

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.