



Pines and Prairies

Newsletter of the Pines & Prairies Land Trust Vol. 7, No. 2 Summer 2009

Farewell, Tom. Thanks for All You've Done

The first glimmers of Pines and Prairies Land Trust began in 1999, with Tom Dureka and other members of the Bastrop County Environmental Network holding exploratory meetings around the county. In January of 2000, Tom, Carrie Knox and Ron Giles attended the first meeting of the Texas Land Trust Council, the statewide land trust organization.

Founded officially on February 1, 2001 by Tom, Carrie, Joan Russell and Bill McPherson, PPLT now has more than 2000 acres of ranch, farmland and wildlife habitat protected forever. The original four directors scavenged for grant money to help them get established and begin the process of educating land owners about saving their precious land by creating a conservation easement.

Mr. Erwin Billig of Giddings contacted us and in early 2003 we signed our first conservation easement protecting his 670 acre ranch. Like other landowners to follow, he wanted to be sure the land he had worked so hard to make fertile and productive would remain intact for food production and wildlife habitat far into the future.

We now have five more easements and two properties we own outright. Last year, Mr. Billig decided to give PPLT his beloved ranch! He was confident we'd be responsible stewards and we are and will continue to be.

In 2003 we got some money from the settlement with Alcoa for their violations of the 1972 Clean Air Act and we moved into a higher gear. Tom became our first Executive Director, with Carrie as board president. Joan and Bill were joined by Priscilla and Jeremiah Jarvis as directors.

The board of directors has grown to 10 members now. We are no longer just Bastrop County residents, but represent all four counties in our coverage area.

Throughout it all, Tom has been steadfastly there, always with his focus on the value of open land and clean air and water.

Our shared environment has benefited from the presence of Tom Dureka and his wife, Ann Mesrobian.

Ann, fiercely protective of our groundwater and Tom, equally persistent in the struggle to hold onto our disappearing open lands, will be greatly missed.

Tom's Sojourn in Bastrop County

I'm leaving PPLT this year to move closer to my family in Kansas City, MO. After 24 years here, there's a lot to leave. Ann Mesrobian, my wife of 27 years and I came here in 1984 to pursue archeology fieldwork jobs.

By 1990, we'd sunk protective roots in our 5 acre homestead off Hwy 304. So, each time we passed the soon-to-be hazardous incinerator in Hill's Prairie going into Bastrop, we told ourselves "we better ask the neighbors and agencies what's going on".

Thus we founded Bastrop County Environmental Network (BCEN), which DID extinguish the incinerator. But things snowballed. With enormous leadership, spark and support from hundreds, BCEN convinced LCRA to stop mining lignite at Powell Bend, jarred TPWD into adding 1200 acres to Bastrop State Park after bulldozing 35 acres of endangered Houston toad habitat inside the park for a golf course; and helped Neighbors For Neighbors in many ways to oppose the Alcoa/SAWS water extraction plans.

On Feb. 14, 1998, Ann and I spent two uncomfortable hours with an outraged logger who'd been shut down from clear cutting the 256-acre Sawicki Bog pine stand, in Houston toad habitat during breeding season. Eight or ten government staffers were at that very time condemning his carnage in the creek bottom far below. He told me—"Ya wanna control the land, ya gotta own it."

When I agreed to be part of a volunteer group appointed by then Bastrop County Judge Peggy Walicek, I didn't know it would be the "Regional Planning and Disaster Management" team. The one aspect of that I wanted to pursue was land conservation. I published and distributed a rationale for a local land trust. BCEN got grants to hold luncheons in the Bastrop County area with speakers from other land trusts. During this, I found that old friend Carrie Knox had been trying to do something similar so we joined forces. PPLT won tax-exempt status in 2001, and has been rocking for 8-1/2 years. I'm pleased the land trust is in careful hands.

Best of luck in the years ahead!

Tom

Yegua Knobbs Preserve Field Day/Bird Census

The YKP Fall Field Day and bird census will take place November 7 from early morning until late afternoon. And Master Naturalist Mark McClelland will be there to lead an eclectic group of folks interested in a pleasant hike over fascinating terrain with a knowledgeable guide pointing out a variety of birds.

A new feature for this annual event will be barbequed wild hog, cooked by David Condron, assuming he can catch one in the trap he's set up by the bog area.

Let's all hope David is successful, since the backup plan involves our serving left over peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.



If you've not attended a YKP field day before, be sure to bring water, sturdy walking shoes and an air of anticipation of a rustic outing in a 300 acre expanse of hills and woods. Also, be aware the "facilities" are a composting toilet in a small metal hut that is flattered by the term, "rustic."

Come out to enjoy a solitary stroll in an unusual outdoor environment or have a guided tour by an able and enthusiastic Master Naturalist.

Carrie Knox Will Be PPLT's New Executive Director

Effective October 1, 2009, Carrie Knox will be our Executive Director. She was one of the founders of PPLT and served as our first president. She and Tom will work together to be sure nothing is missed or overlooked in the transition.

JOIN US FOR SOME GREAT MUSIC

Plan to join Pines and Prairies at The Bugle Boy Listening Room in La Grange for some great music, and help us raise a little money at the same time. On Friday, October 16 PPLT and the Bugle Boy Foundation will host a concert featuring a great Nashville duo, Stacey Earle and Mark Stuart.

Ticket proceeds will benefit both Pines and Prairies Land Trust and the Bugle Boy Foundation.

The Bugle Boy has earned a reputation as one of the finest listening rooms in the country. A no talking rule is observed during the performance, so that the audience gets to enjoy the full benefit of an undisrupted concert. And, there will be plenty of time to visit with other land trust supporters before the show, during the intermission, and after the show. The artists always enjoy visiting with the audience, too.

You'll enjoy a fine evening of good music, pleasant company and know that you're contributing not only to protecting our beautiful shared environment, but to keeping alive a wonderful music venue!



Mark Stuart and Stacey Earle

Showtime is 8:00 PM. Doors open at 7:00 PM. Tickets are \$18. You can buy your tickets from **800-838-3006**. For more information, go to www.pplt.org or to www.thebugleboy.org.

Nature Lessons at the CRR

by Joan Russell

The Nature Lessons at the Colorado River Refuge will resume in October.



The fall classes will concentrate on the trees of Central Texas. Scholars and parents will learn to identify the different species of trees at the Refuge. They will also learn the functions of the various parts of the tree, how trees make their own food and how they transport it through the trunk to the branches, twigs and leaves.

They will also learn something about the animals, insects and birds that live in the trees and benefit from dead trees as well as living trees.

Students vary in age from five and six to mid-teens. A Texas Master Naturalist will lead each lesson and two Master Naturalists will assist in helping to answer questions from the scholars and their parents.

Many of the students have been participating in the nature lessons for two years and are ready for more natural science. The lessons are planned as enrichment for family homeschool programs.

Fall 2009 schedule is:

October 8 and 22
November 5 and 19
December 3

Classes meet on Thursdays at the Colorado River Refuge from 10 AM to 12 PM unless otherwise specified. Everyone is welcome. There is no charge and no pre-registration is required. We look forward to seeing all the returning scholars and new scholars and all the parents. Contact Joan Russell 512-321-2718 or email joanrussell@suddenlink.net for more information.

Events of Interest

October

- 3** S. Central Texas Water Conservation Conf. Washington Cnty Fairgrnd Events Center Justin Dreibelbis 512/551-3004
- 8-10** "50 Years of Birding at Hornsby Bend" Owl workshops by Rob Fergus on the 9th and 10th and much more. Julia Balinsky 512/926-7312.
- 14** PPLT Board meeting 2 PM to 4 PM Carrie Knox 512/308-1911
- 19** Lost Pines Master Naturalists Mtng 6:30 PM Bastrop State Park Refectory Mark McClelland 512/281-5516
- 20** Bastrop Co. Audubon Soc. meeting 7:30 PM Priscilla Jarvis 512/281-2762
- 24** NatureFest Fisherman's Park in Bastrop 9 to 4 NatureFest@att.net
- 25** Deer Anatomy Workshop Lee County Greg Pleasant 979/540-2744

November

- 7** YKP Field Day (see article opp. page)
- 11** PPLT Board meeting 2-4 PM
- 16-18** "Land, Water, People" Confernce River Systems Institute Annette Paulin 512/754-9179
- 17** Bastrop Co. Audubon Soc. meeting
- ??** Feral hog trapping workshop date not set Caldwell County agent Jeff Watts 512/398-3122

December

- 12** Prescribed Burn Workshop 8 AM to approx 2 PM Lee County Greg Pleasant 979/540-2744

If you can't remember the last time you sent us a contribution to help us pay for this newsletter and provide nature lessons for children and pay our insurance and yatta, yatta, yatta... Please stop now and write a check to PPLT. I promise we'll use your money wisely. Thanks

Board of Directors

Jeremiah Jarvis *President*
 Joan Russell *Vice-Pres.*
 Dennis Kestner *Treasurer*
 EvaJean Kestner *Secretary*
 Travis Brown
 Lee Fritsch
 Alan Jaeger
 Priscilla Jarvis
 Kay Rogers
 David Vogel

Carrie Knox *Exec. Director*

President's Message

It's difficult for me to imagine Pines and Prairies Land Trust without Tom Dureka. As Tom moves on to his new adventure in Arkansas, where he'll surely become one of the central characters in efforts to keep that environment thriving and healthy, we'll all discover how it's different. We've already experienced board members stepping up to take on more responsibility and anticipate some of our advisory board members to become more actively engaged in the tasks of sustaining our shared environment.

Given the difficult financial times, we have reduced the Executive Director to a half-time position. Carrie Knox will step in to take on the job. With Carrie's energy, enthusiasm and dedication to our mission, we'll do fine.

David Vogel has orchestrated a fundraiser at the Bugle Boy in La Grange on October 16 and we hope to have other similar events to raise money to keep us going day-to-day. We'll have an event at Frontier Bank in Elgin on October 27 to tell people who we are and what we do and why we do it, with the intention of educating landowners about conservation easements.

We have our brief video and a power point presentation and we're ready to go on the road to civic clubs, chambers of commerce and whoever else will allow us to make our case before them. If you are a member of an organization for whom our message would be appropriate, please contact me or Carrie and we'll set it up.

We're confident we have enough money to defend a challenge to any of our current conservation easements. That money is in banks all around our four counties, secured by the FDIC, in Certificates of Deposits that are earning dismal returns currently. It will stay in safe and insured, very conservative investments until such time we need it to hire attorneys to go to court to defend a protected property.

We're not so confident we'll have enough money to pay our Executive Director, rent, insurance, dues and cover the expense of maintaining our properties.

You'll notice just a few inches below here is an invitation for you to get out your checkbook, ponder just how generous you can afford to be and write a nice check. (There's a little something to the left, too) This newsletter, copied inexpensively on cheap, recycled paper, written, assembled, labeled and taken to the post office by volunteers and mailed at bulk rate, is an example of our fiscal conservatism. Help us!

Jeremiah Jarvis

Please help us maintain our region's quality of life. Your tax deductible donation will support our education programs, distribution of information and direct land preservation.

___\$25 Individual ___\$35 Family
 ___\$50 Business ___\$100 Steward
 ___\$500 Sponsor ___\$1000 Champion

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Make your check to Pines & Prairies Land Trust and mail to:
 106 Conference Drive Bastrop, TX 78602



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512.308.1911 www.pplt.org

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***Pines & Prairies Land Trust Fundraiser at the
Bugle Boy in LaGrange October 16, 2009***

Tickets: 800/838-3006



Featuring Stacey Earle and Mark Stuart