

From the Executive Director

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

NATIVE PRAIRIES Association of Texas has a threefold mission; conservation, research/restoration, and outreach. While having a clearly defined mission is critical to an organization's effectiveness; equally important are the strategies, goals, and actions utilized to implement the mission statement.

One of the challenges facing our organization is not only the breadth of our mission, but also the size of our service area—as we know, Texas is a big state. In addition, we are a relatively small non-profit, so it is really important that we operate as efficiently as possible; utilizing all of the resources available to us. And one of our greatest resources is you, our members; therefore member engagement is critical to NPAT's success. Not only do we want to offer programs that will benefit both you and the environment, we also rely upon you to let us know what is happening at local levels.

We are currently developing urban programs, such as "How to Plant a Prairie Yard," which inform city residents about why prairies are important and shows them how they can create habitat and improve water resources on (continued on page 2)

Coming this Fall!

NPAT Member meeting

Meet with board and staff members to find out what NPAT has been up to this year. Stay tuned.



SAVE THE DATE! NPAT and the Coastal Prairie Partnership are co-hosting the **2011 State of the Prairie Conference**. To be held at the Brown Education Center at the Houston Zoo, this two-day conference will feature presentations and field trips of interest to restorationists, educators, and landowners in urban or suburban areas. For more information, go to www.coastalprairiepartnership.org/events.

Houston Chapter Update

THIS SPRING, guest speakers included Mark Kramer who presented a program on Armand Bayou Nature Center, giving a history of the native prairie restoration there. And, NPAT President, Pat Merkord spoke on the "Plight of the Prairie Dog" detailing with pictures what has caused drastic declines in prairie dogs in Texas and elsewhere, and attempts to have them listed as endangered species.

HNPAT will co-host **Prairie Heritage Day** with the Coastal Chapter of Texas Master Naturalists which will be held again at **Brazos Bend State Park** on

Saturday, November 5. *Save the date!*

This chapter has also agreed to adopt a project to produce a guide to prairies in the Houston and seven-county surrounding area that can be visited or viewed by the public.

The next Houston NPAT meeting will be **Wednesday, August 24** at Bayland Community Center, 6400 Bissonnet in Houston. Meetings begin at 6:30 with speakers at 7:00 p.m. President of the Coastal Prairie Partnership, **Jaime Gonzalez**, will address members about ways to **coordinate efforts to save and restore prairies.**

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(Continued from page 1)

a very local level. This type of program also initiates interest for prairies in outlying areas.

But we need your help with our programming in more rural areas. No matter how valuable the information is, there can be both confusion and even mistrust when the person/organization doing a presentation does not live in an area or have the same background as local residents. A personal introduction helps put everyone at ease.

NPAT's current programs include educational curriculum and field trips, restoration and management plans, and conservation easements—all of which benefit landowners. But we need to engage people locally in order to both provide these services and to receive the input that will guide future efforts. One of the simplest ways to accomplish this goal is to form a relationship based upon one you already have; i.e. you. You know your neighbors and you know us, so you can be the perfect bridge to a mutually successful relationship. Sometimes this can happen through a club or organization function, but it can also happen through the time-honored tradition of "breaking bread."

If you are willing to host a dinner at your home, our staff will be happy to travel to your location and—of course—help with the dinner itself (preparation & costs), but you will supply the guest list. And if the idea of a dinner in your home does not appeal to you, small club gatherings with refreshments would also work.

Our intent with these informal gatherings is to open a dialogue. While we might have a short presentation on a predetermined subject, we want to leave plenty of time for questions. I have found that there is still a lot of confusion and even fear about things deemed environmental, especially conservation easements. An informal gathering provides a good platform for people to air their concerns and let us know how we might better serve their community. If this concept interests you, please contact me personally and we can discuss a recipe for success.

—Dalmara Bayne, 512-847-7615

Commons Ford Prairie Restoration Project

COMMONS FORD Ranch Metropolitan Park is located in western Travis County approximately 25 minutes from downtown Austin. Although the park contains some of the most diverse habitat within the PARD system (including lake frontage, rocky cliffs, pecan trees and an intermittent creek), the 40-acre centerpiece of the park is covered with invasive plants such as King Ranch blue-stem, Johnsongrass and Bermudagrass.

In fall 2009, a group of avid central Texas birders formed Commons Ford Prairie Restoration Organization (Commons Ford PRO) which today has 100 active members. The organization's primary mission is the development and implementation of a native prairie restoration project which will remove the invasive species within the 40 acres and replace them with grasses and wildflowers native to the area. This restoration will not only enhance the habitat for grassland birds and related species, it will also serve as a present-day example of our Texas ecological heritage and should provide an educational model; inspiring similar projects.

With the full support of park manager Joan Singh, the organization has created a broad coalition to support its goal. In February 2010, the organization held a planning meeting attended by representatives from PARD, Native Prairies Association of Texas (NPAT), Balcones Canyonlands Preserve (BCP), USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Travis Audubon Society (TAS). Other project partners include Austin Parks Foundation (APF) and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). Representatives from The Nature Conservancy of Texas and Texas Agrilife Extension Service have also consulted on the project. This support has proved invaluable to both the development of a viable restoration plan and its implementation.

PARD has provided staff and equipment and will assist in the purchase of chemicals and seed. NPAT Program Director James Alderson created the re-

source analysis, the written restoration plan, and participated in the pre-restoration plant surveys. NPAT Executive Director Dalmara Bayne and NPAT Vice President Kirsti Harms have also provided additional consultation services throughout the initial project phase. BCP biologists created and participated in the protocols for the plant and bird surveys. TAS has provided publicity for fundraising and survey efforts. NRCS provided the initial soil composition support. And the organization membership has volunteered countless hours toward fundraising, and plant and bird data collection.

Removal of the invasive species is scheduled to begin later this summer. If the drought ends, a prescribed burn will be conducted later in 2011 and seed planting should begin this winter.

The organization operates under the charitable umbrella of APF; making donations tax-deductible. To find out more about the project or to make a donation, visit www.commonsfordpro.blogspot.com or send an e-mail inquiry to commonsfordpro@gmail.com.

*UPDATE: In late June, APF advised Commons Ford PRO that it would fully fund its grant request in the amount of \$25,000. This grant ensures that the organization will have sufficient funds to purchase the native seed needed for the planned December planting. **A BIG THANK YOU to Austin Parks Foundation!***

The Austin Parks Foundation is a non-profit advocacy group that works with volunteers as well as city departments in order to maintain and improve Austin green spaces. See www.austinparks.org for more information.

The first stage of restoration, removal of mesquites, began in May. Efforts to remove the invasive grasses in the future prairie will begin in mid-July. The park may be closed for a few specific days during the removal process, but should be open during its normal hours on all other days. Signs marking the treatment area will be posted with specific details regarding the treatment process.

Native Prairie Restoration Preparing Your Site

WHAT YOU DO to prepare your site for planting native prairie seeds depends on past land use, current vegetative cover, resources, and time. A big part of this involves controlling competition. I'll assume you have taken care of shrub encroachment. When preparing a site, people often focus on the warm season plants. However, cool season grasses are a major consideration. For example, fescue is a cool season grass that must be removed by shredding or burning in winter followed by herbicide application in spring. Also, other dense growing cool season species will suppress the growth of warm season competitive species, causing significant delays in management of them, if the cool species are not mechanically removed or grazed out.

Identify what is growing when temperatures warm up from late May to August. Highly competitive species will need to be managed as follows:

To control Bermudagrass, Bahiagrass, and Johnsongrass cut off fertilization and shred, hay, or graze the project site to 4-inch or lower height until the peak of the growing season in order to keep grasses actively growing, deplete stored carbs, and prevent tall growth that will leave



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARON FLANDERS/TPMD

A late summer herbicide application following fire on KR bluestem field.

dense clippings. Clippings will reduce effectiveness of herbicides. Apply a glyphosate herbicide following EPA approved label directions, (6 quarts per acre on clay soils, 4 quarts per acre on sandy soils) in order to reduce competitive species. Herbicide should be applied when the grass is actively growing, taller than 6 inches, and soil temperatures are above 65 degrees. Herbicide application is best 3–7 days after a rain in late May–August.

Re-inspect the site at least 14 days following the application and spot treat residual growth with the aforementioned herbicide and rate.

Other options for competition control include grazing out Johnsongrass, deep plowing Johnson or Bermuda, repeated clean tilling to exhaust the seed bank, and other variations. I would caution against deep disking as it depends on soil type, past land use, and seed bank potential. I have observed excellent reduction of KR bluestem utilizing a *hot* summer burn followed by herbicide application after plants have produced enough leaf surface area for foliar herbicide.

Soil considerations: Do not add nitrogen as native grasses are adapted to low nitrogen environments and it only increases unwanted plants. Test your soil (<http://soiltesting.tamu.edu/webpages/forms.html>). Possibly incorporate phosphorus. If needed, add lime to raise pH to

make soil suitable based on available seed cultivar requirements (pay for lime soil test to get more accurate results). Aerate or subsoil severely compacted ground. Use preparatory crops on over-utilized areas to build up soil nutrients and organic matter.

Use cover crops, such as oats or clover, on slopes cleared of unwanted vegetation to prevent soil erosion. You can plant into these. Do not plant rye, cereal grain or wheat. Allelopathic plants (i.e. sudan, milo) can be used as a late summer/fall holder crop to maintain bare soil by controlling plant competition

On old field/go back sites, studies report that native grass plantings are not significantly improved through intensive site preparation compared to simply no-till drilling the native seeds, as long as problematic species (Bermudagrass etc.) are not present. Experience on agriculture fields has shown that native prairie restoration success can be achieved by planting Round-up ready milo or a dead litter crop that will be subsequently planted in.

No cookie cutter technique works for every site. Timing is often critical and you have to adapt techniques based on responses. You miss 100% of the shots you don't take, so get out there and try to make those brown thumbs green!

—Aron Flanders

Wanted Board Members

IF YOU LOVE PRAIRIES and want to 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 a another way to contribute. • It's a great way to learn more about conservation and restoration. Volunteers are vital to this organization. Email NPAT at contact@texasprairie.org or call 512-772-4741.



Native Prairies
Association of Texas

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN JOHNSON

To Help Save Texas Prairies

Join the Native Prairies Association of Texas (NPAT)

To join online, visit www.texasprairie.org and go to the Support Us page.
Or fill out this form and mail a check to:

The Native Prairies Association of Texas
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Membership Categories: \$1,500 Family Lifetime \$1,000 Lifetime
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Name: _____

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Home/Office Phone: _____

Email: _____

I'm interested in prairies because: _____

I'd like more information about: _____

Please consider including an additional donation with your membership dues. It really helps us out!
Please check here to decline listing in a future member's directory.

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

We depend on the support of our members to help us conserve Texas prairies. Programs are supported by gifts, contributions, grants, membership dues, and volunteer efforts.

Consider a Conservation Easement

Benefits include: Significant tax incentives: estate, income, and capital gains

- management and restoration advice
- conservation of your family and Texas heritage

For more information, contact NPAT by email at contact@texasprairie.org, call 512-847-7615, or visit www.texasprairie.org.

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