

Pines and Prairies



Bastrop Caldwell Fayette Lee Counties of Texas

Newsletter of the Pines & Prairies Land Trust Vol. 5, No. 1 Spring 2007

Come Enjoy Springtime on the Yegua Knobbs Preserve

It's green and lush with deep woods, unusual hills, spring-fed ponds and flora and fauna to fawn over.

You're invited to come out May 19 to experience the beauty and serenity of this 302 acre preserve in the heart of the storied Yegua Knobbs of Lee County. Put on your walkin' shoes, bring your camera and binoculars and plan to enjoy a day of hiking and exploring.

Or, bring a lawn chair, a picnic and beverages and just enjoy being away from noise and business for an afternoon of relaxation in lovely surroundings.

Birding Excursion

Stan Wellso, a birder of great renown and member of the Bastrop County Audubon Society, will lead a birding field trip that morning. If you want to see birds you wouldn't have noticed, nor known what species they were even if you had, be there by 8:45. Dr. Wellso is not only a keen-eyed expert, he's a very entertaining and interesting commentator as well.

We'll have plenty of cool drinking water and fruit juice and there's abundant shade for just sitting and enjoying the sound of the wind blowing through the pines.

On a recent work day, Bill Montgomery, Travis Brown, Priscilla and Jeremiah Jarvis, Beth Newman and Bob Tinstman hauled rocks and repaired a damaged road and cleared and marked some existing trails in the woods above the beaver pond. Meanwhile, Carrie Knox and Joyce Leatherwood created some new trails while riding their horses.

For those not quite so comfortable with the great outdoors, we have a composting toilet inside a crude outhouse for private contemplation of natural acts.

Pines and Prairies has owned this property three years and we have been learning more and more how to best manage it for the benefit of wildlife and the enjoyment of people.

Biologists, botanists and entomologists have observed and inventoried species and recommended actions for us to take to maintain and enhance the various habitats in which wildlife can thrive.

Neal Cook discovered the springs that are the source of the beaver pond and Jason Singhurst and Bill Carr have advised us on ways to protect the bog and keep it alive by thinning wax myrtle to allow a greater biological diversity.

If you want to explore the bog and see the springs and the pond they create, you'll have to be prepared to wade through water 4 - 8 inches deep in some places. Because of the much needed rain and the very active beavers, trails leading to and around the beaver pond are covered by water in many places.

On a future work day, perhaps you will come and help us make these areas more accessible again.

For now, access to the general public is limited to our Spring and Fall annual field days. Friends of the Yegua Knobbs however, have hiking, camping, fishing and picnicking privileges.

You can join that lucky bunch by participating in work days and by financial contribution to the YKP fund. We need money to build walkways to the pond, a storage building for tools and materials, solar panels for electrical power, road base material and other stuff.

Come out on Saturday and enjoy this majestic place for yourself. And find the way you can contribute.

Hill Country Conservancy Helps Save Central Texas Ranch Land

Almost 500 acres of Hays County ranch land along Onion Creek will be protected from development by a conservation easement.

The deal, finalized this month, involves money from the Hill Country Conservancy, the City of Austin — \$562,500 from the \$50 million open space bond initiative approved by voters last year — and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a federal program to purchase the development rights on productive farm and ranch land.

“What we are doing is protecting the headwaters of a spring to keep the water coming into Onion Creek clear,” said George Cofer, executive director of the Hill Country Conservancy. Given the land’s role in contributing to water quality, “it is very worthy of protecting,” said Claude Ross, the Texas program manager for the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service. The program, which is putting \$2 million toward the deal, targets land of agricultural and historical significance to prevent conversion to non-agricultural use.

The purchase will add to the city’s 20,000-acre portfolio of protected open space over the Edwards Aquifer. Much of that land, including the Gibson property, has been protected through the purchase of conservation easements that leave the land in the hands of the owner but forever constrain what can be done there.



Feral Hog Management Class

Greg Pleasant, the Lee County Wildlife Biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., will present a class on dealing with feral hogs on Saturday, May 26 at the Fedor Volunteer Fire Dept. on FM 1624.

The class begins at 9AM and will be over by noon.

He will provide information about the hogs as well as various methods for eliminating and trapping them.

A major part of the course will involve building a trap for catching and relocating the animals.

Trap gates will available for sale.

First National Bank of Bastrop Recognizes Pines & Prairies’ Work to Save Environment



President Reid Sharp and FNB Branch Manager Kathy Walicek

Bastrop has a new art installation in an unlikely place. Now you can combine banking with viewing art! The Highway 71 drive thru location of First National Bank is sponsoring a unique and unusual display of photographs and information for Pines and Prairies Land Trust.

This location was closed for remodeling and branch manager, Kathy Walicek, wanted something different and exciting for her lobby. She explains, “I want people to know that our lobby is open and ready for business. We have remodeled and installed a lovely photo display in partnership with Pines and Prairies Land Trust. All the photos in the lobby are of Pines and Prairies Land Trust protected properties. First National Bank invites you to come in to see them and learn more about how this group is helping the community.”

First National Bank president, Reid Sharp, adds, “Bastrop County has some very special places that Pines and Prairies Land Trust is

working to protect. They are kind of a secret and First National Bank wants to get the word out about the good work they are doing.”

Carrie Knox, president of PPLT, commented, “First National Bank has a long history of community involvement, and this partnership just adds to that legacy. We are grateful for this opportunity and hope that everyone will stop by the Hwy 71 drive-thru lobby of First National Bank to view this beautiful display!”

Thanks also go to Austin Waterjet for working hard to create the very different copper “backing” for the photos. It really makes the lobby something special. If you would like an up close view of this new art for Bastrop, stop by the FNB Hwy 71 Drive-thru lobby and check out the display.

FNB has banking locations in downtown Bastrop, on Hwy 71 in Bastrop, in Cedar Creek, Elgin and Smithville.

President's Message

Central Texas continues to grow at the speed of a circular saw. People move into our area at 70 miles per hour. Businesses and highways open, then farm, ranch and wildlands "close."

Many concerned citizens wonder how to make sense of these rapid changes. Many mourn the loss of their special place. Some think change, sprawl and confusion are inevitable. But I don't.

I see all these new people, ideas and energy as "fuel" for a new future for Bastrop, Caldwell, Fayette and Lee Counties. A future where growth and prosperity increase because of our natural beauty, peaceful land and abundant water. A future where endangered species and wildlife are an asset. A future where farmers, ranchers and wildlife managers are heroes to everyone.

Why can't our lush and bountiful counties be an oasis of green in a desert of concrete, strip malls and urban stress? Why can't our rural land and wide open spaces be a destination for everyone searching for peace and quiet? Why can't all of us work to make this a reality?

WE CAN!

If these ideals are important to you - then act on your concerns. Contact your elected officials and let them know what you want. Join PPLT and other organizations dedicated to protecting our precious rural heritage.

Support these worthy causes with money and energy. These small actions can create a big impact. Get involved and be part of the exciting changes that are happening around us.

Remember, land conservation is for all, forever.

Carrie F. Knox, president

Conservation Corner

In central Texas the average rainfall is about 30 inches. In years when rainfall is below average, the farm crops and city landscapes suffer if not irrigated. When the water use is restricted citizens become concerned. If the drought lingers, they panic and try to beg, borrow or steal water from others and search for new supplies. More wells are drilled and creeks and rivers are dammed to make lakes.

Trapping water in lakes is not the best conservation method. The evaporation rate in central Texas averages 55 inches per year.

The best place to store water is underground in our aquifers and Texas is blessed with a few good large ones and hundreds of small sand strata aquifers. However, how to get the water into the aquifers and sand stratas is not well understood by the average farmer or rancher and is a mystery to most city folks.

Let's look at some old but vital research by the USDA. One of their studies shows that a block of soil 3 ft. long, 1 ft. wide and 6 inches deep will weigh about 100 lbs. If it contains 4 to 5 % organic matter, it can absorb a 4 to 6 inch rain an hour and will hold about 165 to 195 lbs. of water. If not used by plants the water slowly and continually goes down and can be trapped in an aquifer. The same size block of soil that has 1 % or less humus or organic matter will absorb only about 1 inch of rain or 35 to 40 lbs of water and the rest runs off to cause flooding and erosion with very little reaching an aquifer.

*from Water Conservation by Malcolm Beck
(beckmalcolm@msn.com)*

Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!

We thank Reid Sharp for his continued support of our efforts to maintain and protect the natural environment of Bastrop County and Central Texas. Both personally and as president of First National Bank, he has been a vocal and financially generous supporter.

Thanks also to Neal Cook of Cook's Canoes in downtown Webberville, for harvesting seeds from his own crop of native grasses and donating them to us for seeding slopes at the Colorado River Refuge.

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Directions to Yegua Knobbs Preserve for the Spring Field Day

Saturday, May 19, 2007 (birders 8:45!) 10AM to 4PM

Eight miles southeast of Elgin on Highway 290 turn onto Loop 223, which is Waco St. You'll pass the Post Office and come to a stop sign at the main street of downtown McDade. Go straight on Waco, which becomes Knobbs Springs Rd. when it turns left out of town. From the stop sign it is five miles to Private Rd. 3051. Just before you come to the turn off onto PR 3051 you'll see a red brick "Southern mansion" on the left. Drive slowly along the gravel road for about 1.5 miles, at which point you'll go straight as the road curves around to the left. A sign will point the way to YKP, another .5 mile to the gate.

The mission of the Pines and Prairies Land Trust is to protect significant open space and natural, historic and cultural resources, and to preserve the quality of life for current and future generations, through educational programs and through owning and protecting easements and land.

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