

# Prairie Periodical

Pines and Prairies Land Trust Newsletter

Summer 2021



The Wild & Scenic Film Festival, photo by Meg Seidel.

## Together Under The Texas Sky

Inspiring films, new campsites, frogs, free drinks and the famous Texas stars!

The first of its kind, The Wild & Scenic Film Festival at Billig Ranch on April 3rd 2021 was an astounding success. Pines and Prairies raised over \$6,000 for important conservation work and made many new friends.

Attendees (around 110 in all) began arriving at Billig Ranch at 4:00 p.m. Saturday the third and had free reign of the property's many hiking trails. Billig Ranch is 677 acres in total with woodlands, ponds and prairies to explore. Melanie Pavlas, PPLT's Executive Director, led a tour

of the property at 6:00 p.m. explaining the various ongoing native prairie restoration projects. Britt White and Thomas Marshall, PhD candidates from the University of Texas led a simultaneous herpetology hike along the shores of Billig's ponds.

Many families simply explored. Lisette, who attended with her five grandchildren, enjoyed seeing them investigate a new place. "Our family loved the Wild & Scenic Film Festival. The weather was perfect; the pond tour was a huge success

with the kids. It was a perfect evening!" said Lisette.

As the sun set attendees returned to their cars or camp chairs to enjoy the film program. Twelve short documentary films were shown. The crowd favorites were *American Ocelot*, a film about the endangered Texas cats and their conservation effort; *Herd Impact*, about high intensity grazing in North Texas; *It's Me Landon*, a film tour of Landon's favorite woods; and *The Wild Divide*, the chronicles of three scientists traversing



Florida's imperiled wildlife corridor. All of the films focused on or connected to the environment in some way—sometimes through recreation, conservation or agriculture.

Another focus of many films was diversity and inclusion. This reflects PPLT's commitment to using diversity, equity, inclusion and justice as a lens for improving and creating our programs. *Detroit Hives* showcased the work of black beekeepers in Detroit engaging students through science and local agriculture. *Water Flows Together* discussed the importance of acknowledging indigenous land on which we recreate told through the voice of a Diné woman river guide. You can read more about these films and the others shown on our website: [www.pplt.org/wildandscenic](http://www.pplt.org/wildandscenic).

As the film program ended, day trippers headed home and campers meandered back to their tents. In the morning Mikael Behrens closed out the event with a birding hike for those up with the sun.

It was wonderful to see old friends for the first time in over a year and make many new ones. We plan to make this an annual event and hope to see you there in 2022!



*If you missed the event you can find a video recap online: [www.pplt.org/wildandscenic](http://www.pplt.org/wildandscenic).*



*The Wild & Scenic Film Festival, photos by Meg Seidel.*



# Notes From The Preserves

## Yegua Knobbs Preserve

Volunteers have cleared and marked a long overgrown trail at YKP. The next time you are there check out the Space Needle Trail. Pines and Prairies is embarking on property wide habitat restoration at YKP this fall. Plans include yaupon removal, a prescribed burn, mapping sensitive resources and fence repair.



*A bobcat caught on a game camera at Yegua Knobbs Preserve.*

## Billig Ranch

Billig will soon host a small herd of cattle that will help reduce groundcover and knock back improved (exotic) grasses in several pastures. Our plan is to burn the two prairie restoration areas next year. Ongoing brush control and exotic grass spot treatment will occur this summer to keep all three of our prairie restoration areas maintained. We plan to also improve the trail system.

Many thanks to everyone who attended the Wild & Scenic Film Festival and camped with us! The event footprint and camping spots were used with great care

and everyone worked hard to leave no trace. We were proud to share this special place with you! Look for more open preserve days at Billig to come.

## Colorado River Refuge

Since its acquisition in 2004, many improvements have occurred at the Colorado River Refuge (CRR). The trail network was built by the Lost Pines Master Naturalists and grant funds from many organizations including Toms, REI, LCRA and Bluebonnet Electric Cooperative have funded the infrastructure we now enjoy.

The last year has seen many changes at the CRR. Development in Tahitian Village, the neighborhood surrounding the refuge, has spiked in the last two years. Where we used to have 10 neighbors we now have over 35! We are very excited to welcome new friends to the neighborhood and our trails. With fast paced development comes the need to clarify the boundaries of the CRR. In 2020 a group of volunteers from the Texas Society of Professional Surveyors led by board president Bill O'Hara began a pro bono survey of the refuge. We are incredibly grateful for their time and commitment to our

*Local scout Frankie Marez built and installed beautiful new trail signs at the Colorado River Refuge for his Eagle Scout project in October. Thank you Frankie for this great addition to the refuge!*

conservation mission. With the completion of the survey, volunteers will be marking the boundary of the refuge with small signs. This will allow construction crews and neighbors to see where the refuge borders their property and prevent accidental encroachment.

The trails are also growing! This spring volunteers at the CRR reconnected the west and east ends of the refuge. The Cliffhanger Trail now joins the Two-Bridges Trail near the railroad crossing. The Bridge Maniacs, a branch of the Lost Pines Master Naturalists are to thank for this improvement that now allows hikers to travel from one end of the CRR to the other.

If you would like to help improve the Colorado River Refuge, please join us for a First Saturday Service Day! Visit our website for more information:  
[www.pplt.org/events](http://www.pplt.org/events).



# PPLT's 20 Year Anniversary!

On February 1st 2001, Pines and Prairies Land Trust (PPLT) was formed by a small group of local, conservation minded stakeholders as a fledgling Texas land trust serving Bastrop, Caldwell, Fayette and Lee Counties. PPLT's first conservation easement was donated in 2003 by Erwin Billig (who later donated the property to PPLT). A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust to permanently preserve the property in its current state whether that be wildlife habitat or a working farm. These agreements run with the land, meaning even after the property changes owners the conservation values will be protected. In 2003 PPLT received mitigation funds in partnership with

the Trust for Public Land and was able to purchase Yegua Knobbs Preserve the following year. In 2004, the Colorado River Refuge was donated to Pines and Prairies. Other donated easements followed in 2005, 2007, 2009 and 2012. PPLT purchased a conservation easement in 2017 in our newly expanded service area of Travis County.

While two of PPLT's founders later served as part-time Executive Directors, it wasn't until 2012 that PPLT's Board decided to hire its first full-time ED-me!

Earlier this year, an original PPLT supporter told me how proud they

are of the organization's evolution. Coming from someone who has seen our every iteration this is incredible reassurance that

we are moving in the right direction. The dedication of each board and staff member to PPLT's mission is

what has kept us moving forward. The changes that occur over any given year are many but seeing all that we have done over 20 years is immense.

Today I continue to keep the founders' wishes for the fledgling land trust as a guide for PPLT in its maturity. They were passionate about stewardship and conservation of the unique landscapes of our region including prairies and the piney woods (hence our name)! Research was another priority of our founders and we continue to do extensive research on our preserves including on the Houston Toad, rare plants and insects and prairie restoration. We partner with state agencies, universities and other organizations to carry out this work. Our founders also were strong advocates for education and community engagement.



*PPLT founding board member Carrie Knox (left) with Bert and Wilda Pecore at the signing of their conservation easement, one of PPLT's first!*

*(Continued on page 6)*



# Who We Are

PINES AND PRAIRIES LAND TRUST works with landowners throughout South Central Texas to conserve their land legacies through conservation easements. These are custom agreements with landowners to protect the resources they value for future generations. PPLT owns and manages three nature preserves of its own totalling over 1,000 acres. These preserves provide rich natural values through native plants and wildlife, beautiful views, water quality protection and public access.

*Protecting Land. Connecting People to Land. Inspiring a Land Legacy.*

## **BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

Camille Wiseman, President  
Erik Iverson, Vice President  
Ricardo Gonzalez, Secretary  
Wilynn Formeller, Treasurer  
Luci Cook  
Steven Smith

## **STAFF**

Melanie Pavlas, Executive Director  
Courtney Young, Outreach Manager

## **VOLUNTEER LEADERS**

Margaret Silbernagel

## Meet The Faces Of PPLT:

### *Board Member- Steve Smith*

Steven Smith (Steve) joined the board of Pines and Prairies Land Trust in 2020. Steve is a personal trainer in Round Rock and brings to the board expertise in finance and accounting. He is passionate about preserving land in Central Texas as the threats of development are ever increasing. Steve is an alumni of Southwestern University and Tulane University.

One of Steve's first events with Pines and Prairies was the Wild & Scenic Film Festival where he ran the concessions booth and made us many new friends! Look for Steve at upcoming Open Preserve Days.

We are so grateful to have Steve with us!



*Steve volunteering at the Wild & Scenic Film Festival.  
photo by Meg Seidel.*



*(Continued from page 4)*

We strive to share our mission and knowledge with the local community to strengthen relationships and foster an appreciation for the land.

While we have lost some key people over the years, we have gained many new leaders and PPLT's legacy will live on in

perpetuity. We also wouldn't be here without our supporters: past, present and future. We hope you too feel proud knowing that everything you love about PPLT is made possible by YOU. Thank you!

If you are interested in sharing your own PPLT memory, we'd love to hear from you.

Cheers to another 20 years,

*Melanie Pavlas*

P.S. Did you know PPLT rolled out a monthly giving program last year?! As a gift to PPLT for its 20 years of service, I am enrolling as the first member of the Prairie Partners Giving Circle! Won't you join me?

## Meet The Faces Of PPLT:

### *Volunteer Leader- Margaret Silbernagel*

Margaret Silbernagel is one of Pines and Prairies Land Trust's most valuable people! She is imperative to the stewardship and accessibility of the Colorado River Refuge and everyone at PPLT is grateful for her service.

She first connected with Pines and Prairies through her work at the Colorado River Refuge with the Lost Pines Master Naturalists in 2018. As she became a regular feature at the work days Margaret soon stepped up to be a Volunteer Leader, hosting the monthly First Saturday Service Days for community members. She is a talented naturalist, trail designer and leader!

Outside of work Margaret loves to hike and work in her mystical garden.



**amazon**smile

Looking for another way to support Pines and Prairies Land Trust?

Look no further! Amazon.com has a charity program, Amazon Smile, which allocates .5% of each sale to the charity of your choice. Follow these easy steps to participate!

1. Go to [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com) and search for Pines and Prairies Land Trust.
2. Find us (make sure you've got the one located in Bastrop) and click the yellow "select" button.
3. You will be redirected back to the Amazon shopping page where you can shop like normal, with 0.5% of your sales donated to Pines and Prairies.
4. Be sure to always shop at [www.smile.amazon.com](http://www.smile.amazon.com).



# Thank You To Our 2021 Donors!

Peggy Anderson  
Katharine Beisner  
Elaine Blodgett  
Bluebonnet Electric  
Blue Norther Hard Seltzer  
Jeff Crouch  
Anonymous  
Cabela's  
Andrea DeLong  
Environmental Survey  
Consulting  
First National Bank of  
Bastrop  
HEB  
Marian Haigh  
Julianne Hodges

Ron Laby  
David Mahler  
Mark Maxwell  
Angie Newman  
\* Melanie Pavlas \*  
Carol & Jim Reidy  
Ivonne Rivera  
Alex Rizzotti  
Brian Schwegmann  
Jonathan Sheller  
Jaimi Shepperd  
Sierra Nevada Bewing  
Tahitian Village Property  
Owners Association  
Judy Turner  
Anonymous

See below how you can join this group of important supporters!

\* Indicates Prairie Partner Monthly Giving Program Member\*

## Show Your Support for Pines and Prairies!

Pines and Prairies Land Trust appreciates your support of our work protecting open space through land conservation, stewardship and community engagement. Here are a few ways you can continue to help:

1. Become a *Prairie Partner* by setting up a recurring monthly donation on our website. This easy gift provides the reliable income we need to continue our important mission. Go to [www.pplt.org/donate](http://www.pplt.org/donate) to join this group of distinguished supporters.
2. Include Pines and Prairies Land Trust in your long term plans. Many PPLT supporters have included us in their wills, ensuring a lasting impact on Central Texas landscapes.
3. Volunteer at a First Saturday Service Day at the Colorado River Refuge! See [www.pplt.org/events](http://www.pplt.org/events) for more information.
4. Make a one time donation with the included envelope or on our website at [www.pplt.org/donate](http://www.pplt.org/donate).





Our 20 year  
anniversary!

Conservation Excellence



Pines and Prairies Land Trust  
P.O. Box 737  
Bastrop, TX 78602

# Prairie Periodical

Pines and Prairies Land Trust Newsletter



PPLT always has fun hikes and programs on the calendar. Visit [www.pplt.org/events](http://www.pplt.org/events) to find one you can attend! Photo by Meg Seidel.



***Our mission is  
to protect open  
space through  
land conservation,  
stewardship  
and community  
engagement.***

Serving Central Texas since 2001