

Pines and Prairies

Bastrop, Caldwell, Fayette and Lee Counties of Texas

Newsletter of the Pines and Prairies Land Trust Vol 7 No. 4 Winter 2010

Workshop to Examine Demands on Central Texas Groundwater

Half of the water we use in Texas is groundwater and the state has only recently taken serious steps to see that our underground water is managed wisely. There are clearly many additional steps to be taken.

We have invited the managers of three Central Texas groundwater conservation districts and a professor at Texas A&M who specializes in water law and particularly water marketing to discuss the ever increasing demands being made on the area's water resources.

The workshop is co-sponsored by Texas AgriLife Extension Service and PPLT. It will be held at the St. Mary's Catholic Church in String Prairie in Bastrop County on April 23 from 1 to 4:45PM. (see the map on back page)

The featured speaker will be Dr. Ron Kaiser of the Dept. of Recreation, Park and Tourism Science at Texas A&M. Dr. Kaiser has focused on water resources and the law and on water marketing and landowner liabilities. Also speaking will be Joe Cooper, manager of the Lost Pines Groundwater Conservation District, Johnie Halliburton of the Plum Creek Conservation District and Greg Singleman, manager of the Gonzales County Underground Water Conservation District.

The groundwater districts were created to deal with the problems caused by the peculiarities of Texas' "rule of capture." Under Texas law, your neighbor can pump out all of the water beneath his property and yours since you don't "own" the water under your land until you pump it out. There is little legal precedent in this state for groundwater leasing and sale.

A half dozen projects have been announced proposing to sell water from the Carrizo-Wilcox aquifer in Bastrop, Lee and Caldwell counties to

thirsty cities and suburbs to the west. Water marketers have been buying up water rights from landowners in those counties.

You can sell your right to the water beneath your own land, but the water itself is not yours until you drill into it and pump it out.

It seems if you choose not to sell your groundwater rights, you may be powerless to protect the water beneath your land if nearby landowners sell their groundwater rights to a water marketer. And, by the way, you may not be compensated for the loss of "your" water if you haven't signed away your right to it!

Most recently, the Brazos River Authority announced a plan to buy 35,000 acres in Lee and Milam counties, probably strip-mined land owned by Alcoa, and export water beneath that land to suburbs north of Austin. Urban areas are desperately seeking water to provide for inevitable population growth and rural Central Texas areas such as ours are prime targets.

This will be a good opportunity to find out first hand about the demands being made on our area's groundwater resources and what we can do to help protect those resources.

The April 23 workshop will focus on Bastrop and Caldwell counties, but future workshops are planned for other area counties, including Lee.

Light refreshments will be served and there is no cost for the workshop. For more information please call PPLT at 512-308-1911 or check www.pplt.org. You may also call the Bastrop County AgriLife office at 512-581-7186 or email rbauer@ag.tamu.edu.



Spring Field Day at YKP

The annual Spring Field Day and bird census at the Yegua Knobbs Preserve will happen on May 1st this year.

Master Naturalist Louise Ridlon will be our leader this time, with ample help from members of the Bastrop County Audubon Society.

The birders like to start by 8:30 in the morning and you'll be welcome to join them for a mostly comfortable stroll around the 300 acre preserve. If you'd rather not start so early, of course, you'll be welcome to hike the various trails on your own and we'll provide a simple map to guide you.

Bring a camp chair and a picnic lunch if you're so inclined. We'll have plenty of cool water and there'll be folks to answer your questions and show you around.

Wear comfortable clothes, bring sunscreen and a hat and if you want to check out the bog and springs, bring rubber boots or shoes you're not crazy about.

We'll have a work day before to create a new trail and you can help us do it. Call Travis Brown (914-3681) or Jeremiah Jarvis (281-2762) for details.

Smith Covey Is Newest PPLT Board Member

Smith Covey joined our board of directors during the February 10th board meeting.

Smitty retired in 2006 from the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service and, as a certified Technical Service Provider and conservation planner, has served as a consultant since then. His skills and experience with land conservation programs and in developing non-profit organizations have already proved valuable to PPLT. He and his wife Louise live in Bastrop.

Welcome, Smitty.

Conservation Easement Workshop in La Grange

On March 5, PPLT served as a co-host of the Lower Colorado River Authority sponsored conservation easement workshop in La Grange. Lee Fritsch served as moderator for the program. Some of the topics discussed included: conservation easement basics and valuations, the role of land trusts, income and estate tax implications of easements and preparing conservation easements. There were 80 people in attendance at the workshop.

Creating Lost Lake Trails

February 20, 2010 an intrepid group of Master Naturalists, PPLT board and staff and other nature lovers gathered to begin a new hiking trail at the Colorado River Refuge in Tahitian Village near Bastrop, Texas. This trail, named the Lost Lake Trail, will eventually link up with proposed trails in the Bastrop Economic Development property off Hwy 71 between Bastrop and Smithville. Thanks to the efforts of over 25 volunteers, phase 1 of this project got off to a strong start.



Mark McClelland and crew

photo by Andy Butler

On a beautiful winter day folks chain sawed saplings, cut briar and vine, cleared downed wood, photographed interesting finds and marked approximately 1 mile of new trail that highlights upland meadows and dramatic creek views. The Lost Lake trail gives visitors to the Colorado River Refuge (CRR) an opportunity to see totally different terrain than the older Refuge trails that run along the Colorado River bottom land. Hawks, rabbits, armadillos, spring flowers and many deer antlers were viewed and admired. Everyone was impressed with how quickly the land changed from flat meadows to deep, rock bottom creek. Plans were made to create short trail spurs and benches for hikers to stop and enjoy the creek views. Future plans also include adding benches to the Cliffhanger Trailhead and a parking area with kiosk and map for the north end of the Lost Lake Trail.

More trail days are planned for this spring so plan to come out and help PPLT and learn more about our natural world. For updates, photos and future trail work dates and the CRR and other PPLT properties check the PPLT web page at www.pplt.org. Thanks to Dale Morrison and all the volunteers.

Nature Classes at the CRR

Bird Adaptations and Bird Nests were the subjects of the Nature Lesson for Home Schooled children and their teachers on March 11. Joan Russell was the lead teacher and Texas Master Naturalists, Susan Crone, Bill Brooks, Marianna Hobbs and Carol Reidy assisted with the lesson.

The lesson was based on a classroom set of Audubon Adventures which was donated to the nature program by the Bastrop County Audubon Society.

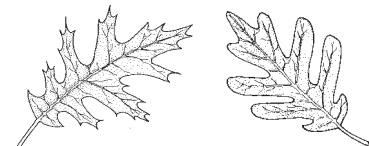
The adaptations of bird bills and what foods different species with different shaped bills eat was demonstrated by an elaborate eight station lab exercise called "Fill the Bill" It was set up on the deck of the Bastrop County Water Control and Improvement District #2. This messy but fun lab used different grasping, catching and straining devices to show how different bill shapes have been adapted by birds in various habitats with widely varying food choices. Twenty-seven children and fourteen Moms participated.



Susan Crone with rapt students

The Audubon Adventures had pictures of the different kinds of shelters that can be made for cavity nesters and platform nesters. It was suggested that birds that make their own nests can be accommodated by providing trees and shrubs for nest building.

It was a nice day and the group took a nature walk at the Colorado River Refuge guided by the Master Naturalists to observe and listen to the birds and to see what wildflowers were starting to bloom. by Joan Russell



drawings by Margaret Campbell

Events of Interest

April

12 Farm to Table Charity Gourmet Dinner
7PM hosted by Bastrop 1832 Farmers Market
512/360-4799

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

19 Lost Pines Master Naturalists 6:30PM
Bastrop State Park Refectory Louise
Ridlon 512/985-5064

20 Bastrop Co. Audubon Society 7PM 1st
National Bank in Bastrop. Priscilla Jarvis
512/281-2762

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

23 Water Marketing Workshop

28-30 Land Conservation Conference
hosted by Texas Land Trust Council 512/
358-1000 ext 211.

May

1 YKP Spring Field Day Travis Brown 512/
914-3681

11 Bluebonnet Electric annual meeting
2:30PM Sons of Hermann Hall in Giddings
800/842-7708

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

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Bastrop State Park Refectory Louise
Ridlon 512/985-5064

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National Bank in Bastrop. Priscilla Jarvis
512/281-2762

**A big THANK YOU to Ms. Ivey
and Ms. Mason and the students
in their Living Skills Class at Bastrop
HS for help with this newsletter!**

President's Message

Texas has its own peculiar way of regarding groundwater, the water in the various aquifers that move in their own mysterious ways beneath our feet. The "Right of Capture," as the Texas law has it, says there's no way to determine if the water under your land is connected to the water under my land, which I'm pumping out as fast as I can, 'cause I'm selling it to city folks so their lawns won't turn all beige and scruffy looking.

Who's to say why your well went dry?

There's a case before the Texas Supreme Court now that might lead to changes in how groundwater is officially perceived and dealt with in such circumstances, but that will probably take years. Meanwhile, smooth-talking water marketers are fanning out across the rural countryside buying folks' water "rights" and promising annual payments for their water in the future and hefty "sign up" bonuses up front.

And they have hydrologists proclaiming "There's plenty of water down there. You could never pump the (fill in the blank) aquifer dry!"

Notice it's water "rights" that are being bought and sold. A landowner doesn't "own" the water under her land. Once she drills a well and starts pumping, the ensuing water is hers to do with what she will, within reason. We have Groundwater Districts now with the responsibility of trying to control how much water is pumped from the aquifer beneath them and they're being besieged by men in suits telling them they have nothing to worry about because "you could never pump the _____ aquifer dry!"

Our job is to save and protect as much fertile farm and rangeland and wildlife habitat as we can and we continue to keep an eye on the landscape, but we know that everything in sight is dependent on the water below and we're trying to find ways to protect that, too.

That's why we asked Dr. Ron Kaiser of Texas A&M to join the managers of several groundwater districts in our area to educate landowners about how to protect their own interests when approached by someone offering to buy their rights to the water beneath their property.

We all have a stake in how this works out.

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.

Board of Directors

Jeremiah Jarvis *President*

Joan Russell *Vice-Pres.*

Alan Jaeger *Treasurer*

Priscilla Jarvis *Secretary*

Travis Brown

Smith Covey

Lee Fritsch

Kay Rogers

David Vogel

Carrie Knox *Exec. Director*

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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Tel. _____ E-mail _____

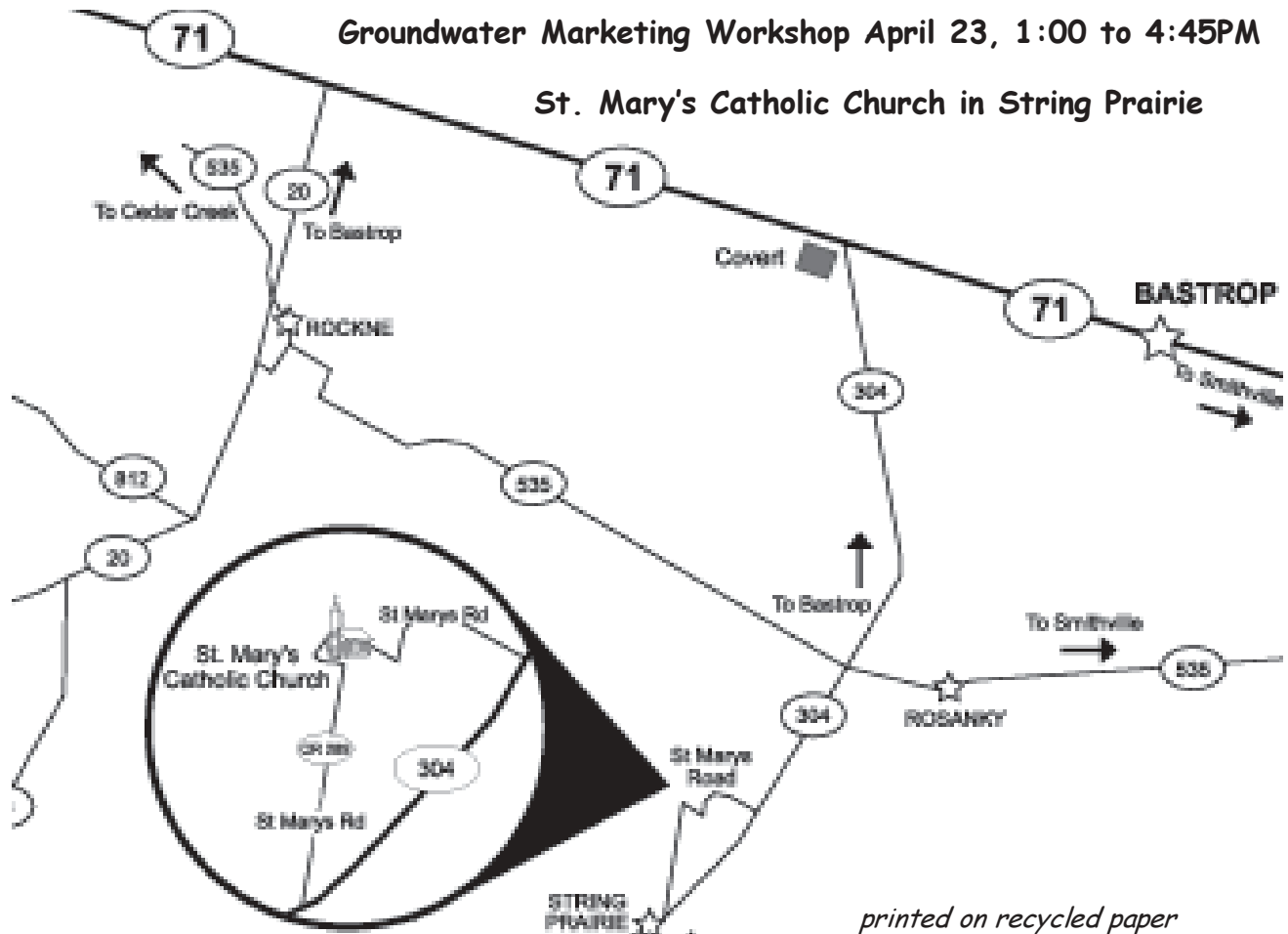
Make your check to Pines & Prairies Land Trust and mail to:
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