

A Look Back, And Moving Forward

By Kirsti Harms

SINCE THE last issue of *Texas Prairie News*, NPAT has continued to evolve as an organization, acquired some prairies and gone through some staffing changes. If you haven't been following us online or seen the monthly e-newsletter, I thought I'd fill you in on the last year or so.

On the staffing front, long-time Executive Director **Pat Merkord** retired in April. She is spending more time with her family, focusing on her environmental business with husband Glenn, and exploring America's prairies and parks. Pat remains active with NPAT as a board member. We appreciate all her efforts for our organization, particularly in expanding our presence in the Texas conservation community and getting the chapters off the ground. We couldn't have done this without her!

In June, **Phillip Quast** moved on to work for the City of New Braunfels' Public Works department as a water quality specialist. Phillip started with NPAT almost 10 years ago as an intern to our first executive director. Since that time he has served in many positions at NPAT, and finally as Interim Executive Director. Phillip was instrumental in NPAT's achieving land trust accreditation. He has been the backbone of this organization for many years and leaves some very large shoes to fill. We wish him well on his next venture!

Where do we stand now? You may recognize my name from my years on the board (and as newsletter editor). I have offered to serve as Interim Executive



PHOTO COURTESY OF STALIN SM

Director until the board is ready to hire a new director. My ten years of NPAT board leadership and long-time involvement in the natural environment of Texas has given me an understanding of this organization that I hope will serve NPAT well. I am teaming with our able office administrator **Pat Rinn** to keep things moving forward. Pat was hired initially to help with accreditation tasks. She now handles membership, the monthly e-newsletter and other critical administrative tasks. I am thankful to have her on board. You can email us at kirsti_harms@texasprairie.org and pat_rinn@texasprairie.org.

THE BLACKLAND Chapter of Native Prairies Association of Texas hosted another successful bus tour. The June trip included visits to Matthew Cartwright-Roberts Prairie near Terrell (pictured here), Ebel Grassland Ranch in Sulphur Bluff, Lennox Woods Preserve near Clarksville, and Mr. B. F. Hicks' Daphne Prairie near Mt. Vernon. Lunch and a tour at the Lennox House in Clarksville was hosted by the Red River County Historical Society. As the finale, the tour group were dinner guests of the Franklin County Historical Association at Mr. Hicks' Church Inn.

LAND TRUST ACCREDITATION

NPAT: Mission Accomplished!

AFTER YEARS of organizational work by the staff and board—with valuable support provided by the Land Trust Alliance team—the Native Prairies Association of Texas was awarded land trust accreditation on February 28, 2018. Accreditation is awarded to land trusts that have shown that they meet the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. NPAT provided extensive documentation and underwent a comprehensive review by the Land Trust Accreditation Commission.* NPAT is a stronger organization for having gone through this rigorous process. It helps ensure that our prairies will be protected in perpetuity. We are making Texas an even greater place for current and future generations.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AIRSITI HARMS

Daphne Prairie is owned by B.F. Hicks and the conservation easement is held by NPAT.

“AT A TIME of political change, one thing is consistent: Americans strongly support saving the open spaces they love. Since 1986, Native Prairies Association of Texas has been doing just that for the people of Texas. NPAT is joining a network of 398 accredited land trusts across the nation that have demonstrated their commitment to professional excellence and to maintaining the public’s trust in their work.”

—The Land Trust Accreditation Commission

What is a Land Trust?

There are dozens of land trusts working throughout the state to conserve the best of Texas’ precious lands and waters. To date, these land trusts have conserved over 1.6 million acres of forests, wetlands, farms and ranches, deserts, coastlines, hill country, and prairies.

Land trusts are charitable organizations whose mission is land and water conservation. These organizations assist Texas landowners with the long-term conservation goals they have for their properties. Land trusts conserve natural areas by negotiating private, voluntary agreements with property owners. Together, landowners and land trusts conserve these special places by permanently protecting them from development for the benefit of the people, economy and wildlife of Texas.

Land trusts bring people together to make commitments that can change communities. They work with landowners to identify lands that are worthy of protection for their natural, cultural, agricultural, recreational or other conservation values.

—Texas Land Trust Council
(texaslandtrustcouncil.org)

What is a Conservation Easement?

A conservation easement is a legal agreement, placed by a landowner, that restricts future uses of a property. The purpose of a land trust is to ensure that the property will be managed to preserve the natural features, historic sites, scenery, traditional land uses or other values of the easement agreement. NPAT accepts donations of conservation easements specifically to protect prairies. Conserva-

tion easements are permanent, run with the title of the property in perpetuity. The property may be sold or inherited, but future owners must follow the terms of the easement. Permanent conservation easements may confer tax benefits to the donor. For more information, download *Conservation Easements: A Guide For Texas Landowners*, at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/private/conservation_easements/.



Accreditation demonstrates NPAT’s long term commitment its role in the conservation, restoration, and appreciation of native prairies, savannas, and other grasslands in Texas.



* *The Land Trust Accreditation Commission is an independent program of the Land Trust Alliance, governed by a volunteer board of diverse land conservation and nonprofit management experts. The program is intended to build and recognize strong land trusts, foster public confidence in land conservation and help ensure the long-term protection of land. For more information about the Land Trust Alliance, go to landtrustalliance.org.*

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

We depend on your support to help us conserve Texas prairies and to educate people about their value. NPAT's programs are supported by gifts, donations, grants, membership dues and volunteer efforts.

BEQUESTS Consider making a gift to NPAT in your will. These gifts help us create a Texas prairie legacy for future generations to experience.

SAVE A PRAIRIE with a donation of property or a conservation easement. Benefits include: Significant tax incentives: estate, income, and capital gains
 • management and restoration advice • conservation of family and Texas prairies

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact us at office@texasprairie.org, call **512-772-4741** or visit texasprairie.org



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DELLA BARBATO

One switch-grass plant is three children long!



A New Face at Deer Park!

Thanks to a generous **Shell Corporation** education grant, **Della Barbato** was hired in April as Director of Education at Lawther-Deer Park Prairie.

Della has been involved in environmental education for many years. She is president of Earth Voice, a company that conducts interactive programs about our ecosystems and natural resources. She has a M.S. from Texas A&M University, is a Galveston Bay Area Master Naturalist, has developed curriculum as a middle school science teacher, and was Education Director for the Galveston Bay Foundation and other non-profits.

Della is developing an educational program that includes student activities; trains teachers to teach the prairie; and facilitates partnerships with local school districts, businesses and other NGOs in the greater Houston area. She will also develop a grassland curriculum that can be presented to classes in local schools.

You can reach her at della_barbato@texasprairie.org.

CHAPTER MONTHLY MEETINGS AND REGULAR EVENTS

Blackland (Dallas) Chapter

Usually meets on the second Tuesday.
blacklandnpat.wordpress.com.

CenTex (Central Texas) Chapter

Usually meets on the first Wednesday in Georgetown.
 Indiagrass Prairie nature walks and work days are on the third Saturday

Fort Worth Chapter

Usually meets on the second Monday
fortworthnpat.wordpress.com

Houston Chapter

Usually meets on the fourth Wednesday
 Deer Park surveys and work days are on the second Wednesday and fourth Saturdays • houstonprairie.org

San Antonio Chapter

Usually meets on the first Tuesday
 Kirchoff Family Farm Restoration work days are on the third Saturday

A SAMPLING OF FALL EVENTS

Fire Ecology Bus Tour to Ray Roberts Lake State Park, Saturday, September 29 for more details, go to fortworthnpat.wordpress.com

Fall Prairie Day at Lawther-Deer Park Prairie on Saturday, September 29 houstonprairie.org

Yantis Prairie Day

Saturday, September 29 at Yantis ISD, 105 W. Oak, Yantis
 Contact: debbie_rhodes@yahoo.com

Elisabet Ney Museum Landscape Walk and Work Day, Austin on Saturday, October 6

Commons Ford Prairie Walk, Austin on Sunday October 7

Texas Prairies and Migratory Birds Workshop

Floresville on Saturday, November 3
 San Antonio Missions National Historical Park and NPAT joint workshop at Three Oaks Community Center and the Kirchoff Family Farm Restoration

Sign up for our monthly e-newsletter to stay current on meetings and events. Go to texasprairie.org and scroll to the bottom of the home page. Find us on **Facebook!**



SAVE THE DATE!

Healthy Prairies, Healthy Watersheds.

The 25th North American Prairie Conference will be held at the University of Houston at Clear Lake on **June 2-5, 2019**

Stay tuned for more details.



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAIME GONZALEZ

The MD Anderson prairie in Houston is a great example of an urban pocket prairie.

It's Prairie Time!

YES, IT'S STILL hot out there. But fall in Texas is a great time to plant, and summer is a good time to plan for it. Our (mostly) mild winters give seeds and young plants time to get established before the long, hot summers hit.

Why not plant a prairie? The Katy Prairie Conservancy recently posted a page titled "Building a Pocket Prairie." Its focus is on the Houston area, but the information can be applied to starting a small (usually urban) prairie site in other parts of the state as well. This page includes tips on selecting and preparing a site, finding plants and seeds, getting others involved, and telling the story of your prairie. Check out katyprairie.org/buildpocketprairies/.

For more information about native seed mixes for your region, visit Native American Seed at seedsources.com. For inspiration, check out the Blackland Prairie mix page and the story of the Commons Ford Prairie Restoration in a City of Austin park. The Bee Happy and Butterfly Retreat mixes are great for adding pollinator-attracting wildflowers to your prairie. The site offers several other mixes and information for projects

throughout Texas. Other Texas native seed sources include Turner Seeds in Breckenridge (www.turnerseed.com) and Douglas King Seeds in San Antonio (www.dkseeds.com). The Native Plant Society of Texas posts a resource list at npsot.org/wp/resources/finding-natives/.

Learn from a great group of folks by getting involved with your local prairie, native plant society or master naturalist group. Find out more about planting, collecting seeds, and buying and transplanting native plants from your area. It's also a good way to get hands-on experience with prairie projects. Check out NPAT's chapter pages for events and projects around the state (texasprairie.org).

To increase your plant knowledge, visit the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin or go online to wildflower.org. In Fort Worth, check out the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (brit.org). Their campus includes a mid-grass prairie. Go afield and search for prairies at your local nature center or park. You can find them throughout the state. Fall is a great time to visit a prairie. It's considered our second spring and the season when many of our native grasses are in bloom. Time to get outside!

Pollinator Conservation

THE LADY Bird Johnson Wildflower Center site states that native pollinators—bees, butterflies, moths, bats and birds—play a critical role in sustaining ecosystems and provide essential services to American agriculture (as much as \$9 billion annually).

Yet pollinators are in trouble. More than 50 native bees are in documented decline, (xerces.org/pollinator-redlist/) with nine critically imperiled. Another iconic North American pollinator—the monarch butterfly—is in severe decline, down from a billion monarchs 20 years ago to 35 million today. Research shows that native pollinators can be two to three times as effective at pollinating agricultural crops as non-native honeybees (news.cornell.edu/stories/2011/10/native-bees-are-better-pollinators-honeybees).

According to the Million Pollinator Gardens Challenge, pollinators are responsible for one out of three bites of food we take each day, and yet pollinators are at critical point in their own survival. Many reasons contribute to their recent decline. More nectar and pollen sources provided by more flowering plants and trees will help improve their health and numbers.

What better habitat for native pollinators is there than a native prairie?

To learn more about pollinators and how you can help, go to these resources:

- Pollinator Partnership pollinator.org/nappc
- Xerces Society xerces.org
- Bee Spotter beespotter.org
- Monarch Joint Venture monarchjointventure.org
- Monarch Gateway monarchgateway.org
- Journey North journeynorth.org/monarchs
- National Pollinator Garden Network millionpollinatorgardens.org
- Butterflies and Moths of North America, butterfliesandmoths.org

A PRAIRIE WORTH SAVING

The Paul Mathews Prairie Legacy

FIRST OF ALL, thank you to our chapters, members and other donors for your dedication and support in raising the funds to purchase **Paul Mathews Prairie!** NPAT was able to raise the funds in a very short time thanks to these efforts and this generosity. Special thanks to Jason and Lisa Spangler, and Evaline Woodrey whose contributions took us to the top. This project was a galvanizing event for all of us. Many have expressed their sense of accomplishment in contributing to the success of this campaign. Several of you have said that saving prairies was the main reason you joined NPAT. And some are already asking what the next project will be!

In addition to our Fort Worth and Blackland chapters, our partner conservation organizations have been very generous as well. The Nature Conservancy (TNC) provided managerial support. The North Central and Collin County chapters of the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSOT) stepped up with financial support. Fort Worth chapter member, Suzanne Tuttle delivered a presentation to the North Central NPSOT Chapter about NPAT's efforts, and the chapter voted to make a very generous contribution to the Paul Mathews Prairie Fund. Our former Executive Director Pat Merkord performed her speaking magic and garnered support from other North Texas groups as well.

This prairie is named for Paul Mathews, who was the owner from 1969 to 2005. Paul was born in 1904, and played in this prairie as a child. He always wanted to preserve it and was finally able to buy 'Paul's Prairie' in 1969. The conservation easement with TNC was placed in the 1980s, and was one of the earliest in Texas. Paul managed the prairie by haying until about 1996. In 1998, he received the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Lone Star Land Steward Award for his care of this prairie. Paul maintained the prairie until his death in 2005, at age 101. It was then sold to Dr. Jim Conrad, a university archivist at Texas A&M-Commerce,



Paul Mathews and his prairie legacy

who credited Matt White in recognizing its value. Dr. Conrad made plans to sell it in 2017. TNC then approached NPAT about purchasing the prairie.

Mathews Prairie is located northeast of Dallas in Hunt County. It is a 100-acre remnant of Texas Blackland prairie—an ecoregion that runs 300 miles from the Red River to San Antonio and is named for its rich black soil.

"[Blackland Prairie] has remained unchanged for thousands of years and still erupts each year in a riot of colorful wildflowers as it has for centuries. Tall grasses once covered much of the Great Plains and hosted dozens of bird species that have declined dramatically following the destruction of the prairie after the Civil War. Today the tallgrass prairie is one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world." —Matt White, author of *Prairie Time: A Blackland Portrait*.

Jim Eidson, former manager of TNC's nearby Clymer Meadow described Mathews Prairie as one of the best representatives of a gamagrass/switchgrass/Indiangrass vertisolic prairie in Texas ("vertisolic" refers to a clayey soil with



little organic matter). This is a relatively flat prairie with some very deep gilgai (these are sometimes called "hogwallows" by farmers). Normal gilgai are rounded, shallow basins, often arranged in a honeycomb-like pattern on level, heavy clay soils. Because they tend to hold water, they often contain moisture-loving species such as eastern gamagrass and spikerush, while drier-adapted species like sideoats grama and little bluestem are common on their ridges.

We are very excited to continue Paul Mathews' and Dr. Jim Conrad's legacy of stewardship of this special prairie. Stay tuned for future opportunities to visit and participate in its care.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUSAN CONATY

Peter Conaty



Kunda Lee Wicce

In Memoriam

WE'VE LOST some of our prairie heroes in recent years: people who were passionate about Texas prairies, and who shared that love and knowledge with others. We hope to continue their legacy to future prairie lovers. These friends will be missed.

Kunda Lee Wicce, formerly known as Lee Stone, passed away in August 2017. Kunda was a founding member and president of NPAT in addition to being a passionate supporter of native prairies. She was employed in Austin's Environmental Department and was involved in saving one of Austin's only remaining prairie remnants at Indian-grass Wildlife Sanctuary.

The **Reverend Peter Conaty** also passed in August 2017. Peter and his wife Susan were instrumental in the protection and acquisition of the Nash Prairie—now owned by The Nature Conservancy. "This remnant coastal tall grass prairie stands as testimony to who Peter was and is part of his enduring legacy. Peter's enthusiasm for the "Works of God" found in nature was obvious and contagious." —Brandt Mannchen

James Alderson, former NPAT program director and past president passed away in October 2017. James retired from NRCS in 2005 and continued to be an eloquent spokesman for prairies. He was instrumental in the restoration of Maddin Prairie Preserve.

Flo Hannah passed away in January 2018. Flo was Houston Audubon's native plant expert. She was a champion of the endangered coastal prairies and was actively involved in saving Lawther-Deer Park Prairie. She also was a cofounder of the Coastal Prairie Partnership.

Jim Varnum passed away in April 2016. He was a self-taught naturalist whose interests ranged from birds to plants to prairies to land preservation. He led regular Trout lily walks in the Dallas area. When asked about his interest in nature, Jim quoted author Ellen Parr: "The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity."

On a personal note: I lost my father, **Bob Harms** in October 2016. He was passionate about the natural world and studied it with a professor's intensity. I credit him with opening the door to my love of the Texas wild.


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Association of Texas

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Office Administrator Pat Rinn

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blacklandnpat.wordpress.com

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CenTex and San Antonio

chapters are active
websites in progress

Visit texasprairie.org
or write **415 N. Guadalupe St.**
PMB 385, San Marcos, TX 78666

Thank you!

TO OUR MEMBERS AND DONORS!

YOUR GENEROUS support of NPAT makes it possible to carry out our mission of conserving, restoring and sharing an appreciation of native prairies. There are too many to acknowledge on this page, but know that your support is greatly appreciated—at any level. Here are some significant donations from the past two years.

\$68,000

Shell Oil Education Grant for
Lawther–Deer Park Prairie

Deer Park Prairie

Ian Kress

Maddin Prairie Trailer

Melody Lytle
Glenn and Pat Merkord, and
Kirsti Harms (transportation)

\$6000+

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MATHEWS PRAIRIE

Thank you to EVERYONE who
contributed to make the purchase
of this prairie possible!

\$20,000

Jason & Lisa Spangler

\$10,000

Evaline Margaret Woodrey

SUMMER-FALL 2018

\$1,000–\$5,000

Jillian Jordan (The Great Seed
Bomb and EARTHx)
David and Linda Knowles
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To join online, visit texasprairie.org and go to the Support Us page.

Or fill out this form and mail a check to: **Native Prairies Association of Texas**
415 N. Guadalupe St. PMB 385
San Marcos, TX 78666

Membership Categories: \$1,500 Family Lifetime \$1,000 Lifetime
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I'm interested in prairies because: _____

Please consider including an additional donation with your membership dues.



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



Sign up for NPAT's email newsletter at texasprairie.org. and keep up with prairie events across the state.

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SAVE THE DATE for the North American Prairie Conference in June 2019. See page 3.

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Photo by Stalin SM



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KELLY WALKER

**BUILDING A PRAIRIE
A CAR LOAD AT A TIME...**

Kelly Walker is a girl on the go! Lately she has been helping create a Monarch Heroes garden at Lovett Elementary in Houston. That has involved bringing in transplants. Kelly started salvaging plants from Becker prairie, which is slated for development, and giving them a new home. Funds for this project came through a National Wildlife Federation program for pollinators.

