

Pines and Prairies



Newsletter of the Pines and Prairies Land Trust Vol. 7 No. 3 Fall 2009

Water Marketers Target Central Texas Groundwater

by Travis Brown

This fall, rain finally came back to Central Texas. Dried-up stock ponds and water-starved trees have been replenished. Aquifers received some recharge.

The drought may be over, but this fall also brought news of other threats to our area's groundwater resources.

Powerful forces promoting development in the Austin and San Antonio areas have teamed up with water speculators in bids to pump and sell staggering amounts of groundwater from the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer in Bastrop, Lee, Caldwell and other mostly rural counties.

Almost every week, a new plan surfaced that would export groundwater from rural areas east of Austin to support growth and development in suburban areas from San Antonio to Austin. Joe Cooper, manager of the Lost Pines Groundwater Conservation District, summed up the situation in a recent Austin American-Statesman article about the rush to buy up and sell Carrizo-Wilcox groundwater east of Austin.

"If they all ramp up in the next 10 or 15 years, we won't possibly be able to dish out that much water," Cooper said.

Here's a list of some of the water marketing schemes unveiled so far.

Former Williamson County commissioner Frankie Limmer and his End-Op company are pitching a plan to the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority (GBRA) to sell 45 million gallons of water per day from Bastrop and Lee counties to foster growth in the San Marcos area. End-Op's plan calls for more than a dozen large wells that could ultimately take as much as 50,000 acre feet per year from the aquifer.

Sustainable Water Resources, led by water speculators Pete Winstead, Terry Gilmore and Paul Bury, wants to pump and

export as much as 45,000 acre-feet of water each year from the rural areas east of Austin.

Austin developer Gary Bradley is lobbying the Lower Colorado River Authority and the San Antonio Water System to build a pipeline to export water from the Carrizo-Wilcox aquifer.

A group of landowners called the Brazos Water Alliance, which includes former Texas governor Mark White and a former chairman of the Texas Water Development Board, has an agreement with the GBRA to explore the sale of up to 200,000 acre-feet of groundwater a year from the Carrizo-Wilcox.

Cross County Water Supply plans to build a 52-mile pipeline from Burleson County across Lee County and sell up to 18 million gallons of water per day to Blue Water Systems, headed by Austin developer Ross Cummings, for growth in the Manor area.

Aqua Water also wants more wells for growth in eastern Travis County. Manville Water Supply already is pumping water from rural Lee County for export to the Hutto area and wants to pump more.

These are just some of the efforts in a new "water rush" in rural communities east of Austin. Some speculators have bought large tracts of land in the area with the sole aim of selling the water rights.

Hundreds of landowners in Lee and other counties already have sold their water rights. Other landowners refuse to join in efforts to profit from selling water under their land and endangering not only their own future water supplies, but those of their neighbors and their rural communities.

The rural areas east of Austin are blessed with an abundant, healthy aquifer. Thirsty cities and growing suburbs will be

(continued page 2)



The Fall Field Day at the YKP last month had a different taste to it, thanks to David Condon, with help from Jimmie Eschberger. David brought his smoker and cooked a variety of meats-including some wild hog sausage made by Delbert Stiewert. Delicious!

Master Naturalist Mark McClelland did his usual fine job of conducting the bird census with a group of stalwarts including Dr. Stan Wellso, adding his considerable expertise. Throughout the day hikers sampled the food when they returned from their adventures on the various trails.

The week before, Lorin and Mary Vant-Hull joined David and several board members clearing and marking the trails in preparation for the field day excursions.

It was a glorious day and the hills and woods of the YKP provided a delightful setting in which to enjoy it.

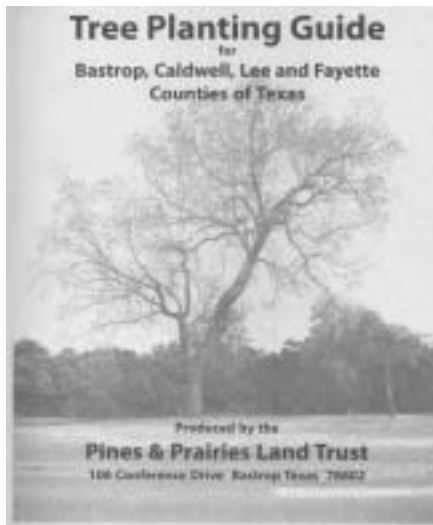


The young white-tailed deer above is one of the 22 released at the YKP by Wildlife Rescue of Austin last year.

This one briefly checked out the field day visitors, then disappeared into the woods again.

No one has reported seeing any of the four skunks released the same day.

Water Marketing Workshop
We are talking with Dr. Ron Kaiser of Texas A&M about presenting a one day workshop on groundwater marketing and the various issues with our groundwater conservation districts in our four county area. It will be sometime in April. Full details will be in our next issue.



This year we reprinted the popular Tree Planting Guide for our four counties. The first printing, funded by the Texas Forest Service, was snapped up quickly and we immediately began raising funds to revise and reprint it.

This is the time of year for tree planting and this book is full of the information you'll need to be sure you do it right!

You can purchase yours at McKinney Roughts visitor center or directly from us at our office in Bastrop.

It'll be a great gift for a gardening friend.

.....
● **Thank You Bastrop County** ●
● **Audubon Society** ●
● **Your generous contribution** ●
● **helped us publish our** ●
● **Tree Planting Guide** ●
.....

Water Marketers (from page 1)
exercising their clout to pump a lot of that water.

The challenge will be to ensure that meeting those urban and suburban water demands don't result in "mining" the aquifer – pumping out more than is recharged – and don't threaten to leave the rural areas starved for water in the future.

Groundwater water districts such as Lost Pines were created specifically to ensure the area's aquifers were protected.

The question is whether groundwater districts and the rural communities they serve can withstand assaults from the politically powerful – and wealthy – developers and cities when push comes to shove over who has a right to groundwater in Texas.

Nature Lessons at the CRR
by Joan Russell

The fall semester of the third year for the Children's Nature Lessons at the Colorado River Refuge ended December 3 with the last in the series of five lessons on Trees.

This series on trees began with Joan Russell's introduction to trees and how to recognize the different species we have in Central Texas. Each of the lessons was taught by a Master Naturalist and the students were given objects made from trees to keep such as a tree "cookie" slice of a trunk so students could observe the different parts of the inside of a tree.



How a tree makes its food and transports it to the various parts of the tree was a lesson taught by Louise Ridlon and the children played the different parts of trees to demonstrate this lesson.

A lesson on how to do tree leaf rubbings was a part of one class on tree species identification and kids did their own leaf rubbings. The things made out of wood and what we use trees for was the subject of another lesson taught by Bill Brooks. Bill made simple wooden toys for each child to play with and take home.

Retired teacher and Master Naturalist Susan Crone taught two lessons, one on how leaves change color and the last class of the year which was on how many creatures depend on and live in trees and how to make pine cone bird feeders. The children took the feeders home with them.

After each lesson, the class hiked through the woods on trails if the weather permitted.

There were a total 73 children and 30 Moms and Dads who attended these enrichment nature lessons for homeschooled children and their family teachers.

A nature hike for Special Education Life Skills classes from BISD involved 8 students and 4 teachers. Everyone, including the guides had a great time on the perfect fall day.

Events of Interest

December

12 Prescribed Burn Workshop, 8AM to 2PM. RSVP to Lee Co. Wildlife Biologist Greg Pleasant (he'll supply lunch!) 979/540-2744.

13 "Holiday in the Pines" 1PM-6PM at Bastrop State Park Refectory. Friends of the Lost Pines State Parks. John Cobb cobbfarm@airmail.net

14 Lost Pines Master Naturalists 6:30PM Bastrop State Park Refectory. Mark McClelland 512/281-5516

15 Bastrop Co. Audubon Society Winter Solstice Party. 6PM 1st National Bank in Bastrop. Priscilla Jarvis 512/281-2762

January

1 Christmas Bird Count by Bastrop Co. Audubon Society 7AM! Priscilla Jarvis (prior to 1/1) 512/281-2762

5 Lost Pines Native Plant Society meeting 7PM Bill Brooks 512/581-0377

13 PPLT board meeting 2-4PM Carrie Knox 512/308-1911

14 Friends of Lost Pines State Parks 7PM at Bastrop State Park Refectory. John Cobb cobbfarm@airmail.net

18 Lost Pines Master Naturalists 6:30PM Red Rock Community Center Mark McClelland 512/281-5516

19 Bastrop Co. Audubon Society 7PM 1st National Bank in Bastrop Priscilla Jarvis 2512/281-2762

President's Message

This has been a year of change and adjustment for all of us. We've reduced expenses where we could and cut our executive director's hours to half-time so we can maintain an office and conduct our daily business.

Our only "extravagance" is in our reserves for defending challenges to our conservation easements. We're confident we will be able to protect against any future attempts to subdivide or otherwise degrade the 2000+ acres of beautiful Central Texas we're committed to defend.

Aaah, two thousand acres of hills, woods, pastures, creeks, springs and ponds providing food and refuge for birds and fish and animals, domestic and wild. That's what we're all about and why it's a joy and a privilege to be a part of Pines and Prairies Land Trust.

Exploring the 200 acres of dense woods on the Yegua Knobbs Preserve; sitting under a giant cottonwood watching and listening as the Colorado River glides by; gingerly crossing a "hillbilly bridge" across the Middle Yegua Creek, shaded by huge pecan trees...these are the tangible benefits.

The densely wooded hills of the Yegua Knobbs are steeped in the history of wild and violent years when outlaws used them as a hideout and dared lawmen to come in and get them.

Now those wooded hills are quiet and peaceful, keeping their secrets and offering their refuge for more tranquil pastimes.

Of course, you're welcome to do your own exploring at YKP or strolling the trails of the Colorado River Refuge, enjoying the natural landscape that will always be there for you and everyone.

And there's so much more precious land, farms and ranches and other wildscapes with their own secrets and beauty, waiting to be saved.

Please help us find and save those special places before they disappear into the coming subdivision.

Thanks to Our 2009 Sponsors
Reid Sharp, 1st National Bank, Bastrop
Margie Crisp, Artist and Writer
Janice Rampy, Centex Mechanicals
Priscilla and Jeremiah Jarvis

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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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.

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The people who are the Pines and Prairies Land Trust wish for you and your family and friends another year of fresh air, clean water and a healthy, robust environment.

Working together, paying attention to how we treat each other and our shared environment, we and our children and their children will continue to be able to enjoy the rare beauty and wonder that surround us here in Central Texas.



*Seasons Greetings
Cherish the Earth
And All Its Creatures*

