

TEXAS PRAIRIE

FROM THE NATIVE PRAIRIES ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

News

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PHOTO COURTESY OF RENEA TAYLOR

NPAT BOARD MEMBERS held their fall meeting in Deer Park and were treated to a walk on this special prairie.

Deer Park Prairie—Saved!

THANKS TO the combined efforts of many volunteers, the media, and more than one thousand donors, NPAT is pleased to announce that Deer Park Prairie has been saved! With a \$4 million price tag and just a few weeks to raise the funds, Bayou Land Conservancy and partners worked overtime to get the word out about this prairie.

Fundraising efforts even went as far as an attempt to get a “Colbert bump,” but in the end, a spot on Stephen Colbert’s national show wasn’t even necessary. The public outcry at the possibility of losing the prairie as well as the monetary response has been overwhelmingly passionate and humbling.

Deer Park Prairie was discovered a few years ago by Don Verser, a local birder and naturalist. It was determined to be one of a small number of remaining natural prairies in the Houston area, as well as a very special one. Virtually untouched by invasive plant species and human disturbance, Deer Park Prairie is located in the middle of a heavily developed area near the Houston ship channel. It is a phenomenon that this ecosystem had not already been developed or destroyed.

This rare prairie site was slated to become a housing development when

discovered. Had the prairie been sold to a developer, more than 200 houses would have been built on this 50-acre plot, and everything that makes it a unique and rich prairie would have been lost forever.

When conservationists were first given the deadline of August 20th, they had less than two weeks to raise that money. While they were not able to raise the total amount, they did raise \$3.2 million in such a short time that the landowner gave them a three-week extension to raise the remainder—until September 10th at midnight. With this extra time, the group was able to raise the rest of the money before deadline.

News of this prairie was covered by the *Houston Chronicle*, KTRK, KHOU, KPRC, and KUHF. Donations came from all over the country and even overseas in addition to the many

contributions from all over Texas.

Bayou Land Conservancy received both large donation pledges and many smaller donations. It was quickly clear how important this prairie was not only to the people of Houston and Texas, but to people all over the globe.

Bayou Land Conservancy hosted an event called *(continued on page 2)*



Join the Native Prairies Association of Texas for

A Christmas Celebration of Prairies! at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site

December 7th — Dinner from 5 to 7 p.m.

An afternoon and evening of activities will include Prairie Photo Contest winners, Birding on the Brazos, A Walk on a Native Prairie, Evening Dinner, Awards, and an Auction of Pictures and more!

Purchase Tickets Now!

\$40 Adults • \$10 Children ages 1-12

Proceeds support our Texas Prairies

For more details and to purchase tickets online go to www.texasprairie.org to the News and Events section.

To order by mail: send checks to NPAT, attention: Gretchen Vollmer 415 N. Guadalupe St. PMB 385, San Marcos, TX 78666.

Write “Blaze and Graze” in the memo line.

Deer Park Prairie

(continued from page 1)

“SOS! Save Our Special Prairie,” just a couple days before the September 10th deadline at Monument Inn in La Porte, Texas. This event was hugely beneficial with a whopping \$21,000 raised just that night. The event took place in at the restaurant and included a video presentation by Bayou Land Conservancy and talks by Jennifer Lorenz, Jaime Gonzalez and Pat Merkord. Attendees of all ages came out for this event. The inn was generous enough to give all proceeds from the event to the Deer Park Prairie fund.

The importance of prairies like Deer Park is that they hold a huge amount of our Texas natural heritage of which so little now remains. This prairie is within a few miles of the San Jacinto Battlefield and Monument, and is an example of the type of prairie site where the battle for Texas independence was fought. It is a rich combination of more than 300 native flower and grass species. Additionally, pocket gophers, grassland birds, turtles, lizards, insects and other wildlife live here. With continued research, scientists hope to find even more species, perhaps even microorganisms yet undiscovered or endangered. Biologists and scientists will be able to study how plant and animal life exist in this unique ecosystem. It has the added benefit of aiding prairie restoration projects in the future by serving as a seed bank.

Once all the paper work and processing is complete, Bayou Land Conservancy will hold the conservation easement for this property. They will hand over the deed to Native Prairies Association of Texas. NPAT will then be responsible for the management of the prairie and will provide guided tours. Plans for Deer Park Prairie include using the prairie as an educational resource for adults and children, as well as opening a visitor center in the house that currently stands



PHOTO COURTESY OF KRISTI HARMS

on the property. NPAT and Bayou Land Conservancy plan to use the prairie to provide programs for area schools and to continue to offer walking tours to the public. Ongoing costs will include staff-

ing this center and management of the property. Please stay tuned for upcoming fundraising events and T-shirt sales to help raise money for the operation of Deer Park Prairie!

Once again, we would like to extend our great thanks to

all the donors who contributed to this project; to Jennifer Lorenz, Executive Director of Bayou Land Conservancy who led the charge; and to the strategic team: Jaime Gonzalez, Lan Shen, Don Verser, Katy Emde, and Pat Merkord. NPAT also would like to acknowledge our partners in saving this prairie: Bayou Land Conservancy, Katy Prairie Conservancy, Coastal Prairie Partnership, NPAT’s Houston Chapter, Native Plant Society of Texas’ Houston Chapter, Houston Audubon Society, and Gulf Coast Texas Master Naturalists.

This would not have been possible without you!

Lan Shen, HNPAT President offers a short history of this amazing project.

Find it on our blog at www.texasprairie.org

Restoration Guide Update

IN A PARTNERSHIP with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, NPAT is working on a restoration guidebook to be published in book form as well as an interactive web format. When completed, the guide will be aimed at audiences looking for first time information on prairie restoration as well as specifics on restoration in North, North Central and Northeast Texas. The area covered in the guide will be blackland prairie, post oak savannah and alfisol prairies.

This August, NPAT completed the first phase of the TPWD grant given to create this guidebook. This involved compiling data from a survey sent to prairie restoration experts, completing an extensive bibliography literature review, holding workshops, hosting field trips, writing articles, and creating a summary on all of the above.

In order to reach a consensus on current research in the field of restoration, NPAT invited a group of experts to a conference in Fort Worth to discuss which proven and new methods should be included in this guide. At the conference, topics included plant selection, plant genetics, plant diversity, restoration for wildlife, site preparation, control of invasives, planting techniques, use of fire and herbicides, integrated management, and monitoring.

The up-and-coming guidebook may be used to learn more about why prairie restoration is important, what goes into maintaining and monitoring a restoration project, grass species information, and a lengthy list of additional resources. We hope that this guidebook will be a resource for potential restorationists and landowners, to help them get started on their project and to offer access to the most up-to-date information. This information will be available on the NPAT website in an interactive format with videos and links.

2014 State of the Prairie

NPAT AND Coastal Prairie Partnership (CPP) are planning the annual State of the Prairie Conference to be held at the beautiful **Botanic Gardens in Fort Worth on May 29-31, 2014**. On August 20th, conference volunteers met in Fort Worth with Pat Merkord (NPAT Executive Director) and Jaime Gonzalez (CPP President) to plan and organize committees. The conference portion will be May 30-31, with many field trips to local prairie sites to be offered on the 29th.

This conference will include speakers from state and local parks, and wildlife agencies as well as representatives from a variety of organizations involved in restoration. Informative exhibits, an awards dinner, and fundraisers including raffles, a live auction, and a silent auction will be utilized to raise money for prairie conservation efforts and support of this conference.

The Fort Worth Botanic Garden is the oldest botanical garden in Texas, it covers 110 acres, and hosts more than 2,500

plant species. A total of 23 gardens with walking trails make this an easy garden experience to enjoy for all ages.

Next door to the Botanic Garden is the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT), an international research institute studying and educating on conservation and plant species. In the last ten years, BRIT scientists have been responsible for studying a number of previously unknown species. Additionally, BRIT works on worldwide issues such as clean up of pollution and sustainable food sources for humans and wildlife.

Conference attendees will have the opportunity to experience the native prairie gardens of BRIT right next to the Botanic Garden. The work they do is important to conservationists as we continue to expand our knowledge of Texas' threatened prairie heritage and provide resources for the conservation and restoration of those prairies.

Save the date and stay tuned for more information on the 2014 State of the Prairie Conference in Fort Worth!



Picturing the Prairie

Awards and prizes will be presented at our **Blaze and Graze** gala at Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site on **December 7th**.

Send your favorite photo(s) digitally to info@texasprairie.org with the subject line "Photography Contest" or send print copies to: Native Prairies Association of Texas, 415 N Guadalupe Street, PMB 385, San Marcos, TX 78666

Photo must be received by December 3rd. Include the following information with your picture: Name, address, phone number and category selected to enter photo in. Photos can be any size, any format, with any aspect ratio and submitted digitally or print. We allow multiple entries to the contest per person, but only one prize per person.

Categories: Adult – Scenic Prairie, Prairie Weather, Prairie Plants, Prairie Animals
Children (to 12) – Scenic Prairie, Prairie Weather, Prairie Plants, Prairie Animals
For more information, go to www.texasprairie.org News and Events.

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**Enter Your
Favorite Prairie
Photo In Our
First Annual
Photography
Contest!**



415 N. Guadalupe St. PMB 385
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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

MAKE A DIFFERENCE for current and future generations in the preservation of Texas' natural heritage, while enjoying outings and volunteer activities with fellow prairie enthusiasts. Be a part of the solution for the many challenges facing this great American landscape.

We depend on the support of our members to help us conserve Texas prairies. Programs are supported by gifts, contributions, grants, membership dues and volunteer efforts.

Consider a Conservation Easement

Benefits include: Significant tax incentives: estate, income, and capital gains • management and restoration advice • conservation of your family and Texas heritage

For more information, contact NPAT by email at info@texasprairie.org, call **512-772-4741** or visit www.texasprairie.org.



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**An update on Deer Park Prairie:
It has been saved!**