

NPAT's Newest Easement The Kirchoff Family Farm

“In order to create a living memorial to our parents, Leroy & Brunhilde Kirchoff, who instilled in us a deep respect for nature, we, their children, wish to restore our family farm to its natural state. It is our intent to restore native wildlife by creating and maintaining a favorable natural habitat. It is our goal that the farm be operated in a sustainable manner to include education, recreation, periodic grazing, laboratory for wildlife management, and any other practice necessary to maintain the prairie and serve as a model for other landowners.”

—Mission statement for the Kirchoff Family Farm

NATIVE PRAIRIES ASSOCIATION of Texas is happy to announce our latest easement. In January 2013, NPAT accepted a new easement located in Wilson County near Floresville. This was once a farm and has been owned by the Kirchoff family for many generations.

The family wants their land protected and are restoring it to its native condition. The property is 200 acres in size with most of the acreage already in varying stages of restoration. From the very first site visit, we could see the deep caring these siblings had for this land, and the thoughtful approach they applied to its management and preservation. This easement will benefit the public by protecting open space. It is only 45 miles from downtown San Antonio and is in a high growth area. Nearby Bexar County is one of the four fastest growing counties in Texas. Open space will become increasingly important as cities expand and the population increases. This kind



PHOTOS COURTESY OF PAT MERMOND



of natural space helps improve air quality, protects water resources and provides carbon dioxide sequestration.

The Kirchoff Family Farm is unique because it is already participating in several programs with government agencies to promote regional conservation. For example, the owners have enrolled the property in a Private Lands Agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service that provides support for projects that enhance wildlife and habitat. Through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), they are enrolled in the

The Kirchoff Family Farm is located in the Tamaulipan grasslands region. The restoration efforts will help wildlife like this great purple hairstreak butterfly.

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQUIP) and the Wildlife Incentive Program (WHIP) that will assist them with prairie restoration and management. Through the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), they are enrolled in a seed increase plot plan that will augment their restoration efforts. This easement is located geographically in part of the Rio Grande Plains best known as the Tamaulipan grasslands.

The owners wish this easement to be a model for prairie restoration, education, and research. We believe they are achieving that goal and they are engaging the next generation in conservation activities. The Kirchoffs have hosted field trips, restoration (continued on page 5)

Houston NPAT and CPP The 9 Natives Challenge

WE HAVE A WINNER! AT the May Houston chapter NPAT meeting, the 9 Natives Challenge winners were announced. This was the culmination of a challenge to design a prairie landscape plan using nine native prairie species. The contestants could choose from a list of 56 species. Judging criteria included aesthetics, adaptability, wildlife value, availability of species, sustainability of design, and compatibility with an urban or suburban setting. The judging team consisted of Scott Barnes, a landscape designer working with the City of Houston; Flo Hannah, a Houston Audubon restoration specialist; Thomas Adams, a botanist at San Bernard Wildlife Refuge; Diana Foss, a Texas Parks and Wildlife urban wildlife biologist; Beth Clark, a landscape architect; and Jaime Gonzalez, president of Coastal Prairie Partnership and education director at Katy Prairie Conservancy. The judges agreed it was

much more difficult to evaluate than anticipated because there are so many layers that go into creating a good design, and each design had its own merits.

The plans submitted produced a list of 33 species that were used in more than one plan. The plants most frequently used included Texas lantana, gulf coast muhly, liatris, black-eyed susan, little bluestem and sideoats grama. Only two woody species—wax myrtle and yaupon holly—were included on the list.

Houston resident Helen James was the winner with the highest score. Her design produced color throughout the year and created a pollinator habitat. Her plan had an engineered wildness to it, but would not overwhelm the urban setting. She used a mix of little bluestem, sideoats grama, gulf muhly, blazing star (liatris) Mexican hat, blue sage, Indian blanket, Maximilian sunflower and blue-eyed grass. Helen said she entered the contest because she



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAT MEMORIO

Black-eyed susan was a popular choice.

wanted to convert her yard to natives and has been working on that for several years. Helen has lived in the Houston area nine years but is originally from London, England—a city with very different environs. Helen was very surprised to win.

Lan Shen won second place. Lan, also a Houston resident has been landscaping with prairie natives for a number of years. She produced a very structured plan that would work well in suburban areas. One feature was a pathway that allows interaction with a native habitat. She also had an individual management plan for each species used.

Two other plans received honorable mentions: J. Ryan Harbert submitted his “Prairie Pothole Abstracted” plan with watercolor design; and Carolyn Fannon produced a very attractive design and a list of substitutes for her selected plants.

The response from the audience at the meeting was enthusiastic and interested, with many of them taking notes. Attendees asked if the plans could be put on the web. Look for them on the CPP/HNPAT (<http://prairiepartner.org/group/hnpat>) and NPAT (www.texasprairie.org) sites. There was a discussion on where to go from here. The plan is to form a committee to formalize the winning designs and identify four to six species to promote for commercial production. The two top winning designs will be used for plantings at local schools. The group would also like to pilot a booth called 9 Natives at local nursery outlets. ☺

Help Save Texas Prairies

Join the Native Prairies Association of Texas (NPAT)

To join online, visit www.texasprairie.org and go to the Support Us page.

Or fill out this form and mail a check to:

The Native Prairies Association of Texas
415 N. Guadalupe St. PMB 385
San Marcos, TX 78666

Membership Categories: \$1,500 Family Lifetime \$1,000 Lifetime
 \$500 Patron \$250 Benefactor \$50 Family
 \$35 Individual \$20 Student/Senior
 New Renewal \$5000 Adopt-an-Acre
_____ Additional donation
Chapter affiliation _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home/Office Phone: _____

Email: _____

I'm interested in prairies because: _____

Please consider including an additional donation with your membership dues.

Youth Group Energized By Fighting Invasives

Interview by Pat Merkord

ON MAY 4TH NPAT hosted a booth at the Love Your White Rock Lake Prairie Festival held in Dallas at White Rock Lake. It was a beautiful spring day that brought out many prairie enthusiasts along with others simply enjoying the gifts of spring. While in our booth handing out brochures and talking about prairies, I noticed a lively group of teenagers working an impressive booth focused on Blackland Prairies. I especially liked their t-shirts that read, “What happens in the prairie stays in the prairie.”

It was obvious they were very enthusiastic about protecting and promoting our Blackland Prairie habitat but I was curious about how they came to be so enthused about prairies, and why they were here instead of in a movie theater or at the mall as other teens might be. I asked their teacher if I could have an interview with one of the students and a very inspiring young man volunteered. His name is Miles Okamoto, he is in the eighth grade and he attends the nearby Saint John’s Episcopal Church as do his cohorts. Miles seemed eager to explain what his group was doing and was proud of their accomplishments. Apparently being part of this service-oriented prairie group is considered a privilege judging from the devotion the students exhibited.

This group has been in existence for the past two years and is open to the eighth grade only. There are seven members in this service organization which is headed by their science teacher, Toni Harran. Last year their teacher applied for and received a Healthy Habitats grant from five entities in partnership: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Environmental Systems Research Institute Inc, Texas Stream Team, Texas Center for



This student group is service learning and helping preserve Blackland Prairie habitat.

Service-Learning and Encarta. In this program, students at each location research and define a local environmental issue then devise a plan of action to address the issue. These students were interviewed by the local television station when the White Rock Lake Prairie was about to be paved over.

Miles Okamoto explained how they found out about invasive species ruining native prairies and they wanted to do something about it. Miles explained that they first learned about native prairies by looking at the NPAT website (www.texasprairie.org). In the Dallas area, around White Rock Lake, Queen Anne’s lace, Johnsongrass, privet and bamboo are all invasive species that threaten remnant prairies. I asked Miles what the students did. He said they go out to the prairie, take soil samples and conduct surveys of the prairie plants using one meter quadrats. They collected some really good data from the quadrat surveys. In order to control the Queen Anne’s lace the group goes out and “dead heads” or cuts off the seed head on the plants to prevent repro-

duction of this invasive. I asked Miles what he liked about his prairie service group and he said “it is great to see that not everything is all urbanized” and “likes it that plants that have always been here are still here.” He thinks it is fun to get to walk around and see nature. It was obvious from the group’s action that they all enjoy saving Blackland Prairie.

NPAT is especially appreciative of teachers like Toni Harran for introducing students—the next generation—to our native prairie heritage and instilling in them a love for nature and the knowledge and skills to care for these rare habitats. ☺

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

NPAT NEEDS YOU! If you are interested in serving on the Board of Directors, or willing to help with committee projects, prairie restoration and advocacy, please contact NPAT via email at info@texasprairie.org or call 512-772-4741.

Increasing Diversity in Restored Prairies

By Pat Merkord, NPAT Executive Director

ACHIEVING SPECIES DIVERSITY and richness in a restored prairie is a goal most restoration practitioners aspire to but one of the most difficult to achieve. From years of restoration experimentation there are some guidelines that are emerging on how to increase diversity. First it should be understood that diversity is not the number of species in a plot. The number of species in a plot is called species richness. Diversity is not just species richness but also the relative abundance within a plot as well as a degree of evenness as species occupy different niches within the plot.

So how can this diversity be achieved? Several guiding principles have emerged, one being to start with a high number of species in the original seeding mix. Many restoration projects start with four to 10 species for seeding and find it is very hard and frustrating to increase the species' richness and diversity. Starting with high numbers of species can save a lot of time and expense later. Since the cost of seed is often the limiting factor, restoration projects often don't start with enough variety in their seed mix. One way to eliminate this problem is to start smaller and carry out the restoration in phases.

Having smaller restoration plots over several years' time leads to greater diversity overall. Restoring a large area all at one time tends to produce a restoration without variety.

Seed collecting from nearby remnant seed sources can also augment seed mixes. If the original site is small, then in a few years it can produce seed for subsequent additions to the restoration. One of common mistakes often made in restoration is trying to do too much at one time.

In restoration projects that did not start with a high number of species there are some techniques that can help increase the diversity. Interseeding is one technique that has been employed with varying degrees of success. If grass is not highly dominant then this method will work fairly well. If one grass species



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAT MERKORD

dominates the site then it may be less successful. It will be important to select a seed mix for interseeding that meets the needs of the restoration goals and physical characteristics of the site. It is important in inter-seeding to open up areas to allow light to get to seedlings. This can be done by mowing to about 6 inches prior to interseeding or removing thatch by burning and providing open sites for seeding. Burning is the most common pre-treatment used. Seed can be planted by broadcasting or using a no-till drill.

Another way to increase diversity in a restored site is to vary the management practices for the restoration. A combination of haying, burning, mowing and grazing may be used over time. Each type of maintenance will favor some species over others so varying the timing and type of maintenance encourages species not frequently seen. The same type of management favors the same type of plant. When burning, it is not necessary to burn on a fixed regular schedule. Changing the timing and frequency of burning can favor diversity. Burning different portions at different times can also be beneficial giving more structural diversity to a restored prairie.

Creating diversity plots within grassland

restoration sites is another technique that can be employed. This requires establishing "nodes" or "plots" of at least 15 X 15 square feet or larger to be embedded at regular intervals within the restoration. These sites can then be seeded with a diverse mix grasses and forbs, or seedlings can be planted within them. In some cases it may be necessary to enclose these sites with wire fences to protect them from deer or other animals. These plots should provide seeds for increases in diversity as well as a means of achieving more evenness within the prairie site.

The method of nested plots is being employed on one of NPAT's newly acquired easements in Wilson County. The Kirchoff Farm restoration is increasing the diversity of their restored crop fields by planting a high number of species of grasses and forbs in diversity plots. The plots will be monitored over several years to determine the effectiveness of using this method.

The Native Prairies Association of Texas is very proud to have an easement that has become a restoration "laboratory" to employ new techniques and methods and evaluate their effectiveness to provide more information and insight in the field of restoration science. 

The Kirchoff Family Farm

(continued from page 1)

activities and have provided on-site restoration technique training with more being planned. Some recent projects include:

The seed increase plot produces seed to be added to purchased native seed mixes and to be drilled into the fields with a Truax no till drill. So far they have successfully produced seeds for switchgrass, four-flower trichloris, little bluestem, Arizona cotton top, sideoats grama, slender grama, orange zexmenia, and at least a half dozen others. There are several 4-H Club members interested in expanding on this.

The USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife projects have been approved, funded, and guided by Chris Best, USFWS State Botanist. Volunteers have participated in these activities:

On Oct 13, 2012, 91 volunteers (plus nine family members) planted a 50-foot wide live tree firebreak around the farm headquarters. Participants included Boy Scouts from the six-county Longhorn District of the Alamo Area Council, Girl Scouts, and 4-H Club members mostly from the Floresville area. In another project, led by Eagle Scout candidate David Pruitt, a Boy Scout troop from LaVernia created wildlife guzzlers. And Eagle Scout Candidate, Jesse Fehr led a Boy Scout troop from Pleasanton in creating burrowing owl roost sites.

Nursery tables have been constructed and planted with the capacity to produce 6,000 native seedlings to be transplanted into 10 diversity plots on the farm in the fall of 2013. The Kirchoffs have offered to conduct training days on the farm for volunteers who want to grow seedlings at their homes for transplant into the plots. They have conducted one educational day and hope to have more. They are working with Wilson County 4-H Club and the Scout leadership to schedule transplanting days this fall. Seeds and supplies are available to volunteers who come to the farm for an educational day.

NPAT is honored to have this new easement to protect prairie habitat and serve as a model of prairie restoration. We hope it will be an inspiration to other landowners and conservationists. ☺



Restoration Field Trip and Workshop

Floresville, Texas

Saturday June 15, 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

NPAT IS OFFERING A RESTORATION

workshop and field trip to the Kirchoff Family Farm. The workshop will be held at the Floresville Event Center. There will be a light breakfast and a short presentation on the use of seed increase plots, and increasing diversity in restoration projects. We will then travel to the Kirchoff Farm. At the farm, participants will be able to view the seed increase plots and learn about techniques to make a restoration successful and diverse. A tour of the restoration fields will include explanations of how it was accomplished and how to address the problems encountered.

After the field trip, participants will return to the event center for lunch and short presentations on tools to help in restoration projects, and the benefits of these tools. State and federal government programs that provide funding and expertise to landowners will be presented. Programs to help reduce taxes like the 1-d-1 wildlife management plans and conservation easements will also be discussed.

This is a great opportunity to see a major restoration in various phases and learn how it can be done. The cost of the event is \$10. For more information or to make your reservation, contact Pat Merkord at 936-827-7973 or pat_merkord@texasprairie.org. Participants may also register at the door. The Floresville Event Center is located on 600 State Hwy 97 West in Floresville.

Mary Talbot Prairie

Saturday June 8

8:30 to 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.

NPAT is hosting a visit to a rare 114-acre remnant Silveus Dropseed prairie in North-east Texas near New Boston in Bowie County. View the prairie as model for restoration. Contact Pat Merkord at 936-827-7973 or pat_merkord@texasprairie.org.

Prairie Restoration Round Up

Friday July 26 from 9 a.m. to 3 pm.

TNCT Texas City Prairie Preserve

JOIN THE BEST RESTORATIONISTS

in southeast Texas for a day of hands-on demonstrations and insightful discussions about restoring prairie to farms, ranches, private residences, parks, and more!

Cost: \$35 for general public and professionals, \$25 for students and Texas Master Naturalists. Registration is required.

Go to prairiepartner.org/page/heartland-series-1 for more information.



PHOTO COURTESY OF PAT MERKORD

Native Grasslands Restoration Workshop in Paris

THIS LANDOWNER WORKSHOP ON

native grasslands was hosted by Native Prairies Association of Texas and Connemara Conservancy at the Love Center in Paris, Texas. The morning presentations included an overview of native prairie habitats in North Texas by NPAT Program Director, Phillip Quast and a discussion of grassland wildlife habitat management by wildlife biologist Ken Gee of Oaks & Prairies Joint Venture. Matt Machacek, NRCS grazing lands specialist, presented range management techniques for the care of native grasslands, and RJ Taylor talked about conservation easements as a land protection tool. Pat Merkord, ED of NPAT presented native prairie establishment and restoration techniques. After lunch the group took a field trip to the Tridens Prairie, owned by the Nature Conservancy, and the Smiley-Woodfin Ranch, one of their easements. At the prairie sites, participants viewed effects of management on prairie species.



The Commons Ford Prairie Restoration Project

A Field of Dreams

By Kirsti Harms

A FEW YEARS AGO I STARTED receiving emails from my birding friend, Ed Fair, asking questions about prairie restoration and groups involved in this sort of thing. Ed and other birders have long considered the City of Austin's Commons Ford Metropolitan Park a special spot, with a very diverse mix of bird species. But I was surprised at his interest in the habitat, pleasantly surprised. I recently asked Ed how he got interested in this project. He told me, "I thought the central section (about 40 acres) of the park looked kind of interesting with some sort of yellow grass. I knew nothing about native vegetation, but I birded that section regularly. At times, birds were present and at other times nothing. I invited Byron Stone—who knows sparrows and grasses—to come bird the park with me so he could tell me more about this field. I was shocked to learn that the pretty yellow stuff was KR bluestem and Bermuda-grass—both non native, invasive species. Not only that, but they had a negative impact on birds. We did find a few Le Conte's sparrows that day and Byron said something like 'imagine if that

field was full of sideoats grama, we could have lots of Le Conte's and other sparrows in here.' That got the ball rolling for me."

Ed knew that the field had been sitting untouched for many years, so he started talking to park manager Joan Singh. Joan says that their conversations began with discussions of the mowing regime and evolved into wondering how to turn the fields into prairie. She had no funds to work with but could provide personnel and machinery. She also saw the value of creating something bigger and liked the public land, private citizen partnership aspect. (She now looks at the park as a set of ecosystems and sees that diversity is what makes it special.)

So Ed arranged a meeting. He invited several groups (Austin Parks and Recreation Department, Balcones Canyonlands Preserve, Native American Seed Company, Native Prairies Association of Texas, Natural Resources Conservation Service/USDA and Travis Audubon Society) who could potentially contribute to this project. Soon after, the Common Ford Prairie Restoration Organization was created under the wing of the non-

profit Austin Parks Foundation, and the CFPRO began raising funds and grant money for the restoration process. A restoration plan was provided by James Alderson of NPAT.

It was agreed that regular bird and vegetation surveys should be conducted to help supply hard data for whether the project was working or not. This added a significant educational component that could serve as a model for others. John Chenoweth of the Balcones Canyonlands Preserves developed the vegetation and TPWD prairie bird survey methodology, and determined the transect points. The initial surveys were conducted by BCP staff, James Alderson, PARD interns, Joan and Ed. The continuing vegetation surveys now involve a regular group of volunteers. Ed and Travis Audubon volunteers provide monthly bird walks that help provide additional bird data.

The next step: herbicide treatments were applied to the Bermuda and KR in late summer of 2011 and again in the fall. There were some bumps in the road with contractors, weather (historic drought conditions) and miscommunications, but the main parts of the field



The Big Day in the Park included a plant walk on the prairie with Bill Carr (left) and lots of birding throughout the day.

were successfully treated by late 2011. Ed contacted Native American Seed and by early 2012, staff member George Cates stepped in. He took on an advisory role and recommended seed mixes. George also convinced the group to use the no-till drill planting method. He believed it was so important to the project that he put together a budget for the cost of planting and the seed. CFPRO paid what they had in their budget and Native American Seed made an in-kind contribution to cover the rest. George continues as an essential part of this project as consultant and overseer.

In October of 2012 George gave a presentation on the restoration project and what needs to be done to maintain this prairie. One of the biggest components on park land (aptly called ‘the commons’) is the public’s perception of a prairie and the importance a providing a good model of success to maintain their support—in the court of public opinion. Keeping invasive, non-native (and some unruly native) species in check will always be necessary to the maintenance of the prairie. This is an opportunity to educate visitors about how to use public spaces and ways that communities protect resources for the future. It gives children access to nature and wild areas. And this benefits everyone.

Also in the fall of 2012, Ed hosted an event to enlist some more support for the

spring Big Day in the Park fundraiser and for the future leadership of CFPRO. He sweetened the deal by bringing a margarita machine. Apparently the mix worked on Diane Sherrill—she found herself chairing the Big Day event!

Ed credits Diane for the success of the 2013 Big Day in the Park, which included sponsorships, exhibits by conservation groups, nature and bird walks in the prairie, and the Wing Ding pledge drive. The group raised \$8000 toward herbicide treatment and restoration of the re-

maining areas that were left out of the earlier treatments. The day-long Wing Ding bird survey turned up 85 species, up from 73 the previous year.

And about the birds... Ed says the most telling thing is the prairie bird survey results. The pre-restoration survey turned up a single sedge wren. During the first post-restoration surveys in the winter of 2012 they had 97 individual birds from 10 different species. The species with the highest number of individuals was Le Conte’s sparrow—one of the target species. The team will continue to conduct similar surveys over the next several years to see if the pattern holds, but it looks like a pretty good start.

For more information, go to www.commonsofordpro.blogspot.com.

Save the Date!

THE STATE OF THE PRAIRIE
Conference will held be in Fort Worth
in late May 2014. If you want to
volunteer with the conference or
planning committee, contact Pat
Merkord at 936-827-7973 or
pat_merkord@texasprairie.org
Stay tuned...

Board of Directors 2013

Kirsti Harms, President
 512-296-9160 (m)
kirsti_harms@texasprairie.org

vacant, **President-elect**

Matt Singer, Vice President
matt_singer@texasprairie.org

Jason Billick, Secretary
jason_billick@texasprairie.org

vacant, **Treasurer**

David Bezanson
david_bezanson@texasprairie.org

Brad Bowman
brad_bowman@texasprairie.org

Jason Singhurst
jason_singhurst@texasprairie.org

Kenneth Wisian
ken_wisian@texasprairie.org

Lan Shen, Interim President HNPAT
Lan_shen@texasprairie.org

Executive Director

Pat Merkord
 936-827-7973 (m)
pat_merkord@texasprairie.org

Program Director

Phillip Quast
phillip_quast@texasprairie.org

Advisors/ Special Committee Members

Dr. Fred Smeins, Scientific Advisor

Clair Burleson

Mickey Burleson

Jim Giocomo

B.F. Hicks

Johnny Johnson

Bob O’Kennon

Robert Rasmus

David Todd

Carolyn Vogel

Matt White



415 N. Guadalupe St. PMB 385
San Marcos, TX 78666

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Our address has changed!

NPAT has a new office, located at
100 N. Edward Gary St., Suite B111 in San Marcos.

Our new mailing address is:
415 N. Guadalupe St. PMB 385
San Marcos, TX 78666

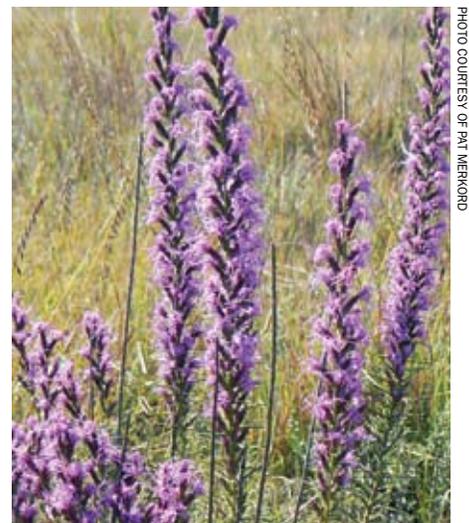
MAKE A DIFFERENCE for current and future generations in the preservation of Texas' natural heritage, while enjoying outings and volunteer activities with fellow prairie enthusiasts. Be a part of the solution for the many challenges facing this great American landscape.

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 contact@texasprairie.org, call 512-772-4741, or visit www.texasprairie.org.



Learn more about prairies and restoration at the land-owner workshop and field trip to NPAT's newest easement.

See page 5 for more information.