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From the Executive Director

State of the Prairie Conference Goes to South Texas

THE 4TH ANNUAL State of the Prairie (SOP) Conference was held this year in Kingsville on December 6-9. This conference is co-sponsored by the Native Prairies Association of Texas and the Coastal Prairie Partnership. It was the first time conference organizers ventured outside of the Houston area and the first time to hold an expanded 4-day event. Each year the SOP Conference brings together the best in the field of prairie restoration and conservation to share their expertise. This year was no exception.

The first and last days of the event featured field trips to the King Ranch, Kika de la Garza Plant Materials Center, South Texas Natives Facility and Welder Wildlife Refuge. Those attending the field trips saw first hand the conservation and restoration efforts going on in South Texas. Presentations were given on Friday at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife and on Saturday at Texas A&M University Kingsville. Everyone marveled at the beautiful facility and native landscaping on the grounds of the Caesar Kleberg Center, and enjoyed dinner on the patio South Texas style.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Fred Bryant, director of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Center who gave an inspiring presentation on "The Last Great Habitat" of South Texas about the changes that have occurred and efforts to conserve and restore wildlife and habitats of this area. Dr. Bryant was the recipient of the prestigious "Prairie Builders Award" presented at the awards dinner on Saturday evening. Dr. Malcolm Vidrine of Louisiana and author of *Cajun Prairie: A Natural History*, won the Dr Charles Allen



COURTESY OF KIRSTI HAMMS

The A. E. Leonard Family Native Plant Garden is features more than three hundred species of native plants from habitats of South Texas. Created by David Mahler of Austin, the walk-through garden features a windmill, flowing creek, and seven plant display areas: riparian creek, cactus garden, rare plants, south Texas brush Community, bordas-escarpment, oak-motte, and native prairie.

Cajun Prairie Award. Sandy Wilson, a Texas Master Naturalist, received the Dick Benoit Upper Texas Coast Award for his volunteer work in prairie restoration. The Clifford Carter Central Texas Coast award went to Tim Anderson of USFWS. The South Texas Prairie Award went to landowner and restorationist Greg Smith, MD. Jason Singhurst, TPWD botanist, was recognized with NPAT's Prairie Preservationist Award.

A special thanks to the super conference committee members Susie Doe, Cheryl Sedivec, and Sonya Najera for making it all happen. And a huge thanks to Jaime Gonzalez, CPP President and conference

founder, who has worked tirelessly for four years to bring prairie information to the public through the SOP conference.

Videos of all the conference presentations can be found on texasprairie.org and at prairiepartner.org.

The Next Conference

The organizers have decided to hold the next SOP conference away from the coast. It will be held in spring of 2014 in the Fort Worth area. This would be a regional conference for Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, and possibly Arkansas.

The focus will (continued on page 5)

NPAT: A Leadership Transition

AS OF OCTOBER 2012, I have agreed to serve as Interim Executive Director for NPAT. I have been a member of the board of directors and an officer since 2006, first as Secretary, President-elect and then President. This change presented a new range of challenges and gave me a different perspective on the organization.



One of the first things I did was attend the Land Trust Alliance Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah along with our Program and Outreach director, Phillip Quast. It was great to join other members of the land trust community, and learn more about conservation easements and all the legal aspects of new IRS regulations, including how to avoid problems by creating the best easement possible. Many of the workshops were led by lawyers who presented much-needed expertise on the increasing complexities and require-

ments of the land trust business.

I have since had the opportunity to travel around the state to visit beautiful prairies and meet with groups and individuals who share the goal of prairie habitat conservation and restoration. I have been so impressed by the many people who volunteer and do extraordinary

things for Texas prairies. It seems we are on the verge of a “prairie awakening” in Texas. I am inspired to work with renewed energy toward conservation of our native prairie habitats and restoring those that have been lost. I look forward to the challenges ahead in growing the organization, saving prairie lands and educating the public about our great prairie heritage in Texas.

—Pat Merkord,
Interim Executive Director

From the Departing Director

I am leaving my position as Executive Director for NPAT on August 1, after serving in that capacity for four years, and as the first employee. During my tenure, the organization completed the Prairie Survey Project, which is serving multiple organizations in strategic planning. New programs which serve NPAT’s mission have also been implemented, including: a North Texas regional restoration guide, landowner workshops, and outreach.

NPAT is unique in both its mission and goals: it focuses on conserving Texas’ historical and ecological heritage—native grasslands; it accomplishes its mission through education, research and restoration as well as acquisition. And while we placed an additional 1,500 acres under protection in the last year, educating children about our heritage

and environmental issues is equally important; especially since they are the decision makers of the future. In addition, helping landowners improve land management through restoration is a worthy goal that increases the quality of open space and our natural resources.

I have been truly blessed in that I have always worked in arenas that I felt were making a difference. And I know that NPAT has not only made a difference but will continue to do so through committed members, board, and staff. I am leaving my position, to work more directly with landowners, but I not only wish NPAT well in all endeavors, I trust that the future will be assured through both wise management and worthy goals.

—Dalmara Bayne,
former Executive Director

Message from the President of the Board

THERE HAS been a change of leadership at NPAT since this summer. When Dalmara Bayne left in August, the board began the search for a replacement. We found several strong candidates, but not the right mix of experience. So I was very pleased when Pat Merkord offered to step in as interim director. She has a 6-year history with the NPAT board, and has run an environmental



business. I volunteered to serve as board president.

We’ve also had changes on the board. Leslie Dietz, Cheryl Sedivec, Mike Roller and Noreen Hoard stepped down this fall. In

spite of family issues, Cheryl spearheaded one more prairie conference. We are very grateful to her for that. Noreen was the first president of NPAT’s first chapter. Lan Shen has offered to serve as interim president of the Houston chapter. We gained two board members in September: Brad Bowman and Ken Wisian. We are thankful for these generous volunteers who serve our organization.

And last—but definitely not least—we owe a big thank you to our very resilient and multi-talented staff member, Phillip Quast. He has worked very hard (and worn a lot of hats) over the past year to keep things running. We could not have done it without him.

NPAT has moved from being an all volunteer run organization to having staff. This has made it possible for us to pursue more complex and involved projects. I’m currently working with Pat and Phillip to get through this transition period. It has been an interesting challenge—running a statewide organization with limited resources can be daunting. But hearing about the local, grassroots efforts to save and restore prairies, gives me hope that we can keep NPAT going. I hope you will continue to support us in our efforts.

—Kirsti Harms
NPAT Board President

Grassroots

Communities working
to save prairies

Deer Park Prairie

A New Name and Effort to Save College Park Prairie

INITIAL ATTEMPTS to save College Park Prairie were unsuccessful but a new group has formed to continue the effort to save this unique and rare cajun prairie in Deer Park. Bayou Land Conservancy headed by Executive Director Jennifer Lorentz is now leading the effort with a new coalition of interested groups including Native Prairies Association of Texas, Katy Prairie Conservancy, Houston Audubon and Texas Master Naturalist Members from the Houston Area. In order to increase awareness of the location of this native prairie, the name has been changed to Deer Park Prairie. It is truly amazing that a 50-acre remnant of such high quality and size could exist in such a developed and industrialized part of the greater Houston area. If you are interested in learning more or helping to save this prairie visit saveourprairie.com.

Commons Ford Prairie

AUSTIN ARTIST Gail Woods is featuring her watercolors of the birds of Commons Ford Prairie at the Laura Bush Library gallery (9411 Bee Caves Road, Austin). Gail is donating all the profits from the sale of these works to the restoration efforts at Commons Ford Ranch Metropolitan Park. Her work will be on display until February 28, 2013. Her artwork will also be available at the Commons Ford Big Day in the Park.

Visit www.etsy.com/shop/BirdsOfCommonsFord.

Big Day in the Park 2013

SUNDAY, APRIL 7, 2013 from 8 to 4 for the Commons Ford Big Day in the



Carolyn Fannon has posted spectacular photos of Deer Park Prairie in her album at saveourprairie.com. The gayfeather blooms (*Liatris pycnostachya*) were abundant this year in late summer and fall.

Park 2013. Walks will include birds, plants, park history and fun for children. Vendors will be selling artwork, books, food and other items. Also planned: a ‘Wing Ding’ to count all of the birds seen and heard in the park that day.

While this event is free, The Big Day in the Park will raise funds to continue the Commons Ford Prairie Restoration Project. Donations of any amount are encouraged. CFPRO is very excited about the results of the first year’s prairie planting, but must continue efforts to further remove invasives and replant natives to insure long-term success. Come see the beginning of a beautiful native prairie.

For more details, or if you want to help with the event, contact Diane Sherrill at nativeearthscapes@gmail.com.

Fort Worth Prairie Park

FRIENDS OF Fort Worth Prairie Park formed recently to gain support and to raise money to save this prairie park from development. The approximately 2,200-acres of virgin prairie, located

southwest of Fort Worth, is currently being held by the Texas General Land Office and is adjacent to a toll road project. A conservation easement of 230+ acres has been promised by a private landowner with intentions to add more land. The Great Plains Restoration Council and Jarod Manos have been working to preserve this property since 2008 (see gprc.org). This is one of the largest undisturbed prairies remnants in the nation. Immediate plans include acquisition of 100 acres to add to the private land held. The North Texas Tollway has agreed to use minimally invasive practices to preserve the prairie. The Army Corp of Engineers at the adjoining Benbrook Lake have expressed interest in working with the park to include access to Rocky Creek Park. Long term goals include an interpretive center for prairie study. Find Friends of the Fort Worth Prairie Park on Facebook. For more information, contact joacollins@gmail.com

Travis Country

THIS NEIGHBORHOOD was recently honored by the Save Barton Creek Association (SBCA) for its efforts to preserve a property located in the heart of the neighborhood. What began as a local, grassroots effort to preserve a small, but environmentally sensitive remnant savannah grew into a significant citywide initiative.

SBCA President Sarah Faust cited the community’s focus, tenacity, and dedication to what often appeared to be a herculean task to protect the savannah (and by association Barton Creek and Barton Springs) from the impact of increased urbanization, and to preserve it for enjoyment by future generations.

HOA Board member Pat Epstein noted that “a few folks involved had some expertise regarding Austin’s environmental issues; however, most—including myself—learned along the way.” She recognized the support of the Travis Country HOA Board and the hundreds of Travis Country residents who participated in the conservation effort by writing emails, walking door-to-door, showing up at countless meetings, and more.

“Great things are accomplished by the tiny steps of many, many people.

Native Grasses for Fall Color

By Mitzi VanSant

AS I DRIVE between Smithville and Austin lately, I've been noticing along the roadside the lovely green grass with purplish seed heads rippling in the wind. The grass is about 18" high and half as wide, but growing closely so as to make one continuous carpet of color.

I did not know the name of the species, and it wasn't one of the more commonly planted native ornamental grasses, so I consulted my friend Linda Lehmusvirta who is the producer of Central Texas Gardener on KLRU in Austin. She often answers questions for gardeners who visit the show's website www.klrutv.com. She was nice enough to do some research for me, and together we reached the conclusion that it was *Aristida purpurea*, or Purple three-awn grass.

Here is what the Wildflower Research Center (www.wildflower.org) writes to describe the variety, "With a gentle breeze passing through purple three-awn inflorescences (grass flowers), a dreamer can imagine that the earth has purple hair. This low-growing prairie grass is good for erosion control on banks and provides a root matrix for many wildflower species. Purple three-awn is an early successional species."

This one short paragraph tells me why I am noticing it for the first time. I used to always lose myself in the tall, dark green foliage of the majestic Loblolly Pines on either side of the road. Now that they are only blackened sticks remaining, my eye is drawn to the grass on the lower plane (plain). Since this grass is "an early successional species", it has arisen as a result of the wildfires last year. Some of it may have been planted by TXDOT, to prevent erosion along the roadside.

Some other more commonly planted native ornamental grasses that you might want to consider for your landscape are:

For shade *Chasmanthium latifolium* (Inland Sea Oats) This 3' high clumping grass develops pendulous seed heads in summer that turn gold and tan in the fall. As the foliage matures over summer, it turns pale gold with a purple cast, and



Gulf muhly forms pink cloudlike seed heads and can be quite striking in the fall. This is the prairie at the entrance to Brazos Bend State Park.

later goes dormant in winter. Like the Purple three-awn, it is appreciated for the movement of those dangling seed heads in the wind.

Carex species, including *C. tumulicola* (Berkeley Sedge), *C. flacca* (Blue Sedge), *C. cherokeensis* (Cherokee Sedge), *C. perdentata* (Meadow Sedge) and *C. texensis* (Texas Sedge) This group of grassy plants are evergreen and prefer shadier conditions. All will form a green carpet from 6"-2' high, depending on variety. They have either a green or yellow bloom; not as ornamental as some other native species. They do, however, work well as an easy evergreen groundcover in shade.

For Sun to Part Shade *Nasella tenuisima* (Mexican Feathergrass) This 1-2' tall semi-evergreen grass is noted for its soft weeping form and feathery seed heads. Green in spring and summer, it turns a silvery green color in fall and winter.

Muhlenbergia capillaries (Gulf Muhly) This is my favorite native ornamental grass, both for its finely textured blue-green foliage, and its cloud-like pink/purple seed heads that form in fall. It

grows to about 2 ½ feet high and wide and mixes beautifully with perennials.

For Full Sun *Muhlenbergia lindheimeri* (Big Muhly) Growing to 4' tall, this native grass makes a big statement all on its own, and I think is better used individually rather than inter-planted with other shrubs and perennials in the garden. The exception is to group it with other native grasses and succulents.

Schizachyrium scoparium (Little blue-stem) The cultivar 'The Blues' is the most beautiful variety, growing to 2-3' with upright bluish foliage accented by reddish stems. The fall color changes to bronze and orange.

Using these native grasses in the garden will cut down on watering and maintenance issues, and provide a connection or transition to the "full wild" of our surrounding landscape.

Mitzi VanSant is the owner of The Fragrant Garden, a landscape and garden design service working in the Austin and Houston metro areas, and rural communities in-between. <http://thefragrantgarden.com>

State of the Prairie Conference

(continued from page 1) be water and wildlife. A conference will not be held in 2013 since the 2012 conference came at the end of the year and it will require a year to plan and organize. A committee will be formed to organize the event and volunteers from the Fort Worth/Dallas area will be needed to help make this conference a success.

If you are a prairie enthusiast anywhere and would like to be on this committee please contact Pat Merkord at pat_merkord@texasprairie.org or call 936-827-7973.

Houston NPAT Chapter Update

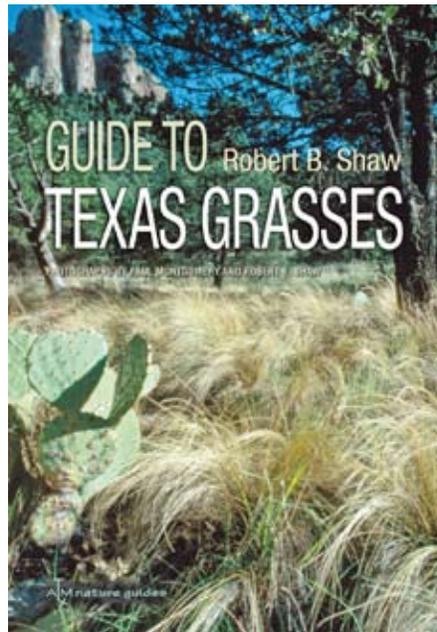
IN DECEMBER, this very active chapter of NPAT finished the year with a pot luck dinner and hosted the statewide organization's 2012 membership meeting. Pat Merkord presented NPAT's achievements and activities for the past year.

Noreen Hoard announced that she will be stepping down as an officer in 2013, but expressed how much she had learned and enjoyed her tenure as president of the Houston NPAT chapter. She plans to remain active in the organization. The board, staff and members greatly appreciate Noreen's hard work as president, and recognize that she was the first official president of HNPAT. Lan Shen has volunteered to take over as a interim president.

Officers will be elected at the Wednesday, January 23 meeting, held at Bayland Community Center on 6400 Bissonnet in Houston. The meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. with a social, followed by a presentation at 7:00. The January speaker is Aaron Tjelmeland, Upper Coast Project Director for The Nature Conservancy. He will be speaking about the invasive plant species of the South Texas prairies, and about some prairie restoration projects.

All HNPAT meetings this year will be held on the 4th wednesday of each month at the above address.

For Your Library



Guide to Texas Grasses By Robert B. Shaw

In this new, complete *Guide to Texas Grasses*, Robert B. Shaw and the team at the Texas A&M University Institute of Renewable Natural Resources provide an indispensable reference to the world's most economically important plant family. After discussing the impact of grass on our everyday lives as food, biofuels, land

restoration, erosion control, and water become ever more urgent issues worldwide—the book then provides: a description of the structure of the grass plant; details of the classification and distribution of Texas grasses; brief species accounts; distributional maps; color photographs; plus black-and-white drawings of 670 grass species—native, introduced, and ornamental. Scientific keys help identify the grasses to group, genera, and species, and an alphabetized checklist includes information on: origin (native or introduced); longevity (annual or perennial); growth season (cool or warm season); endangered status; and occurrence (by ecological zone).

Guide to Texas Grasses is a comprehensive treatment of Texas grasses meant to assist students, botanists, ecologists, agronomists, range scientists, naturalists, researchers, extension agents, and others who work with or are interested in these important plants.

ROBERT B. SHAW is a professor of ecosystem science and management at Texas A&M University. Shaw coauthored (with Frank W. Gould) the second edition of *Grass Systematics* (Texas A&M University Press, 1983) and is the author of *Grasses of Colorado*.



PRAIRIE FEST at the Tandy Hills Natural Area in Fort Worth is coming together. All the bands are selected. There will also be science-based hikes for kids and families, wildflower walks with Master Naturalists, food and other fun stuff. More details to come in the February *Prairie Notes*. For more information, visit www.tandyhills.org

Lesser Prairie-Chicken Listing

THE COMMENT PERIOD is now open for the proposed rule listing the lesser prairie chicken as “threatened.” Members of the public and scientific community are encouraged to review and comment on the proposal during the 90-day comment period ending March 13, 2013. Public hearings will be held in February in New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

You may submit written comments by one of the following methods:

(1) Go to <http://www.regulations.gov>. Search for Docket No. FWS–R2–ES–2012–0071. You may submit a comment by clicking on “Comment Now!”

(2) By mail or hand-delivery to: Public Comments Processing, Attn: FWS–R2–ES–2012–0071 Division of Policy and Directives Management U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042–PDM Arlington, VA 22203.

In Texas, the public hearing to gather comments on the listing proposal will be Monday, February 11, 2013 6:30 p.m.–8:30 p.m. Lubbock Civic Center 1501 Mac Davis Lane Lubbock, TX 79401

Reimagining American Landscapes

The 2013 Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT) Lecture Series kicks off with a presentation by J.K. “Rooter” Brite of JA Ranch, “**Ranchers Perspective of the Importance of Grasslands**” on January 31st at 6:30 p.m. at BRIT (1700 University Drive, Fort Worth). These are free and open to the public. For more information, visit www.brit.org

Later presentations include:

Feb 23, 10:30 a.m.: Dr. Wes Jackson, The Land Institute

April 18, 6:30 p.m.: Dr. Barron Rector, Texas A&M University

May 14, 6:30 p.m.: Dr. Kelly Kindscher, University of Kansas

Make a Difference!

NPAT NEEDS YOU. All types of skills are needed on the Board of Directors.

We are currently in need of officers.

Joining a committee is another way to contribute. • It’s a great way to learn more about conservation and restoration. Volunteers are vital to the success of this organization. Email NPAT at contact@texasprairie.org or call 512-772-4741.

Coastal Prairie By the Numbers

TOM SOLOMON of the Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalists and the Coastal Prairie Partnership has provided some numbers on coastal restoration efforts. The following is for 2012:

Armand Bayou Nature Center

Grasses (gallon plants): 13,176
Forbs (gallon plants): 4,162
Volunteer hours: 3,041
Acres impacted: 34

Sheldon Lake State Park

Grasses (gallon plants): 13,096
Forbs (gallon plants): 2,070
Volunteer hours: 2,146
Acres impacted: 30

Texas City Prairie Preserve

Grasses (gallon plants): 6,733
Forbs (gallon plants): 1,202
Volunteer hours: 1,738
Acres impacted: 10

San Jacinto

Grasses (gallon plants): 3,418
Forbs (gallon plants): 448
Volunteer hours: 964
Acres impacted: 2.5

Volunteers are making a difference!

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Thank you to our **renewing members** as well!

Donate to NPAT to help protect Texas prairies. Many employers will match donations, so check with your employer to make your donation go farther!