanical Garden Committee* oversees the management of the living plant collection according to the procedures established in the Living Plant Collection Policy and recommends new accessions to the living plant collection.

*The Collections Committee* was recently established to develop a collections policy and oversee the addition of new items to the CDRI's living, nonliving, and library collections.

The *Development Committee* actively supports the CDRI development program through the formulation of strategies and activities that will serve to increase member and/or corporate contributions and gifts.

The *Ad Hoc Building Committee* oversees planning for construction projects.

## **Make a personal financial contribution to the organization.**

Personal financial contributions are based on the means of the individual board members. A minimum contribution of \$50 per month is recommended.

## **Inform others about the organization.**

## **Suggest possible nominees to the board who can make significant contributions to the work of the board and the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute.**

## **Keep up-to-date on developments in the fields of education, conservation and/or natural history-- especially as it relates to the Chihuahuan Desert region.**

**Follow conflict of interest and confidentiality policies.**

**Refrain from making special requests of the staff.**

CDRI staff members are extremely hardworking and are often juggling numerous responsibilities at the same time. Requests for staff assistance must go through the Executive Director, thus avoiding putting an individual staff member in an awkward position.

**Assist the board in carrying out its fiduciary responsibilities, such as reviewing the organization's annual financial statements.**

## Personal Characteristics to Consider

**Good board members have the...**

**Ability to** listen, analyze, think clearly and creatively work well with individual people and groups;

**Willingness to** prepare for and attend board and committee meetings, ask questions, take responsibility and follow through on a given assignment, contribute personal and financial resources in a generous way according to circumstances, open doors in the community, evaluate oneself;

**Willingness to develop certain skills if you do not already possess them, such as** cultivate and solicit funds; cultivate and recruit board members and other volunteers; read and understand financial statements; learn more about the substantive program area of the organization;

**Possess** honesty, sensitivity to and tolerance of differing views; a friendly, responsive, and patient approach, community-building skills; personal integrity; a developed sense of values; concern for the CDRI's development and a sense of humor.

Board Responsibilities taken from *Ten Basic Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards*. Washington, DC: BoardSource, 1996.

Board member responsibilities taken from *Six Keys to Recruiting, Orienting, and Involving Nonprofit Board Members*.





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