

# Coke County group chosen for large PTWC grant

The Central West Texas Trails Coalition in Coke County are the recipients of a \$398,000 grant for the Coke County Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Park. This project will include construction of about four miles of new OHV trails, maintenance training, and the development of water, power and sewer systems. It will also fund the purchase of trail tools, a storage container, a parking area and engineering.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission approved \$3.71 million dollars in grants to fund 22 motorized and non-motorized recreational trail-related projects across the state.

The National Recreational Trails Fund (NRTF) funds recreational trail construction, renovation and acquisition. The grants are funded from a portion of the federal gas tax

generated by gasoline purchases for off-road motorcycles and four-wheelers. Thirty percent of the total NRTF grants must be earmarked for motorized recreational trails, while another 30 percent must be spent on non-motorized trail projects. The remaining 40 percent is discretionary.

Several projects funded in previous years were completed under budget and four were cancelled, creating an additional \$700,000 available for re-allocation this year. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has been utilizing the re-allocated funds for trail improvement projects in state parks. The result is a total of \$4.37 million dollars in federal funding available to fund eligible trail construction projects.



[Editor's Note: The article below was written on Memorial Day, May 25, 2020.]

## Decoration Day

by James M. Decker

In the spring of 1915, the combatants of the "War to End All Wars" fought the Second Battle of Ypres, a bloody, ultimately inconclusive battle in western Belgium. Ypres was noteworthy as the first incident of troops from a former colony

(Canada) defeating an imperial European power (Germany) on European soil. It also marked Germany's first use of poison gas on the Western Front. On May 7, 1915, Lt. Col. John McCrae presided over the funeral of his friend and fellow Canadian soldier, Lt. Alexis Helmer, who was killed in the battle.

After Helmer's funeral, McCrae wrote a poem and promptly discarded it. Thankfully, McCrae's fellow soldiers retrieved the poem and it was published later that year in a British magazine. "In Flanders Fields" became one of the most famous literary works to arise from the war. It reads as follows:

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow*

*Between the crosses, row on row,*

*That mark our place; and in the sky*

*The larks, still bravely singing, fly*

*Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

*We are the Dead. Short days ago*

*We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,*

*Loved and were loved, and now we lie*

*In Flanders fields.*

*Take up our quarrel with the foe:*

*To you from failing hands we throw*

*The torch; be yours to hold it high.*

*If ye break faith with us who die*

*We shall not sleep, though poppies grow*

*In Flanders fields.*

Moina Michael was a professor at the University of Georgia who volunteered with the Young Women's Christian Association during the war. In 1918, she read McCrae's poem and was inspired to wear a red poppy as a message of remembrance for the valiant men and women who served in the bloody war. In 1921, after observing a need, Michael began to sell silk poppies to raise funds for disabled servicemen. The American Legion Auxiliary and Royal British Legion both adopted the poppy as a symbol of remembrance, creating the widespread use of the poppy on Memorial Day that we know so

well today.

The origins of Memorial Day itself are complex and disputed, with dozens of origin stories and locations. Many different communities, both Union and Confederate, began remembrance ceremonies during and after the American Civil War. Many such ceremonies were inspired by the Decoration Day traditions of Appalachia, in which families decorated graves and cemeteries to honor their ancestors. Over time, these ceremonies grew more numerous and coalesced into a national Decoration Day tradition. After World War II, the name became Memorial Day and it became a fixed federal holiday in 1971.

Today, on Memorial Day, we honor those who have died in service of America. Every group and community marks Memorial Day in its own way - from the elaborate to the simple to the individual - which is befitting of a holiday that developed generations ago via countless Decoration Days across the country. As we mark the day, let us think of the poppy. Let us remember the passion of Moina Michael, the grief of Lt. Col. John McCrae, and the sacrifice of Lt. Alexis Helmer there on Flanders fields, where the poppies blow.

*James Decker is a lawyer, farmer, and mayor in Stamford, Texas, and the creator of the forthcoming "West of 98"*

podcast and website. He may be contacted through Facebook at [facebook.com/james.decker](https://www.facebook.com/james.decker).

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