



2002 - A Guadalupe St. PMB 290
Austin, TX 78705-5609

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NPAT Landowner Workshop Tools and Resources for Managing and Conserving Texas Grasslands

July 13, 2012

Forestburg Community Center

16617 FM 455, **Forestburg, TX**

(about 30 miles southwest of Gainesville)

Cost: **\$15**

This second in our series of one-day landowner workshops includes talks on quail and grassland bird habitat management, range management with and without livestock, ranch management, and the benefits and incentives of conservation easements. There will also be trips to Thomsen Nature Preserve and to the Dixon Foundation's Leo Ranch. Lunch will be provided.

RSVP required. For more information contact **Phillip Quast** at phillip_quast@texasprairie.org or call **512-751-9265**.



NPAT member, John Johnson submitted this image of a prairie in bloom. Taken at Gambill Goose Preserve in Lamar County, six miles west of Paris, this preserve is known as a goose refuge, but it also contains a very special prairie remnant.

If you wish to submit articles and photos, contact the editor, Kirsti Harms by email at editor@texasprairie.org, or mail to 2002 - A Guadalupe St. PMB 290, Austin, Tx 78705-5609. Material appearing in *Texas Prairie News* may not be reprinted or otherwise reproduced without written permission of the editor or the Board of Directors.

From the Executive Director

MARY TALBOT PRAIRIE

A True Prairie Partnership

THROUGH THE GENEROUS efforts of numerous parties, NPAT has been able to acquire 114-acres of rare *Silveus'* dropseed prairie [see page 7]. Mary Talbot Prairie in Bowie County (formerly known as Godley Prairie) was first brought to our attention by Jason Singhurst, TPWD plant ecologist and NPAT board member. Those of you who know Jason are well aware of his love of prairies, but when he called me about this prairie; his enthusiasm meter was at an all time high. The property had recently been listed for sale and the prospect of losing another example of Texas living history was a major concern.

Not only has a great deal of this habitat been lost, with more diminishing daily, we simply do not have the funds to compete with market-value buyers. But in this case several people worked together to ensure that this particular prairie was saved. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) provided a grant for this purchase, and Jason and Lisa Spangler donated significant funds. Jason is a former President of NPAT and Lisa is a former President of the Native Plant Society of Texas' (NPSOT) Austin Chapter. Both are long time NPAT members and prairie enthusiasts. They were delighted to see their funds make this purchase possible.

In addition, we also received a grant from NPSOT. The former owners also made significant contributions by making this an amicable transaction, along with their past stewardship of the property.

David Talbot, Mary's son represented the family in this transaction, but prairie appreciation is a multi-generational tradition. As a boy, David cut hay for use on the family lands. He was inspired by his maternal grandfather, Lloyd Wilson (past



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DAVID TALBOT

Talbot Prairie this spring. RIGHT: As a boy David Talbot helped with haying.

Chairman of the Board of the oldest bank in Texas —The Old First National Bank and the son of Texas Senator, James R. Wilson). David says that Lloyd encouraged him to leave the prairie as it was, as a source of feed for their livestock.

This wonderful example of family wisdom resulted in long-term, sustainable land use; which served the Talbot family well during the drought last year. And this tradition will be continued, as we have signed an memorandum of understanding with the family to continue haying as a management tool. This agreement not only benefits NPAT and the



Talbot family, but the community as well through the ensured availability of both local feed and as a seed source for future restorations. And along with the conservation of this plant community, many grassland animal species will benefit from saving this habitat.

Thank you so *(continued on page 7)*

NPAT's Spring Tour

Prairie Chapel Ranch and Simpson Prairie

ON MAY 26TH, NPAT hosted a tour of the Prairie Chapel Ranch and the Simpson Prairie outside Crawford. Prairie Chapel Ranch is also known as the Bush Ranch or the 'Western White House' during the presidency of George W. Bush. The Simpson Prairie, a 75-acre remnant tallgrass prairie is one of NPAT's conservation easements. The tour was lead by prairie restoration expert Mike Williams, owner of Simpson Prairie and lead restoration consultant for the Prairie Chapel Ranch.

As tour attendees arrived in Crawford, they were greeted by an NPAT banner waving in the wind across the street from the Crawford Coffee Station. Attendees were met by Mr. Williams and Phillip Quast, Outreach Coordinator for NPAT. After everyone was checked in, the tour caravan embarked for the Prairie Chapel Ranch. Seven miles from Crawford, the tour group pulled up to the fortified front gate of the ranch. Once cleared by secret

service, the group drove out into the restored prairie on a well-worn access road.

Mr. Williams started the tour by pointing out the view across the restored prairie, which included a sea of American Basketflowers (*Centaurea Americana*), Standing Cypress (*Ipomopsis rubra*), Firewheel (*Gaillardia pulchella*), and Lemon Beebalm (*Monarda citriodora*). Mr. Williams described 2012 as 'the year of the forbs' due to the large amount of rain that fell early in the year prompting wildflowers and other broad-leafed plants to grow larger and in greater densities than in the past several years. He then described how—using heavy machinery, herbicide, and extreme diligence—he was able to conquer the Johnsongrass (*Sorghum halepense*) monoculture previously found where the restored prairie is now located. After the short presentation, the tour set off into the prairie on convenient paths cut by Mr. Williams prior to the visit.

The next leg of the tour took the group

to the main ranch house which showcases some of Mr. Williams' remarkable landscaping using native grasses and wildflowers. Lush buffalo grass (*Bouteloua dactyloides*) lawns dotted by enormous bunches of wildflowers surround the ranch house. Thanks to the irrigation system, wildflowers around the house were huge, with bunches of Lemon Beebalm reaching to more than four-feet tall.

After a stop at the Crawford Coffee Station for an air-conditioned break and a tasty lunch, the group headed to the Simpson Prairie. This prairie is Mr. Williams' personal restoration project. Previously used for grazing, he has nurtured this tallgrass prairie remnant back to the state that it is in today—a biologically diverse prairie acting as a window into the past and showing visitors what the landscape looked like prior to European settlement. The group wound its way through the prairie remnant with frequent stops for plant (continued on page 6)

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
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Grassroots

Communities working
to save prairies

PHOTO COURTESY OF DON VERSER



College Park Prairie

HOUSTON Audubon, Houston Wilderness, Coastal Prairie Partnership, Native Plant Society of Texas (Houston Chapter), and generous individuals are working hard to save College Park Prairie—a 53-acre gem located in the heart of Deer Park.

A willing seller and a brief window of time to raise funds (**they have until November 1, 2012**) are providing a rare opportunity to potentially acquire this extraordinary property—the largest known high-quality prairie remnant for sale in Harris County.

Coastal prairie was once the dominant ecosystem of Harris County's sprawling 1.1 million acres. Now, only a few fragmented remnants are left of these local prairies where cowboys, cattle drives, saltgrass trails, and rich farmlands once prospered. The vast local prairies of Harris County once teemed with grassland birds and supported countless other wild-life species. Except for the abundance of prairie-associated names, little remains of that rich heritage.

To date, more than 240 native plant species have been recorded, indicating an extremely diverse, high-quality prairie. TPWD botanist and plant ecologist, Jason Singhurst, has surveyed College Park Prairie and describes the site as a Texas-Louisiana Coastal Prairie that is extremely rare in both Louisiana and Texas.

**Thundering into
Seabourne Creek Nature Park...**

Saturday November 3rd

**Prairie Heritage
Festival**

**10am - 4:00pm
ROSENBERG, TEXAS**

Hosted by Coastal Prairie Texas Master Naturalists
& Native Prairie Association of Texas

For more info contact
Jamie Harris jwoodharris@aol.com
Cheryl Sedivec cheryl_sedivec@comcast.net

**Save the
Date!**

This prairie has the potential to serve as a vital link to Texas history, a living science laboratory, and a photography magnet for the Houston area. There are more than twenty public schools within several miles of the prairie!

For more information go to <http://savecollegeparkprairie.ning.com>. You can also donate by check. Write the check to Houston Wilderness, be sure to add "College Park Prairie" to the memo line and mail it to 550 Westcott Street #305, Houston TX 77007.

Fort Worth Prairie Park

This is the Great Plains Restoration Council's flagship project. They are working to preserve a 2,000-acre tallgrass prairie, just outside the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. This prairie represents some of the last remaining original Fort Worth Prairie ecosystem.

The Goal: Protect this site from development and establish it as a first-class park. This park also uses work in wild nature as therapy for physical, psychological, and behavioral challenges. Animals need refuge, people need refuge—nature heals and strengthens both.

To find out more, go to <http://gprc.org/our-work/fort-worth-prairie-park/>

Travis Country

A southwest Austin neighborhood (www.traviscountry.com) has raised about \$300,000 in pledges in an effort to purchase a conservation easement on 12 acres owned by the Austin school district. They are still hopeful that needs of the public will prevail; not just for this generation, but for future generations as well. For information and videos go to <http://www.youtube.com/user/SaveTravisCountryNow>

The Role of Prescribed Fire in Mitigating Catastrophic Wildfires

By Maria Gutierrez and Amy Hays

Texas A&M University Institute for Renewable Natural Resources

Fight Fire, With Fire

THE VALUE OF prescribed burning in maintaining the functionality of rangelands has long been recognized. Prescribed burning can improve rangeland conditions, forage productivity and wildlife habitats. Many private landowners understand the benefits of prescribed fire but lack the experience or confidence to frequently apply prescribed burns. In a year when Texans faced one of the driest years on record, this level of confidence from landowners was definitely being “tested.”

The drought and associated catastrophic fires have had a heavy toll on landowners and Texans. Interestingly, concerned landowners like Stan Graff have been campaigning for the development of a statewide comprehensive fire policy to communicate to the citizens of Texas, landowners and land managers the importance of prescribed burning as part of the solution in mitigating the dangers of catastrophic wildfires.

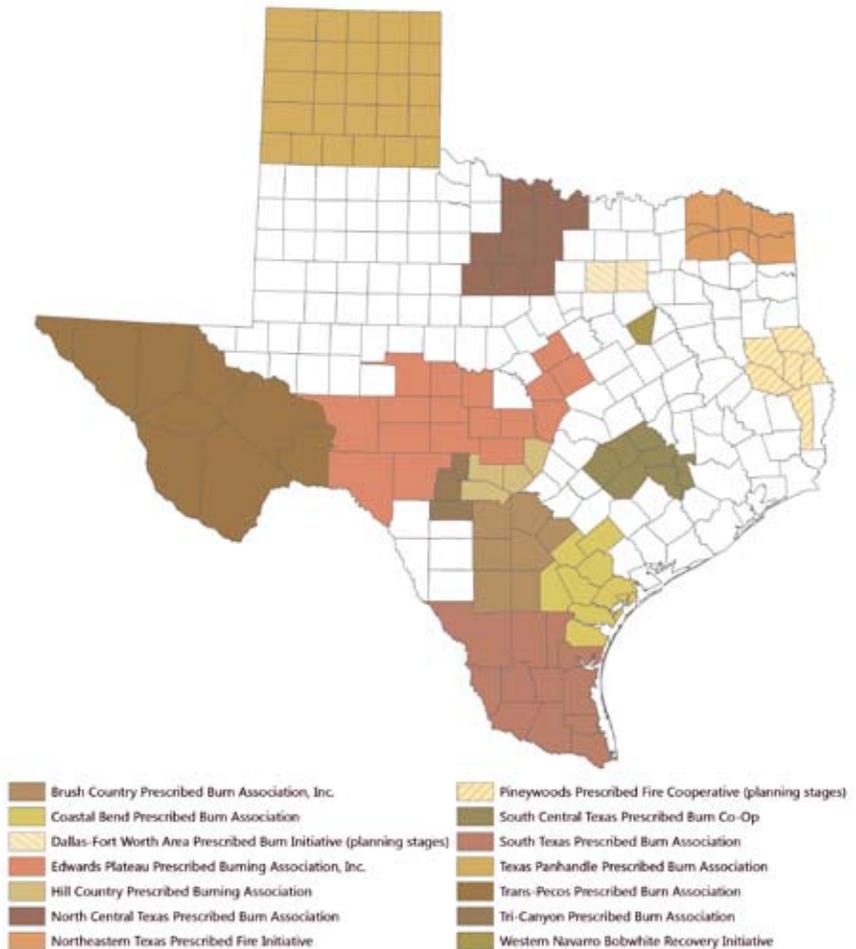
State and federal agencies cannot solely provide the support and technical assistance needed to implement effective prescribed burning at large, regional scales. The solution in many regions of the state has been an ‘army’ of landowners advocating for the use of prescribed fire via Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs).

Landowner Burn Cooperatives

In 1997, the concept of Prescribed Burn Associations (PBAs) began as organized landowner cooperatives. PBAs are nonprofit organizations, owned and operated by private landowners to promote and expand the use of prescribed burning across the landscape. PBAs share resources, knowledge and expertise within the cooperative and serve to increase the application of planned prescribed fires, enhancing agricultural production and wildlife habitat.

A leading proponent on the use of

COUNTIES IN EACH PRESCRIBED BURN ASSOCIATION



prescribed fire, Dr. Butch Taylor with Texas AgriLife Research in Sonora, states that “since Texas does not have a fire culture, the overall perception of the general public, in particular those affected by fire, see all fires as bad. However, not all fires are bad but rather often misunderstood and feared.”

The model of PBAs has been extremely successful. In fact, during the last 10 years, the concept has expanded to include cooperatives and fire initiatives with more than 1,000 statewide landowner members. (See map.) Dr. Taylor and others also believe PBAs are a viable alternative to the current statewide “non-policy” dilemma, since burn associations

can significantly reduce landowners’ risks through increased and shared experience, and can ultimately serve to increase capacity for use of prescribed fire at regional, landscape scales.

Statewide Alliance

The last decade and a half has allowed the concept of PBAs to flourish. As the number of PBAs increased, some of the challenges of greater communication and need for a single ‘voice’ emerged.

In recognition of these issues, leaders from Texas’ PBAs and state and federal agencies came together to begin the process of forming a statewide Texas Alli-

July Field Trip Identifying the Grasses of Central Texas

July 21, 2012; 9 a.m.–1 p.m.
At Balcones Canyonlands
National Wildlife Refuge

To **RSVP**: Phillip Quast, NPAT Outreach
Coordinator: phillip_quast@texasprairie.
org, 512-751-9265

Brian Loflin, coauthor of “Grasses of the Texas Hill Country” will guide the group through two locations on the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge showcasing two distinct types of grassland vegetation communities. The first location will be a native Oak-Juniper floristic association where more than 30 species of grasses have been recorded. The next location is a prairie and ponds with a different habitat and a variety of mixed short grasses.

This will be an easy walking field trip. Good walking shoes and long pants are suggested, as well as precautions for sun. NPAT will provide bottled water but attendees are also encouraged to bring beverages and snacks as needed. Contact Phillip for more information.

ance of Prescribed Burn Associations (TAPBA) under a NRCS-Conservation Innovation Grant (NRCS-CIG) managed by the Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources.

The most common issues facing PBAs today are (1) maintaining communication among cooperatives, (2) dissemination of timely information, (3) support for training/certification, and (4) liability insurance. A solution to these issues can be addressed through the concept of a statewide “Alliance” of PBAs and build further capacity in use of prescribed burning on private lands.

In the summer of 2011, PBA leaders met at the San Angelo AgriLife Research Center to further explore the concept of a statewide alliance. The concept was unanimously supported by PBAs attending the conference, and as a result, the group drafted a charter and mission statement. Initially, four workgroups were established to explore and propose recommendations for the Alliance Steering Commit-

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tee to consider. Those recommendations focused on organization, group liability insurance, finances, and education and training. If you want to learn more about TAPBA and/or if you would like to join a PBA, visit the alliance’s Prescribed Fire Portal at [http:// pfire.tamu.edu](http://pfire.tamu.edu).

In the end, the purpose of the TAPBA is to promote the safe and continued use of prescribed fire. Given the drought and catastrophic wildfires Texas experienced in

2011, the only “smoke on the horizon” the group would like to see is from the safe and properly applied use of prescribed fire. Fighting wildfires with prescribed fires is a solution that makes sense in mitigating for increased fuel loads from a lack of a frequent burning regime.

This article was published in the January 2012 issue of Texas Wildlife magazine. It is reprinted here with permission from the Texas Wildlife Association.

Fort Worth Prairie Fest Evolution of a Festival

MAY 26, 2012 brought to a close the 7th annual Fort Worth Prairie Fest—the original green festival in North Texas. To the hard-working volunteers cleaning up at Tandy Hills the next morning, it felt like the 10th annual, due to the event being extended to three separate Saturdays throughout spring 2012.

The evolution of Prairie Fest and its unlikely existence is somewhat miraculous. It began on shaky legs in 2006 as a desperate pushback against those who would consider gas drilling at Tandy Hills Natural Area. Our goal was to get thousands of new people to Tandy Hills.

An inexperienced but passionate group of individuals set up a modestly scaled festival in our front yard. We announced to the world that Tandy Hills and other green spaces were too special to allow industrial development. A few people listened.

In 2007 we moved across the street to the park, expanding on the original purpose to include green-living exhibitors and environmental organizations. Art, music and food helped create a festive atmosphere to lure the public as did the spring wildflowers.

That public was hungry for an alternative to the so-called, “Fort Worth Way”. We offered instead a “connection to the natural world.” As crowds grew and sponsors came forward, the little solar-powered festival was evolving into the greenest of green festivals.

By 2008 interest in the fest exploded requiring us to become legitimate. A committee was formed to help manage the growing event. Friends of Tandy Hills Natural Area achieved non-profit status and began working more cooperatively with the City of Fort Worth, ultimately yielding an official partnership agreement.

In 2010, *FW Weekly* named Prairie Fest, “Best Outdoor Cultural Event”, but the fest had grown so big it was nearly unmanageable for a small band of volunteers. In 2011, with nearly 150 exhibitor booths, huge crowds and a threatening thunderstorm, we decided it was time for a change.

Prairie Fest x3 in 2012 was planned as a return to our roots, a determined downsizing of the event. The commercial aspect was discarded in favor of science-based nature hikes for children, organized by Prairie Keepers (www.prairiekeepers.org). Reduced hours meant less need for expensive security while three events guarded against a rain-out.

Despite the non-commercial format, sponsor support remains steady. Memberships are up as well, allowing us to continue important education and conservation programs. The result: Thousands of children now know what a prairie looks like, the names of prairie wildflowers and why Tandy Hills must be protected. For more information, visit <http://tandyhills.org>.

—Don Young

Prairie Chapel Ranch and Simpson Prairie Tour

(Continued from Page 2)

and insect identification, and just to enjoy the beautiful setting.

Overall, the Prairie Chapel Ranch and Simpson Prairie tour was a great success. Not only did we have a wonderful day among the grasses and flowers but we also introduced several people to NPAT and to the idea of conserving an endangered ecosystem right in their own backyard.

A huge ‘thank you’ to Mike Williams and the secret service staff at Prairie Chapel Ranch for taking time from their busy

schedules to accommodate the tour.

Increasing community involvement with NPAT and educating others about conservation and restoration practices in Texas through direct interaction with a prairie are two main goals of events such as the Prairie Chapel Ranch and Simpson Prairie tour. Support future events like this by joining or donating to the NPAT at www.texasprairie.org.

—Phillip Quast, NPAT Program Director and Outreach Coordinator

For Your Library

The Cajun Prairie: A Natural History

By Malcolm F. Vidrine

THE CAJUN PRAIRIE, a 2.4-million-acre wilderness in 1600, was occupied by Native Americans and the typical prairie plants and animals. The tallgrass prairie in September obscured the view across the landscape making it extremely easy to get lost, and by December the mud was so deep that a wagon was quickly buried to the axle, but winter fire brought forth



the most luxuriant growth of grasses and wildflowers from early spring to late summer. “The garden of Louisiana” and “the loveliest part of Louisiana” were descriptions of early travelers like C. C. Robin, William Darby and

Col. Samuel Lockett. But this prairie is extinguished and listed as critically threatened. Literally less than 100 acres are considered to remain in narrow strips and small pieces dotting the landscape. The natural history of this prairie is described for the first time as a result of the work of a group of devoted prairie biologists and ecologists. This is their story, in part, and the view of the future as restoration ecologists attempt to recreate the Cajun Prairie as a sustainable, alternative landscape, the biodiversity garden.

Plates include a gallery of photos of the last remaining pieces of Cajun Prairie as they appeared in the 1980s and 1990s. These photos of railroad rights-of-way collectively provide an opportunity to construct a series of mental images of the prairie in different locations and in different seasons. To order, go to www.cajunprairie.org/books/

Malcolm F. Vidrine is a professor at Louisiana State University Eunice.

Mary Talbot Prairie

(Continued from Page 1)

Thank you so much to everyone who helped ensure that a part of living history will remain for future generations: David Benzanson at TNC, Jason and Lisa Spangler, NPSOT, and of course, the Talbots. We have renamed the prairie after David's mother, Mary, but we also want to thank the entire family for their wise and continued stewardship which ultimately made this all possible.

—Dalmara Bayne,
NPAT Executive Director

Silveus' Dropseed Prairies

These prairies are named for the grass that dominates there—Silveus' or silver dropseed. They are found in the north and east edges of the Blackland Prairie, in areas with higher relative precipitation. A different type of soil helped create this kind of prairie. The sandier, low pH alfisol soils formed mainly on bedrocks higher in sand content and lower in calcium carbonate. These special prairies are an incredible scene to behold in spring and fall with beautiful prairie wildflowers, and make it well worth a visit to northeast Texas.

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Bob Harms came out in April to collect plants from the preserve. One of the areas visited was the north side of the Champion Creek riparian area.

A Maddin Prairie Update

WHAT A DIFFERENCE a year makes! Last summer we were hauling water to the prairie dog town because it looked so parched, with the hope that watering might encourage a little something to grow. We were concerned that we'd lost our colony because they were being so reclusive. This winter, with the help of our staff and volunteers we completed the new electric fence—which encloses eight-acres around the colony. And, this spring the prairie dogs and their pups were seen on a regular basis. Hopefully the fence will give them some relief from predators and allow their numbers to increase once more. The rains this past winter and spring—though not as plentiful as in central Texas—have helped bring back the green to this West Texas landscape. Mowing, not watering is on my to-do list these days.

The rains brought amazing wildflower displays all over Texas this spring, and Maddin was no exception. Thanks to some encouragement from Tom Wendt at the UT Austin Herbarium, I started collecting plant specimens on my monthly

trips to Maddin. And thanks to the dedicated and exacting work of my father, Bob Harms, the plants we've collected have been pressed, identified and added to the herbarium. Maddin and Mitchell County now represent more than 110 species in this collection. Not too shabby for an under-represented part of the state!

The grasses are now greening up, starting to bloom and set seed. So, we'll keep collecting as the year progresses.

And while we missed the migrants on this year's breeding bird survey, we noted lots of nesting birds. This was an encouraging sign after last year's drought. It seems that our bird population is in recovery. The Grasshopper sparrows have returned. A highlight of the survey was the discovery of a Swainson's hawk nest in the wildlife corridor area. Northern bobwhite quail were noted throughout the preserve. And we heard scaled quail northeast of Champion Creek.

The current grasshopper population explosion should provide food for young birds. And that's yet another survey...

—Kirsti Harms