

TEXAS PRAIRIE

Journal

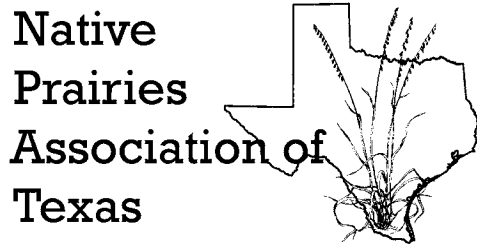
Prairie in Pieces

**Bob and Mickey Burleson
Win**

**Lone Star Land Steward
Award!**

**Condemnation:
Fighting**

A Growing Threat to Conserved Land



Who We Are and What We Do

Mission

The Native Prairies Association of Texas (NPAT) is a non-profit land trust dedicated to the conservation, restoration, and appreciation of native prairies, savannas, and other grasslands in Texas. We save Texas prairies.

Less than 1% of the original 20 million acres of Texas' beautiful tallgrass prairie remains, so we must act now to conserve our remaining tallgrass prairie heritage.

Conservation

NPAT protects prairies through acquisition, partnerships, and by accepting donations of conservation easements and property to protect native prairie in perpetuity. Learn more about protecting your prairie in perpetuity and potential tax benefits.

We protect over 1200 acres of native Texas prairie, including over 100 acres of endangered/threatened tallgrass prairie.

Restoration

We restore native prairie on our own land, and promote restoration on other private and public lands to benefit the native plant communities, grassland birds, and other prairie wildlife of Texas. We provide informational resources and advice to assist restoration.

Appreciation

We educate Texans about native prairies, plant communities, grassland birds, and other prairie wildlife. We promote the conservation and restoration of Texas prairies.

Partners and Affiliations

NPAT is affiliated with the following groups:

- Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
- Land Trust Alliance
- Native Plant Conservation Campaign
- Native Plant Society of Texas
- Plant Conservation Alliance
- Teaming with Wildlife
- Texas Land Trust Council
- Texas Prairie Coalition

COVER PHOTO © STEVE SCHWARTZMANN

About the photo, Steve says, "Although the "mountain" in mountain pinks correctly suggests the plant's usual haunt is the Texas Hill Country, in May of 2006 I came across several small colonies growing on what would have to be considered prairie well east of the Balcones Fault in Austin. The colonies were located along the south side of US 290 from about a third of a mile to two-thirds of a mile east of US 183. The first group was in terrain that had become part of a US 290 construction site, and the groups farther east were in "vacant" lots bordering an older section of the highway."

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NPAT Update

From the President

GREETINGS to all prairie supporters! We have lots to feel good about and work to do. NPAT is about to have its most exciting year yet!

How do you like our new newsletter/journal format? For this we thank **Kirsti Harms**, our new Board Director from Austin who is an art director for *Texas Highways* magazine. As an avid birder and not at all bad with her prairie plant identifications, she has become an instantly valued member of the Maddin Prairie Management team. Welcome, Kirsti! Thank you for your cheerful service to prairie conservation!

I am also pleased to welcome another new Board Director: **Dr. David Rosen** is an active prairiephile and does much for their conservation as a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He is our second current board member coming from the east side of the State, along with our Secretary Pat Merkord. David has already been an asset to our NPAT prairie work and we are very happy to welcome him aboard.

Thanks to NPAT Treasurer **Jason Spangler**'s many talents and to the **Meadows Foundation**'s appreciation of the critical importance of prairie conservation, we received the splendid news on Valentine's Day that the Foundation has granted us \$192,000 over the next three years to support staff and outreach, including our 90-county search to document all the remaining tallgrass prairie in Texas! Our special thanks to **Mike McCoy** of the Meadows Foundation for his belief in us. We have been all-volunteer since our founding in 1985. We have accomplished a lot in the last ten years and are now more than ready to take NPAT to the next level.

And now, more thanks, this time to the **Dixon Water Foundation** in Fort Worth: NPAT is the recipient of another big grant to support professional NPAT staffing over the next three years. We are enormously grateful to Foundation President **Robert Potts** of San Antonio for his trust and confidence. And again our thanks to Board Director extraordinaire Jason S. for being the best treasurer and fund-raiser our Board ever had!

Speaking of officer positions on the board, I announced at our annual Board Retreat last January in Fort Davis that **I will not seek re-election** as an officer at the end of this year, that I will stand for re-election to the

Board for one more two-year term in a non-officer capacity to assist with our transition to a staffed land trust, and if re-elected, I will be retiring from the board at the end of 2010, grateful to my heart's core for the experiences and the friendships.

In a related note, **Jason** recently announced he will stand for **President** of the Board (all officers are elected by the standing Board) after my retirement, and that means we will need to **recruit a treasurer**.

Here's what he writes about the task: "Luckily, the Treasurer's job will not be as time-consuming in the future since we will have staff (see page 3) handling the day-to-day business of the organization. The division of work and responsibilities between the treasurer and staff will need to be determined. I foresee the Treasurer will have a financial oversight role, and partner with the staff in creating financial reports, budgets, and tax filings and arranging financial audits."

Please give either of us a call to learn more about opportunities to serve our wonderful native grasslands. Service of the Board is a tremendously rewarding feeling! I've been a volunteer for native prairies since 1986 when former President, founding member and my mentor **Arnold Davis** recruited me. Maybe I'll wax eloquent in my final message as President about those founding members, and those who came next whom I have been privileged to know. It truly has been an incredible 20 years of working with people passionate about prairie conservation. We actually do have current vacancies on the board, so if you would like to help out, please call one of your friendly Board members about your interest in serving.

Thank you for being supporters of native grasslands.

—Kunda Wicce

CALL FOR BOARD MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

NPAT needs members willing to serve on the Board of Directors, and we need volunteers to help with prairie restoration and advocacy! Please contact NPAT via email at info@texasprairie.org or via postal mail if you are interested.

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TEXAS PRAIRIE *Journal*

If you wish to submit articles, send to editor@texasprairie.org. We welcome reports, articles, literature reviews, and announcements related to native prairies. Please submit photos via e-mail.

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The Burlesons Receive the 2008 Lone Star Award

PHOTO COURTESY OF LISA SPANGLER

THE TEXAS Parks and Wildlife Commission has announced that Bob and Mickey Burleson are the 2008 Lone Star Land Steward Award winner for the Blackland Prairie Ecoregion. The award will be given out at a ceremony on Wednesday, May 21st.



Jason Spangler nominated the Burlesons for this award. He says about them: “Bob and Mickey Burleson are two of my prairie heroes. Decades ago, when few people talked about tallgrass prairie conservation and restoration, they went and did it: they purchased worn out crop land and an overgrazed prairie remnant in Bell County and spent many years restoring over two hundred and fifty acres of highly diverse, native tallgrass Blackland Prairie through collection and planting of local ecotype native seed from area hay meadow prairie remnants, invasive plant removal, prescribed burning, haying, and other management practices.

The Burlesons collected local ecotype seed from native prairie hay meadows in the area, many of which no longer exist due to being destroyed by plowing or development. Their prairie is an invaluable source of locally adapted native plant genetics and seed, and they have provided prairie seed and seed hay for use in other restorations.

Both Bob and Mickey were founding members of the Native Prairies Asso-

ciation of Texas (NPAT). They host field trips for landowners, prairie conservationists and enthusiasts, and any others who wish to learn about tallgrass prairie restoration. They have also written a tallgrass restoration guide, “The New Southern Reconstruction—Home Grown Prairies”, which is available online on NPAT’s web site.”

The Lone Star Land Steward Awards program recognizes and honors private landowners for their accomplishments in habitat management and wildlife conservation. This program is designed to educate landowners and the public and to encourage participation in habitat conservation.

For more information go to www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/private/lone_star_land_steward/.

Congratulations Bob and Mickey!

Information Request for Prairies and Savannas

NPAT IS LOOKING for prairie and savanna remnants and restorations throughout Texas, especially in the Blackland Prairie, Coastal Prairie, and Grand Prairie (of the Cross Timbers and Prairies) regions of Texas.

Knowledge of prairie remnants greatly assists us in conservation planning, and helps us identify land owners so we can inquire about their interest in protecting their prairie.

If you know of any existing remnants (even drive-by sightings or just rumors), own a prairie remnant, or are restoring prairie on your land, please contact NPAT via email at info@texasprairie.org or write to 2002 - A Guadalupe St. PMB 290, Austin, Tx 78705-5609.

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Message of the Milkweed

By Don Young

THE DEAD OF WINTER is upon us. Braving the cold wind on a recent hike at Tandy Hills Natural Area, I observed that last seasons tall grasses have begun their slow motion freefall to Mother Earth. The colorless, skeletal remains of Eryngo lanterns belie the deep purple of their recent youth. Lanky limbs of False Gauras sway in the chilly breeze. Bleached, leathery fans of Compass plant and dried husks of Prairie Primrose litter the cold ground. It's winter, all right. Not a mosquito in sight.

The trees lining the steep slopes and drainages have shed their leaves, which have piled up along the trails and winding creek banks. Sightlines through the landscape are much longer. Wildlife burrows, carefully hidden a few months ago, are now clearly visible. The only interruptions to the eye in this drab, grey/brown landscape are the bright red fruits of the Possumhaw tree.

Despite few visible signs of life, Tandy Hills is far from dead. In fact, an unfathomable source of energy is at work. Down along the sheltering creek banks, in the deep compost of last years leaves, lie the spawning grounds of the elusive, Trout Lily, one of springs early messengers. Plunge your hand into the fragrant soil and you can smell April.

Higher up the slopes small, fragrant rosettes of Engelmann's Sage, are silently forming (at least to human ears) into dense colonies that will soon blanket the ground in blue-purple flowers. All over this winter wonderland the energy that produces the season we call spring is almost overwhelming.

Hiking back up the hill, I spied the strange shape of a milkweed pod in the grass. The gray-green, spike-studded marvel looks like something from a 50's sci-fi flick. I took it home and placed it on a table.

A few days later, just like in the movies, the pod began to transform before my eyes, splitting open lengthwise. Soon after, the "creatures" inside began to emerge. These feather-like vehicles for the milkweed seeds float lightly on the wind, not unlike the Monarch butterflies who will feed on the fruit of the mature plants come spring.

As I sat outside composing this essay on an unseasonably mild February afternoon, my concentration was interrupted by a loud thump. I looked up to see a disoriented Cedar Waxwing lying on the ground next to a nearby window. The



window was smeared with damp feathers. Chasing the cat away, I carefully picked up the uncommonly beautiful creature for a closer look. There was a little blood but the bird seemed okay.

The unblinking little Icarus sat perched on my tablet while I fetched my bird guidebook and camera. Seems the little guy was drunk on fermented Juniper berries, the reason he was here in the first place. Tandy Hills is dotted with Junipers and the fruits are indeed ripe. Feeling like a police desk clerk confronting a DWI suspect, I couldn't resist this rare photo op and took a snapshot of the unfortunate victim. (See attached photo.) Seconds later, he joined his mates in a Sugarberry tree, where he sat motionless, perhaps pondering his fate, for a good hour.

About a week later, after an extended warm spell, I took to hills again. Hiking down to where I found the Milkweed pod, I was astounded to see innumerable milkweed seeds parachuting in the

wind. As if obeying a silent command from an unseen force, it seemed every milkweed pod at Tandy Hills had split open at the same moment in time.

Thinking back on the magnificence of these events and the creatures great and small that occupy Tandy Hills, I feel acutely aware of how fragile and tenuous their existence is, especially in the Barnett Shale region of Texas. I am reminded of the importance of our role in protecting natural areas from those who are only interested in what they can take from the land and put in the bank. Please continue supporting efforts to save some of Texas.

Come to the meadow and feel the powerful energy that will slowly transform Tandy Hills into a color-drenched spectacle in less than 80 days.

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Friends of Tandy Hills Natural Area are Pleased to Announce

The Third Annual Fort Worth Prairie Fest

Saturday, April 26, 2008

11 a.m. - 8 p.m.

FREE Admission

Tandy Hills Natural Area is a 160-acre prairie remnant located at 3400 View Street in Fort Worth.

"BIGGER & GREENER IN '08!" Prairie Fest features live music and entertainment; arts, crafts, and green-living exhibits; environmental speakers and botanical educators. Learn all about Prairie Fest by going to www.tandyhills.org and clicking on the EVENTS tab.

If you embrace the Prairie Fest philosophy of environmental stewardship through sustainable living, green building, clean energy, organics and prairie preservation, sign up now to be an exhibitor, sponsor or volunteer.

When you visit www.tandyhills.org, be sure and check out the entertaining, three-minute Prairie Fest video. It's a toe-tapper!

Please spread the word by sharing this message with your friends.

—Don Young

A Prairie In Pieces

By Henry Chappell

Remnants of Blackland Prairie—with head-high grasses and rolling meadows—shed light on a vanishing part of Texas heritage.

MATT WHITE speaks in paragraphs, pausing often as if to compose and polish. His manner invites careful reply, for when he's in virgin prairie, his element, he is inclined to stop in midstride—on his way to point out the crawdad-shaped root clumps of red gamma, say—to address in detail something you said in passing an hour earlier.

Perhaps this habit stems from his calling as an educator; he teaches history at Paris Junior College. Just as likely, it reflects his position as a student of his home ground, the Blackland Prairie of north central Texas—or what's left of it.

I have lived in the Blacklands, in the Dallas area, for the past 25 years. I know parts of other regions of Texas better than I know my home county in Kentucky, where I was born and raised. Yet I had never seen a piece of untilled Blackland Prairie until I stood with White on a cool mid-September morning in a 100-acre remnant in central Hunt County, near Greenville.

Notwithstanding the summer heat, I would have rather seen the meadow in June or July, the peak wildflower season. I had expected the deep greens and straw browns of late summer, and indeed those hues were present in abundance. But I was unprepared for the magenta of fall-flowering gayfeather, the azure blooms of blue sage, the deep red fruit of prairie rose.

"I've always heard about head-high big bluestem," White said. "But I had never seen it until this year."

Neither had I. Nor chest-high Maximilian's sunflower, waist-high Indian grass, switch grass, eastern gama, knee-high little bluestem and sideoats grama, layered like a climax forest, laid out in a mosaic of communities suited to varying soil moisture.

Over the course of a long life, even residents—those who care to notice—can expect to see the prairie at its most glorious during only a few summers. I was fortunate. After a long drought, record spring and early summer rains had found the tough prairie rootage protected, healthy and waiting. The Blacklands have known

periodic drought for thousands of years.

This tiny parcel of prairie had been a hay meadow set aside like money in a savings account, a hedge against drought, hail, pestilence and worn-out soil. A healthy patch of Blackland Prairie, unplowed and used with care, will feed grazing stock when the vagaries of nature lay waste to cotton, corn and sorghum.

"The best of the old farmers had a practical conservation ethic that's rare today," White said. "They knew that they had to plan for every contingency. They couldn't just go buy whatever they needed like we can."

White lives with his wife, Kristin, and four daughters on the Hunt County farm where he was raised. In his book *Prairie Time: A Blackland Portrait* (TAMU Press, 2006), he writes, "I come from prairie people. Therefore it is with mixed emotion that I write about these people, the world they inhabited, and the way they treated the land around them. I may not agree with the choices they made, but I realize that those choices were often desperate ones meant to ensure their survival."

The Blackland Prairie Region is an extension of the Tallgrass Prairie that runs through the eastern portions of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas, most of Iowa, and parts of Missouri, Indiana and Minnesota.

In Texas, the Blacklands, bounded on the west by the Cross Timbers and Prairies Region and in the east by the Post Oak Savannah Region, extend from the Red River, in Grayson, Fannin and Lamar

counties and the eastern half of Red River County, about 300 miles southward in a gradually narrowing band, through Dallas and Waco, terminating just north of San Antonio—about 12 million acres in all. Except for river breaks, the Blacklands are gently rolling, ranging in elevation from 300 to 800 feet.

The region takes its name from the rich, black, waxy, alkaline, calciferous soil that has long delighted and vexed nearly everyone who has ever worked it, from 19th century yeomen to modern weekend gardeners. Pioneers called Blackland soil "nooner" soil because it was often too gummy to plow on wet mornings, then hard as concrete by mid-afternoon. Even today, a brief shower can make unpaved farm roads treacherously slick or impassible, even to farm machinery and vehicles with four-wheel drive.

As with the Tallgrass Prairie in the plains states to the north, big bluestem and Indian grass dominate most of Blackland Prairie, while midgrasses such as little bluestem, sideoats grama and switch grass are common as well. Ancient root systems, equal in biomass to the richest tropical forests, anchor the prairie soil.

"Unlike the forests in the east, these prairies were ready for settlement," White says. "You didn't have to clear land. Just show up with your milk cow and a few hogs, and build a cabin. You might not have much, but you wouldn't starve."

In 1848, upon arriving at the edge of the Blackland Prairie, John Brooke, an emigrant from England, wrote: "It was the

Visiting Blackland remnants

Most of Texas' remaining Blackland Prairie survives in small patches on private property.

- The Nature Conservancy owns or manages several tracts for the purposes of preservation, research and public education. **Clymer Meadow Preserve**, a 1,068-acre remnant in northwestern Hunt County, near Greenville, is one of the largest and most scenic Blackland Prairie remnants in Texas. Access is by appointment only. For information, call the preserve manager at (903) 568-4139 or visit www.nature.org.
- **Parkhill Prairie**, a 436-acre preserve in northeast Collin County, features a 52-acre remnant prairie and walking trail: www.co.collin.tx.us/parks/parkhill_prairie.jsp.
- **Cedar Hill State Park** is refuge to five small prairie remnants: www.tpwd.state.tx.us/cedarhill.
- **Rosehill Park** is a 75-acre prairie preserve in Garland: www.ci.garland.tx.us.



THIS BREEDING BIRD of the North American tall- and mixed-grass prairies, and fallow agricultural fields is named after its song—a simple, sharp, dry “dick, dick, cissel cissel.” In late spring, the male **Dickcissel** (*Spiza Americana*) sings all day long while perching on a fence post or tall stalk. Dickcissels are an “irruptive” species though—they can be abundant in area or totally absent. The Dickcissel looks a little like a cross between a long-billed House Sparrow and a small Meadowlark.

Outside of breeding season they are social birds and can form very large flocks. Their flight call has been described as buzzy and flatulent, kind of like a “bronx cheer.” They winter in Central and South America.

For more information on this grassland bird, go to www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Dickcissel.html

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finest sight I ever saw; immense meadows 2 or 3 feet deep of fine grass and flowers. Such beautiful colours I never saw.”

Later, after settling in Grayson County near the northern edge of the Blackland Prairie, he wrote: “I can sit on my porch before my door and see miles of the most beautiful Prairie interwoven with groves of timber, surpassing, in my idea, the beauties of the sea. Think of seeing a tract of land on a slight incline covered with flowers and rich meadow grass for 12 to 20 miles.”

Another Englishman, Edward Smith, who visited the Dallas area shortly after Texas joined the Union, wrote of the rich, black soil: “It is universally admitted to be the finest soil in the country, equaling in fertility the rich alluvial bottoms of the great Mississippi Valley.”

Black bears foraged in the river bottoms and along the wooded creeks. Greater prairie chickens boomed on their leks in the open spaces amid the tallgrass. Pronghorn antelope ranged as far east as Fannin County. Packs of prairie wolves shadowed bands of that most emblematic prairie species, the bison. Most likely these were small resident bands joined by migrating herds from the Great Plains north of the Red River. Early Dallas settlers reported abundant buffalo bones on the Trinity River floodplain.

Constant, often violent change characterized the Blacklands. Migrating bison herds grazed and trampled the prairie, killing encroaching brush and creating a soil disturbance favorable to germination of sunflower, ragweed, croton and other forbs. Frequent wildfire, caused by lightning or started by American

Indians, burned dead grass and killed even well-established brush and trees. The heat stimulated germination of long-dormant seeds and invigorated root systems. Burned plant matter provided soil nutrients.

But settlers could ill afford conflagrations. Wildfire was something to be feared and suppressed. Today, brush and trees cover hundreds of thousands of acres of former prairie. Contrary to popular perception, trees are not always the answer.

From the late 1830s, when pioneers first began trickling into the Blacklands, through the Civil War, farming was primarily a subsistence enterprise, though there are early reports of large herds of longhorn cattle and wild horses, and cattle drives from Dallas to St. Louis. Small settlements, stocked with goods hauled overland from Jefferson and other East Texas towns with riverboat access, provided modest markets for area farmers. In 1860, just prior to secession, the population of Dallas County stood at only 8,665.

But the coming of the railroad in 1872 provided access to distant markets. The rich Blackland soil produced tremendous cotton crops, and the prairie went under the plow at an unprecedented rate. For the next 70 years, by some accounts, the Blacklands produced more cotton than any other region in the world. Agronomists considered Blackland soil the most fertile west of the Mississippi River. The region’s human population swelled. By 1915, more people lived in Blacklands than any other region of comparable size in the United States.

Today, the Blackland Prairie may be the most tamed and degraded of Texas’ 10 ecological regions, though it remains very productive agriculturally. Estimates of the

destruction range from 98 percent to more than 99.9 percent. Small differences aside, true Blackland Prairie is the most rare and endangered habitat in Texas, if not in all of North America.

Matt White describes the loss: “If we think of the Blackland Prairie as a person, all that we have left is a sliver of fingernail.”

In a region so altered and dominated by Dallas and the surrounding suburbs, even the most sentimental nature lover may have trouble imagining wildness worth fighting for. Nowadays, visitors and even longtime Blackland residents describe the region as monotonous, bleak, unmercifully hot, a place best suited for freeways, unending commercial expansion and hermetic, air-conditioned travel.

So why bother? Practically speaking, the true Blackland Prairie is gone. Would we really miss those last few thousand acres? Would anyone other than a few naturalists or nostalgic local historians even notice? Who really cares whether it’s imported Johnson Grass or big bluestem growing along the road to more scenic country? We’re talking about grass, not mountains or giant redwoods. You can always plant some wildflowers.

Matt White stopped his examination of a prairie petunia, a delicate flower with five pale violet petals, and pointed to the sky.

“Hear that?”

A soft fffitt, fffitt.

“A migrating dickcissel.”

Something else caught his eye. “This is what I’ve been looking for,” he said. He parted the grass to expose a low-growing forb with dagger-shaped leaves. “Wide leaf false aloe. Very rare. Probably the rarest plant on any of these prairie remnants. It doesn’t get pollinated or set seed, but burning seems to propagate it.”

He stepped back and let the grass reform a canopy over his rare find. As we walked toward the truck, he said, “You plow this up and it just doesn’t come back. Even with 50 years and an unlimited budget, it’s not the same. This is our heritage, and it’s just about gone.”

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Henry Chappell is a contributing writer for *Texas Parks & Wildlife* and writes a regular column for *Texas Wildlife*.

Maddin Prairie Preserve

A Restoration Success Story

By Pat Merkord

RECENTLY Native Prairies Association of Texas Board members made visits to Maddin Prairie Preserve to monitor and inventory the condition of the preserve and catalog species. These surveys were conducted in the months of November and February, representing two seasons that are relatively undocumented at Maddin. Visiting in November were Kunda Lee Wicce, Board President, Board Secretary Pat Merkord and Board Director, Kirsti Harms. In February, Pat Merkord and Kirsti Harms were joined by Margie Crisp who is writing a book on the Colorado River. Margie was impressed to find a preserved area representing the upper Colorado River drainage system. What was seen by all was refreshing and uplifting. We found a prairie vibrantly alive, surviving on its own, with threatened prairie species thriving in this protected and restored prairie.

Maddin was acquired in 1996 by the generous donation of Alfred E. Maddin who had a dream of restoring Maddin to its original prairie state in order to further prairie education and appreciation. NPAT has labored over the past 11 years to achieve that dream. From 1996 to 2001 a very active campaign to plant native grasses and forbs was carried out. Grass plantings included little bluestem, big bluestem (sand bluestem variety), side oats grama, switchgrass, sand dropseed, sand lovegrass, buffalo grass, blue grama, Indiangrass and green sprangletop. Forbs planted were Englemann's daisy, Maximillian sunflower, Illinois Bundleflower, partridge pea and purple prairie clover. During the fall and winter visits of 2007 and 2008, all of these plants could be found thriving in old crop fields. In 2004, a very extensive mesquite removal program was carried out. Cattle grazing and deer leasing was halted in 2006. It was a welcome sight to prairie enthusiasts to look out across a vista of tall big bluestem, side oats grama, Indian grass and bright red clumps of little bluestem dotting the horizon. This fall, a sizable crop of partridge pea had turned brown in the autumn sun producing a patchwork quilt effect against the bright golden colors of grass. For any who doubt



A porcupine was photographed at Maddin Prairie in February.

the ability of restoration to work, visit Maddin and you will become a committed prairie restorationist.

Maddin is not just a home for prairie grasses and forbs. Many prairie species find sanctuary there as permanent or seasonal residents or as migrants passing through. A large number of prairie animals now considered threatened, endangered and declining in numbers now find refuge at Maddin. A second prairie dog restoration project began in 2006 and is still surviving despite heavy predation by badgers, coyotes, hawks and snakes. The prairie dog town is enclosed by an electric fence and a large mowed area is maintained around the perimeter. There is nothing more rewarding than to come upon the town and suddenly see prairie dogs scurrying and running for cover. Sentinel dogs always remain to warn of intruders, standing up looking at the viewers observing them. The dogs are counted three times a day each site visit. Prairie dog numbers are slightly higher than when first installed. Adult and juvenile prairie dogs, as well as a burrowing owl were observed during the November and February visits. No burrowing owls were seen prior to this.

Besides prairie dogs, seven other mammal species have been documented

at Maddin and more will be documented with increasing visits. These include coyotes heard howling in the evening, wood rats seen nesting in prickly pear, raccoons, badgers, bobcats, white-tailed deer and the latest addition to the list, porcupine. In February, a porcupine was observed in a lone tree on the prairie contentedly munching on twigs of mistletoe, a favorite food. The porcupine was undisturbed by close-up encounters with board members taking pictures. Obviously the porcupine knew this was a protected place and we were merely curious observers.

The fall and winter trips included surveys of birds previously undocumented at Maddin. These trips amended our knowledge of fall migrant and winter resident birds. A total of 87 bird species have been documented at Maddin since May 2006. These past two visits added 30 of those 87. Notable species seen include sharp-shinned hawk, merlin, short-eared owl, barn owl, wood duck, winter wren, dark-eyed junco, grasshopper sparrow, pine siskin and red-breasted nuthatch. We counted over 300 sandhill cranes flying overhead, indicating the significance of this area of Texas for sandhills.

Most significant is the number of birds (14) found at Maddin that are species of

concern as determined by the American Ornithological Union (AOU), TPWD, Audubon Watch List, and State and Federal Threatened and Endangered Species lists. The fourteen species include bob-white quail, scaled quail, burrowing owl, rufous-crowned sparrow, Bell's vireo, Swainson's hawk, loggerhead shrike, white-throated sparrow, lark sparrow, white-crowned sparrow, Eastern meadowlark, grasshopper sparrow, black-throated sparrow and field sparrow.

**For any who
doubt the ability of
restoration to work,
visit Maddin and you will
become a committed
prairie restorationist.**

The National Audubon Society's 2007 list of most declining birds (based on Christmas Bird Counts and USGS Breeding Bird Surveys) include five species found at Maddin. These species include: Northern bobwhite, 82% decline, Eastern meadowlark, 72% decline, loggerhead shrike 70%, field sparrow, 68%, and grasshopper sparrow 65%. Texas Audubon Society adds to this list lark sparrow, 90% decline. The Nature Conservancy has targeted Cassin's sparrow, scaled quail, and burrowing owl, also found at Maddin, for protection. The USGS notes a 70% decline overall in 29 prairie bird species. There is a great need for information on abundance, productivity, habitat use, seasonal distribution and effects of habitat management. We hope to make data from Maddin part of that information.

If you would like to be part of the discoveries and progress being made at Maddin join us on our next trip scheduled for the weekend of May 10-11. We will be doing a breeding bird survey, as well as Texas horned-lizard, prairie dog and butterfly/insect surveys. Maddin will be in its peak wildflower season as well and we still have many to document.

For more information on trips to Maddin Prairie, contact kirsti_harms@texasprairie.org and Pat Merkord at pat_merkord@texasprairie.org.

Dodder

By Steven Schwartzman

CARNIVOROUS plants are rare, but like the man who bit the dog, they get a lot of attention by switching the roles of predator and prey. Less spectacular but much more common than the Venus fly trap is dodder, a plant that preys not on animals but on other plants. Some 145 species of this vine, including a couple of dozen in Texas, twine their way around the tropical and temperate regions of the world; all are classified in the single genus *Cuscuta*, though in most cases a non-specialist would be hard-pressed to tell one local species from another. Botanists once placed the genus in the *Convolvulaceae*, many of whose members are also vines, but now usually set it apart in a family of its own, the *Cuscutaceae*.

Dodder begins its life on the ground, where its seeds sprout and put down roots. The new plant sends out tendrils, and when one finds a victim, it attaches to it with tiny suckers that allow the dodder to extract nutrients from its unwilling host. Then dodder's roots wither away and the plant lives entirely in the "canopy" above the ground, though this canopy is often only a few inches from the earth that the dodder has left behind. Where other plants have intricate roots, dodder's above-ground strands grow into a crazy cat's cradle that can repeatedly bridge the gap between one neighboring victim and the next.

Dodder produces surprisingly many flowers, each measuring only about an eighth of an inch across. A person standing up may not even notice that they exist, but anyone who bends down with a lens to see the flowers' waxy, fleshy, five-lobed form will likely find them unexpectedly pretty.

Just as some animals hunt primarily certain other animals, some species of dodder attack specific plants or groups of plants, while others are more egalitarian predators. Common host plants in Texas include buttonbush, verbena, pigweed, and—horrors!—the state flower, the beloved bluebonnet.

Shinners and Mahler's *Illustrated Flora of North-Central Texas* explains that the genus *Cuscutaceae* takes its name from the Arabic word *kushkut* or *kusat*, meaning a tangled wisp of hair. That makes sense, given dodder's common appearance as a mass of tangled yellow or orange threads. Less certain is the origin of the English

word dodder, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* says may come from a Middle Dutch word meaning the yellow of an egg, perhaps because of the color of dodder's strands or flowers; the colors match, but nothing else about a yolk seems appropriate to describe dodder's appearance or behavior.

English speakers have given dodder some colorful colloquial names. Positive ones, based on the yellow to orange of its many fine strands, are gold thread and angel hair (which, in our expansive culture, calls to mind angel hair pasta and the way that first-time observers of dodder may see its filaments as strands of slender spaghetti). Negative names for dodder take us out of the angelic realm and into the diabolical: witches' shoelaces, devil's-thread, and devil's-gut. Dodder's twining appearance and parasitic nature are reflected in the vernacular names strangle-weed, strangle-vine, tangle-gut, and even scald, perhaps by analogy with the way that misdirected hot liquid or steam can damage the skin of those rootless creatures better known as human beings.

Yet another name, love vine, is open to interpretation. We sing the praises of love, but if dodder loves its host, it does so with a smothering, debilitating sort of love. Ellen D. Schulz gave a further explanation of the name in her classic 1928 *Texas Wild Flowers*; she wrote that dodder has long played a part in the romantic traditions of the Old South by offering an alternative to the common but simplistic (s)he-loves-me-(s)he-loves-me-not plucking of the "petals" of a daisy. In the Southern variation, you swing a piece of dodder around your head three times and throw it over your shoulder, then walk away without looking back to see where the dodder has landed. After three days you return to the spot and check whether the dodder has attached itself to a plant: if so, then your sweetheart loves you. Unlike the 50-50 odds of pulling out petals, this method supposedly has a higher success rate due to dodder's skill in latching on to nearby prey. Thus is sound botanical knowledge transmuted into folklore—all in the service of that tangle of emotions we call love.

© Steven Schwartzman. The author has done his doddering mostly on the Blackland Prairie south of Pflugerville.

Condemnation: Coming to an Easement Near You?

Tactics for fighting a growing threat to conserved land

by Jon Halpin

ATOWN OFFICIAL pores over a map, searching for land on which to site some essential public service. The town is crowded with buildings, outer residential areas are too dense with houses, but there, on the outskirts, is open space. Green, undeveloped fields. He doesn't know that there is a conservation easement on the land; he may never have even heard of conservation easements, or of the land trusts that steward them. What the official sees is land that can be taken and used to fill a public need.

Land trusts increasingly face threats of condemnation from all levels of government. Eminent domain, also known as condemnation, is the taking of land for public use and for the public good. While not yet widespread, condemnation of conservation easements is on the rise because condemning authorities see open space and agricultural land as easy targets.

Condemnation can happen when there is the need to widen or build roads, locate schools and firehouses, place utility poles and transmission corridors. Condemnation requires only that there will be some public benefit resulting from the taking. Property owners must be compensated, but that is the sole duty owed by government or the condemning authority.

The condemning authority rarely pays full fair market value, and even if the land trust is fully compensated, the land resource is still lost. The land trust can attempt to maximize value by retaining its own appraiser to value the property and then negotiate for increased compensation based on that evidence. The validity of the public use or the public good claimed by the condemning authority can be challenged, although these challenges do not usually prevail. A few states have additional layers of review before a conservation easement can be condemned, offering some protection.

Land trusts have no certain legal recourse against condemnation, but that is not to say that there is no recourse. Several land trusts have managed to preserve their easements, or at least to limit losses through negotiation, public outcry, and

strategic alliances. As Camilla Herlevich, founder and executive director of the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust, described the lesson she learned after dealing with a condemnation threat: "You have to look at a combined strategy—how and when to talk to the media, and use litigation and political contacts. Condemnation is not just a technical legal problem."

Skillful and early negotiation coupled with smart and timely community response can save the day.

Keeping a Farm Protected

WHEN CONDEMNATION threatened a conserved farm in Pennsylvania, Christopher Kocher found himself unprepared for the reality of it. "I was amazed at how easy it is for a municipality to condemn a conservation easement. Shocked. Once they'd filed a taking, it would have been done."

Kocher is president of the Wildlands Conservancy, which in 1996 accepted a donated agricultural easement on Mary Leister's 104-acre farm in Lower Macungie Township, Pennsylvania. She intended to conserve the Leister Farm forever, limiting its use to agriculture.

The township had other ideas. After Leister's death the farm was condemned by the township. At that point only the land itself was condemned, not the easement. But it wasn't long before the township went after that as well.

In August 2007, when Kocher went to the township to ask for money to preserve another piece of property, they in turn asked him how much it would cost to purchase the Leister Farm easement. When Kocher explained that Wildlands Conservancy had no intention of selling the easement, that such an action would go against his land trust's mission, the township declared its intention to pass a resolution for a declaration of taking at the next township meeting in three weeks. The township's plan was to use the land for recreational purposes, specifically to build ball fields. Coming out of that encounter, Kocher faced a short deadline

and nothing in the way of legal options.

But Kocher knew the township meeting would provide a very public forum for making a case for the Leister Farm. "We made a decision to fight this from a public relations side first," he said. "We contacted legislators, various local conservancies, and farm groups." The result was an outpouring of support from the community, the county government, and from the local paper, which went on record in support of the Wildlands Conservancy.

"That meeting was a watershed moment," said Kocher. "It was the point at which the community came together. We had 150 people show up at that meeting." Most tellingly, the Youth Association—for whom the fields would ostensibly be built—came to the meeting and said they did not want the farm used for ball fields.

As a result of the meeting, the town supervisors gave the Wildlands Conservancy 60 days to find an alternative site for the ball fields, noting that if the conservancy failed to do so, then condemnation proceedings would begin. Kocher took the opening and ran with it. "It wasn't hard to come up with a laundry list of sites that would work better," he said.

While looking into alternatives, Kocher moved to further secure the easement. He identified other recreational activities that would be allowed under the easement, passive rather than active recreational possibilities, such as walking paths, fishing and nature-watching. A month after the meeting he implemented 'Plan B,' donating half the interest in the easement to Lehigh County. County commissioners accepted the Wildlands Conservancy's offer. While such a move did not secure the easement against condemnation, it added a layer of protection, as it is more difficult to condemn land held by another government entity than land held by a land trust.

The conservancy's actions will have saved much more than just one farm. Kocher noted that in response to the condemnation threat, many local residents began asking why they should conserve their farms if the government could

Practical Pointers

—Leslie Ratley-Beach

NO ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL response is appropriate for condemnation threats. Land trusts however have many opportunities early in the condemnation process to anticipate, divert and minimize damage to conservation permanence.

Land trusts need to discuss any condemnation situation with experienced legal counsel. The Land Trust Alliance does not provide legal advice. These practical pointers are distilled from a wide variety of sources experienced with condemnation and are strategic suggestions only for consideration as your land trust faces condemnation threats.

1. The earlier the better. Start the conversations immediately upon first learning of a possible condemnation threat. The condemning authority often works more than two years to produce a public proposal. If you wait for public hearings to make your land trust known to the government agency, you may find that you are too late to propose alternative solutions. If you wait until the legal proceedings, then all that will be left is a dispute over valuation.

2. Educate the condemning authority. Condemning authorities are usually unaware that land is conserved. Emphasize the public investments in and use of the conserved land.

3. Ask what they need. Find out what the particular public need is and find less damaging alternative routes or locations to satisfy that need. Press the conversation. You need to stay prominently but professionally in the process.

4. Find alternatives. Finding the alternative location to conserved land is essential. Demonstrate that conserved land is not the path of least resistance.

5. Remember to explain valuation. Condemning authorities see conserved land as an inexpensive acquisition because it often has no structures and has a lower fair market value. They forget to account for compensation to the land trust. You need to show them legal arguments that conserved land is valued as much as unrestricted land.

6. Involve landowners. Coordinate owners of conserved land early. Hearing from local residents who are unwilling to give up their property for the proposed use makes a difference to state and local government. Landowners may not get notice until late in the process. Advise your owners of conserved land as soon as you have a communications plan.

7. Think strategically and create partnerships. Think of condemnation as a political exercise— find the crack

and pry it open. Provide GIS maps of your conserved land in the condemnation area so that political leaders understand the importance of your work to the community. Inform potential allies and advocacy groups early.

8. Involve the media appropriately. Tell the story of what makes this a critical community quality of life issue.

9. Use your full toolkit. You need to anticipate, move, minimize or mitigate takings, and sometimes use all techniques at once. You will need money to pay consultants to help identify alternatives, so have a legal defense fund you can draw on. Averting condemnation takes skill, time and money early in the process. Preventing condemnation is a success. It is worth the effort to try!

10. Co-holding and case law. Conservation easements co-held with government agencies may impede condemnation by other agencies, but politics may have more impact than case law. Imposing a federal interest may override state and local powers, and may also not be as influenced by local politics. Case law in some states may also provide an argument that condemnation may be blocked because the land is already used for public purposes.

just take them through condemnation. By fighting the condemnation, the Wildlands Conservancy may have saved both the community perception of conservation effectiveness, as well as conservation easement donor confidence in the land trust's resolve to uphold their conservation gifts.

As of press time, the decision of what to do with the land is under a second 60-day delay. An alternative site has been identified but not yet approved, but Kocher feels confident that the Leister Farm will escape unscathed.

Offering an Alternative Location

FUTCH CREEK was a success story for North Carolina. It had been the focus of cleaning efforts since 1996 and by 2002 was a pristine tidal creek, clean enough to be reopened for shell fishing.

To protect Futch Creek, the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust bought a conservation easement on Foy Creek, a tributary of Futch Creek, from the Claudia Taylor family. The family then donated an easement on another 95 acres to the land trust.

As the N.C. Coastal Land Trust and Clean Water Management Trust Fund were securing the preservation of the creeks, the state department of transportation was engaged in a massive road project: the construction of the U.S. 17 Wilmington Bypass. On one section of the bypass the state planned a storm water runoff on the Taylor Family's land, exactly where the land trust had just acquired conservation easements.

When Camilla Herlevich talked to the transportation department, they initially thought she represented an environmental

Meeting the Condemnation Challenge

advocacy group. “When we first went to them, they were completely clueless as to why we were there,” she remembered. “We said ‘We’re here like any other property owner would be.’”

At first she attempted to negotiate, suggesting the runoff move from the east of U.S. 17, where the tidal creeks were located, to the west of the highway. “We tried to take a political route, get officials to voluntarily locate an alternative site,” she said. “That didn’t work so we went to our second option, taking them to court.” The lawsuit the land trust filed concerned the water permit to discharge storm water into a natural waterway. “They had the right to condemn, so we had to find something else as grounds for contesting the taking. We ended up contesting the storm water permit; we took an environmental tack rather than a property tack.”

The lawsuit had dual merit: it attacked the environmental damage that could be caused by the storm water runoff and it also delayed condemnation of the easement, allowing time for the land trust itself to discover alternative sites. With opposition to the location of the storm water runoff organizing, both sides were eager to find a solution to what was becoming a costly choice.

“The real way we got the project stopped was by identifying an alternative site for it,” Herlevich said. “We didn’t want to continue in litigation, but they wouldn’t leave unless they had a place to go.”

The search for alternative locations paid off. Nearby property was donated by the R.L. Foy family for the runoff, and the creeks were out of danger. What Herlevich took from the ordeal was that while success in fighting a condemnation threat was possible, “enforcement of our easements was going to be a whole lot more difficult than we thought.”

Triage in a Utility Corridor

WHILE THE LAND trusts in North Carolina and Pennsylvania faced condemnations of single properties, the Vermont Land Trust faced condemnation on a much bigger scale. The Vermont Electric Power Company (VELCO) was expanding its transmission corridor between West Rutland and South Burlington. Almost 20 parcels of conserved land fell within the proposed corridor.

The corridor expansion was controversial from the beginning, with local residents,

ANTICIPATING AN INCREASE in condemnation and other legal challenges to conserved land and easements, the Land Trust Alliance has launched a national conservation defense initiative. The Alliance will create a legal defense fund, recruit pro-bono attorneys, and launch a legal clearinghouse and an attorney locator. The Alliance is also researching the feasibility of a litigation insurance program to help land trusts defend their easements.

Land trusts can be more effective with condemnation— and other challenges— if we all share information and experiences.

The Alliance can help by providing a forum for national information sharing. Let us know if your land trust has faced, or is facing, significant condemnation challenges. The Alliance will use the information to monitor condemnation efforts and connect affected land trusts to each other. The Alliance is also looking for private attorneys who have expertise in condemnation. If you practice extensively in this area, please let us know. Contact Leslie Ratley- Beach, conservation defense director, on any conservation defense topics at lrbeach@lta.org, 802-262-6051.

—Leslie Ratley-Beach, the Land Trust Alliance’s new conservation defense director

environmentalists and farming groups all voicing concerns about the effects on towns, scenery, farms and the environment. Several groups tried to block the corridor, and the first choice VLT faced was whether to join them in opposing it.

VLT concluded that the expansion had scenic impacts, but that scenic impacts were not the primary public purpose of the farmland easements at stake. The land trust, which primarily conserves working farmland and forestland, wanted to ensure that the land continued to be used for farming. Assessing the threat from this viewpoint, VLT found that the impact of the corridor expansion on farm operations would likely be nominal. After the analysis, VLT decided not to oppose the corridor, and focused instead on minimizing adverse effects on farming.

The first step was to educate the utility about the land trust’s role in the proceedings. “We had to teach the utility about conservation easements, what the rights and responsibilities are, about the fact that we co-held a legal interest in that land,” said Gil Livingston, VLT president.

With that legal interest VLT could engage in site specific negotiations about the direct impact of the corridor on individual parcels. These included details such as limiting the amount of land to be condemned, moving pole locations to minimize the effects on farms, locating guywires, and ensuring pesticides and herbicides weren’t used around poles

where the corridor crossed organic farms. Right-of-way easements were secured and utility maintenance agreements ensured that workers wouldn’t trample crops on their way to the poles and would provide advance notice to farmers. Temporary and permanent access roads were drawn to limit interference with farm operations.

The negotiation proceedings were, in effect, a massive triage effort by VLT, to minimize the damage done to the conserved land. “In each case we looked to minimize impact, parcel by parcel, pole by pole,” said Livingston.

VLT’s biggest victory came when VELCO proposed taking a farm field to build a new substation. The farm is owned by John DeVos, and is one of Vermont’s premier organic dairies. To be certified organic, the farm must have a certain number of acres per cow, a ratio threatened by any taking of land for the substation. Negotiations between the trust, the town, the utility, and the dairy’s neighbors resulted in locating the substation on a commercial parcel next to the dairy.

After a year and a half, negotiations on half of the parcels are concluded and the rest ongoing. Describing the experience as “really hard,” Livingston doesn’t imagine it will be the last condemnation VLT handles. “The path of least resistance may be conserved land. In Vermont, conserved land is the least fragmented land. I think we’ll see more of this, not just here, but across the country.”

Advocacy in Perpetuity

Land trusts need to be prepared to face condemnation of land on which they hold an easement. Consistently in the cases described above, government agencies did not know about conservation easements before the disputes began, did not fully understand them when they learned about them, and did not appreciate the extent to which the land trusts would fight for them. Each condemnation case will require land trusts to educate the condemning entity, and to strongly advocate for ensuring the permanence of conserved land.

Kocher wonders if his experience in Lower Macungie is a sign of things to come as land gets scarcer and the needs of communities squeeze against the goals of conservation. "We may start to spend a lot more time protecting easements than getting them," he said. "We need to become more aware of the potential for condemnation, the speed with which it takes place, and start developing plans for when it comes to pass."

Jon Halpin is a writer in Vermont. Reprinted from *Exchange: The National Journal of Land Conservation*, Volume 27, Number 1, Winter 2008 with permission of the Land Trust Alliance. Copyright 2008. All rights reserved. For more information visit <http://www.lta.org>.

Resources

- *Land Conservation Case Law Summaries*, compiled and edited by Rob Levin, Esq., www.LTAnet.org; also search "condemnation" on the site
- Land Trust Standards and Practices 11J, www.lta.org/sp/index.html
- Nichols on Eminent Domain (Matthew Bender: Revised 3rd. ed. 2004)
- "When Forever Proves Fleeting: The Condemnation And Conversion Of Conservation Land," © 2001, 2003, Robert H. Levin, New York University Environmental Law Journal at 9 NYU Env'tl.L.J. 592 (2001)
- Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition Legal Advisories: www.massland.org/pages/tools/legal_advisoryexist2.html
- White paper on eminent domain from the California Council of Land Trusts, available in March at www.calandtrusts.org
- Check out our condemnation section, including a list serve, at www.lta.org

For Your Library

[PCA] Native Seed Production Manual

This new manual provides in-depth information for native seed production of 32 species of the tallgrass prairie flora of the upper Mid-west. The information presented is compiled from published accounts coupled with native seed production experience at the Tallgrass Prairie Center at the University of Northern Iowa. Critical to this effort were publications from the USDA-NRCS Plant Materials Program, published research articles and technical notes, and Internet resources. Botanical nomenclature follows USDA PLANTS Database (<http://plants.usda.gov>).

Copies are available for \$13 each (\$10 + \$3 shipping), via check or money order payable to: Tallgrass Prairie Center. A sample .pdf file is available upon request.

Contact Greg Houseal at 319-273-3005 or write Tallgrass Prairie Center, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, IA 50614-0294.

Ghetto Plainsman By Jarid Manos

Published by Fort Worth's Temba House Press: From a life of anger, violence, despair and resentment to one of commitment and renewal, *Ghetto Plainsman* is a searing journey of one of the Green Movement's most original voices at a time when the world is in crisis and heading into ecological collapse.

Jarid Manos is founder and CEO of Great Plains Restoration Council, based in Fort Worth, Texas. Visit his website at GhettoPlainsman.com

An environmental advocate for more than sixteen years, Mr. Manos is a frequent contributor to the *Fort Worth Weekly* and has been published or written about in the *New York Times*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, *USA Today*, *Smithsonian*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Denver Post*, and many others.

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The Prairie Dog Back Issues Available Online

Past issues of *The Prairie Dog*, the newsletter of the Native Prairies Association of Texas, are available online at: www.texasprairie.org/newsletter/

Some past newsletters may have articles removed if online distribution was not permitted by the author. A PDF reader such as Adobe Acrobat Reader is required to view the newsletters, and can be downloaded via a link on the newsletter web page.

For web page information or problems e-mail: webmaster@texasprairie.org

NPAT Field Trips & Events

Check www.texasprairie.org for an up-to-date listing of events or subscribe to the NPAT Email Announce list (more information on back page) to receive current announcements from NPAT. Contact Jason Spangler, jason_spangler@texasprairie.org or 512-736-4199, for more information.

April 19: Field Trip to **Meador Prairie** near Saint Jo, We will meet at 9 a.m. at the Dairy Queen in Saint Jo and then proceed to the prairie. Contact jason_spangler@texasprairie.org for more information. Come see one of the largest tallgrass prairie remnants in Texas! Bill Meador's 1800 acres of native prairies in the Fort Worth Prairie are used as native hay meadows. We hope to see Shooting Stars and other early spring prairie flowers along with early growth of native grasses.

April 26: Prairie Fest: NPAT will have an **information booth** at the festival (see page 3). To help with our booth, contact kunda_lee_wicce@texasprairie.org.

May 3: Field Trip to **Simpson Prairie** (Crawford) – more spring flowers. Seed used by Mike Williams to plant Laura Bush's prairie. Contact jason_spangler@texasprairie.org

May 10 & 11: Maddin Prairie Preserve (near Colorado City) breeding bird survey, Texas horned-lizard, prairie dog and butterfly/insect surveys. Contact kirsti_harms@texasprairie.org and pat_merkord@texasprairie.org.

May 17: Field Trip to **Nash Prairie** (West Columbia near Katy) – one of the best coastal prairies (over 300 acres). Contact jason_spangler@texasprairie.org

June 8: NPAT Board meeting at **Clymer Meadow** in Celeste (east of Dallas)

August 8 - 10: Joint Conference with Texas Society for Ecological Restoration in Fort Davis. For more information visit www.ser.org/txser/.

Sept 27: Maddin Prairie Preserve field trip with NPAT Board. Details to come.

Sept 28: NPAT Board meeting in Colorado City (west of Abilene)

There will be a **WILDFLOWER TOUR AND DEDICATION** of a new prairie remnant at The Nature Conservancy's **Clymer Meadow Preserve** in Celeste on **May 17**. Contact Jim Eidson, jeidson@tnc.org or (903) 568-4139. For more information about the preserve visit www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/texas/preserves/art6387.html.

21st North American Prairie Conference

Aug. 4–Aug. 8, 2008

Winona State University
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 - Dr. Calvin Fremling, Faculty Emeritus, Winona State University
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 - An entire day is scheduled for guided field trips to 10 different sites
 - Abstracts, barbecue, banquet and field box lunch are included with registration
 - Reduced conference rates for students
 - **Register now!** <http://bio.winona.edu/NAPC/registration.htm>

Invitation to Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture Meeting

I would like to invite you to participate in the formation of **Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture** (OPJV), and to join forces with other conservation organizations in an effort to improve and increase habitat for regional avifauna. The OPJV area covers almost 60 million acres in Texas and Oklahoma, including the Post-oak, Blackland Prairie and Edward's Plateau regions in Texas and the Cross Timbers region in Texas and Oklahoma. Because of our location, conservation and restoration of native grasslands, prairies, and savannas will be a major focus of the Joint Venture.

We will meet April 24, 2008, 12:30-3:30pm at the Cabela's, **Fort Worth** just off I-35 (12901 Cabela Dr, Fort Worth, TX 76177, upstairs in the conference center next to the snack shop.

Our meeting agenda will include introductions, what are Joint Ventures, what they do, how they work, what role the OPJV will play in regional conservation, and how you and your organization can participate. We will also plan the formation and initial meetings of the management board and technical teams.

For more information about the OPJV please see our concept plan at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bkw7000_1220.pdf

Please RSVP Jim Giocomo (Jim. Giocomo@tpwd.state.tx.us) to help us out with planning. If you know anyone else who may be interested in attending this meeting, please let me know.

Thank you,
James J. Giocomo, PhD
Coordinator, Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
c/o USDA-Grassland, Soil, and Water Research Laboratory
808 East Blackland Road
Temple, TX 76502-6712
254-770-6528

Thank you!

To New and Renewed Members in 2008!

New Lifetime Members are in bold

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