



The concrete base of some playground equipment at Blue Bonnet Park is fully exposed where ground mulch has been eroded and worn down by children throughout the summer. The mulch is placed around all parks' equipment for two reasons: It cushions falls children may have while playing on the equipment, and it provides a barrier against weeds and grasses which may try to grow in the areas. L&T photos/Chris Linenbroker

After long summer, mulch all but gone

By GISEELLE ARREDONDO

• Leader & Times

With so many families in Liberal attending the 2013 Duck Festival at Blue Bonnet Park last weekend, it's no wonder a lot of the children would want to head to the playgrounds.

However, a few parents were not willing to allow their kids to play there because it was missing the ground mulch that protects them if they happen to fall from any of the playground equipment.



“No one has said anything to me like that,” Parks Director Bill Houk said.

The mulch at some parks seems to be worn down or hasn’t been replaced in a while. Brief inspections at Light Park and Blue Bonnet Park, the two biggest and most popular parks in Liberal, seem to have the least amount of mulch. Normal wear and tear on the mulch with children scampering over it after a full summer could be one reason the mulch has been worn down.

“Well, we went through almost all the parks and put new mulch in it this year. I thought it was – it should of been, but I’ll check and see,” Houk said.

How can the city afford a new park like Leete, but not afford mulch?

“One reason is that the new park is paid for by the 1-percent sales tax,” Houk explained. “Maintenance on the parks comes from the general fund. It’s two completely separate budgets. Leete Park is new construction, and it’s paid for out of the 1-percent sales tax money.”

The mulch, which is made at the county’s landfill, is actually quite expensive for the city, according to Houk.

## missing mulch

Thursday, 26 September 2013 11:59

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“It’s an expensive process. I’m not sure just how much, but I know that at the first part of the year, we spent several thousand dollars on mulch. I thought we went to all the parks that needed it,” he said.

“We did most of the parks at the beginning of the year,” Houk added.