



# L.I.P. Bulletin



A N N U A L N E W S L E T T E R

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The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) is administered by the Private Lands and Public Hunting Program of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Wildlife Division. In partnership with the TPWD Inland Fisheries Watershed Conservation Program, LIP strives to meet the needs of private landowners wishing to enact good conservation practices on their lands for the benefit of healthy terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. The LIP Bulletin is the venue for showcasing the great work of our landowner partners as well as providing program information and opportunities to get involved.

CHET FENNER, AUSTIN COUNTY LANDOWNER

## Unraveling Our Impact, One landowner's Journey

I grew-up retreating from our home in Houston almost every weekend to a place my father bought in the late 1960s in Austin County. I learned a great deal growing up on this place – hunting, shooting, riding motorcycles – and I developed a deep appreciation for the outdoors and wildlife. It was good, clean, healthy fun for me, my family and our friends.

Some of my fondest memories come from this property. One very clear memory I have from my childhood is walking peacefully through the countryside only to have large coveys of quail flush-up and scare the pants off me! I imagine most people reading this know what I'm talking about – that huge, violent eruption of quail blasting off the ground, shattering the peace of the outdoors.

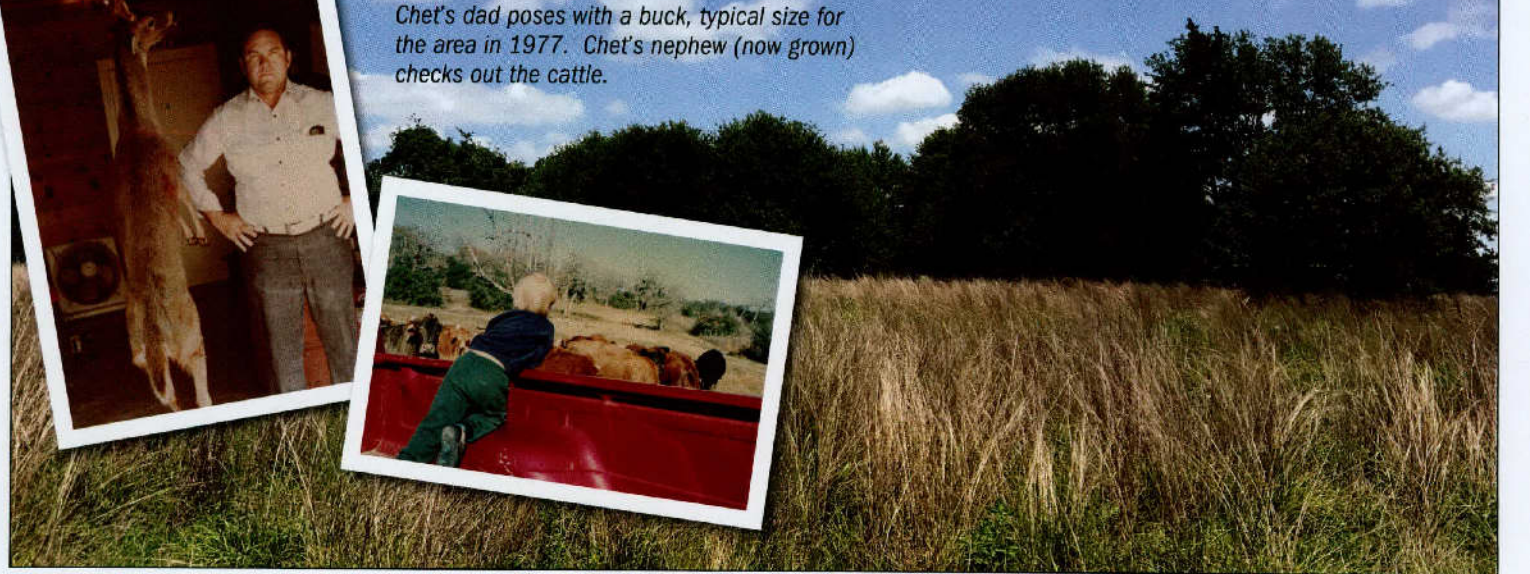
We had lots of deer, but too many does. When we did see a buck, they were very small. In fact, my first buck was embarrassingly small – I would have been lucky to eek-out a B&C score of 12 on him! But, that's about as good as it got out there at the time. Bucks were never allowed to mature due to general mismanagement in the county.

Over time, we saw fewer and fewer quail until there were none left. My dad used to complain that he didn't know what happened to them, then revert to the common thoughts at the time: Fire ants, not enough rain, snakes, etc. were decimating the quail. I wasn't sure of the cause of their demise, but I knew I hated not having the quail around. I missed hearing that beautiful "bobwhite" call that would always bring a smile to my face and a calm, peaceful feeling, reminding me that I wasn't in the big city anymore.

As time went on, I completely dismissed ever hunting at our place again due to the lack of decent deer. Then one day my dad asked for a game cam for his birthday. I bought two game cams for good measure, set them up for him and got them rolling. About a

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*Chet's dad poses with a buck, typical size for the area in 1977. Chet's nephew (now grown) checks out the cattle.*



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month later, I grabbed the SD cards out of the cams, fired-up my laptop and started showing the pictures to my parents. We enjoyed seeing pictures of deer feeding and other wildlife passing by as well. Then I came to a picture and stopped. My jaw dropped open. A really nice buck. Then I forwarded to the next. An even nicer buck. Much bigger than I'd ever seen out there by a long shot.



I finally came to realize that the 13-inch rule that TPWD put in place for Austin County decades earlier had a very real impact. That was confirmed after doing some research and finding out that over the 20 or so years that I had not been hunting there, research had shown that the bucks being harvested in the area were more and more mature, and as a result, were bigger and bigger every year. From that point forward, I was done with paying a lot of money leasing property 6+ hours away from home. I decided it made more sense to spend that money on doing some habitat management on our place much closer to home.

Until that moment, I had never seen such conclusive evidence firsthand as to how well TPWD wildlife management programs work. This was proof enough that I needed to start working more closely with TPWD to continue their impressive work. I wanted to gather more information, so I went to a Cat Spring Wildlife Management Association meeting and met some great folks who were very helpful. From this and doing some online research regarding wildlife management, it became clear exactly what happened to the quail. Although some of the factors my dad had blamed years earlier may have played a role, the main driver of their decline was that we destroyed their habitat.

I started explaining to my dad that the reason the quail disappeared is that he replaced almost their entire habitat with

improved rangeland, such as coastal, for his cattle. I hate to think about the thoughts that my dad must have had when I explained this to him – that all of the investments he made in his property actually caused the demise of one of his favorite creatures. We simply didn't know at the time that planting coastal, which was beneficial for the cattle, was not good for just about any other living creature out there. In fact, it was just the opposite – it was incredibly hazardous to them.

At the time, we did not have a TPWD biologist in Austin County, but eventually Mark Lange was named the wildlife biologist for Austin and Colorado counties. He has been an incredible asset to the wildlife management efforts in these counties. He explained what the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) was and how we could get assistance restoring the native habitat – the first step in getting our quail back. Now that I had better insight and the support of someone as helpful and knowledgeable as Mark, I quickly decided that it was time to start unraveling the impact we had on the local wildlife. The problem then became how do I get my dad to agree to “undo” much of his investment in the property. I explained to him all of the benefits the wildlife would enjoy, and to my surprise, my dad readily agreed. He missed the quail and other wildlife as much as I did.

In early 2013 I had Mark come out to our property, we talked at length with my dad, and finally came to an agreement to take about a quarter to a third of the property and convert it back to its native condition. We began by spraying the pastures with herbicide to kill the coastal. We waited then sprayed it again, as coastal does not give in easily. After we felt that we knocked the coastal back, we planted by drill-seeding the pastures with a blend of native grasses. We separated the native grass pastures from the cattle pastures and did not let the livestock into these newly planted pastures until the native grasses were established.

The rains came, and they came in a big way and paid huge dividends. That was a true blessing, as we saw impressive results. Sometime later, I had Mark come back out to see how the property was responding. He said he was expecting to see some growth, but nothing like we witnessed. He was amazed at how quickly the native grasses established themselves. And after a couple of years, I'm happy to report that the pastures have continued to do well, though there have been some lessons learned.

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One is that we sprayed the herbicide on the coastal during a drought. We thought we had eradicated it with a few applications over several months but in many places after the rains came, the coastal came back. The coastal was there, but dormant during the drought. So, in some spots, we have coastal mixed in with the native grasses, which we now need to address. Despite this, I feel that this has been a resounding overall success. I've personally witnessed the success of the program made possible by Mark and the Landowner Incentive Program. I've learned a great deal, but I admit that I'm still a novice. I have a lot to learn about the variety of grasses, how to identify them and determine which are good and which are not.

The hard work is worth it, and the results have been phenomenal:

There is a more diverse bird population; the additional deer we are seeing are healthier, with the balance between bucks and does much improved; and, we're seeing more cottontails and jackrabbits, even though we're also seeing more coyotes, bobcats and foxes. This further supports the notion that habitat may be the most important aspect of wildlife and game management. The focus shifts from trying to control predators (a near impossible task), to keeping things in balance.

I plan to expand my efforts, do some controlled burns in places, restore a couple of more pastures and continue to learn more about building a better habitat. The benefits are clear to me now, and it has been tremendously rewarding, which encourages me to do more. There have also been fringe benefits that I wasn't expecting. Last summer, my sister was complaining that she missed seeing fireflies like we used to see when we were young. I told her just to drive out to one of the native grass pastures and relive her childhood - they were there again, just like they were when we were kids. The native grasses attract a much more diverse range of insects, which in turn, attracts other forms of wildlife to feed on them.



**I feel like I'm doing my part with my wildlife management efforts to not only realize his dreams, but also to continue building on them for future generations, fostering appreciation and understanding along the way.**

Again, there is better balance, and it's a beautiful thing, not only for wildlife, but for our own eyes when those fireflies start to light-up the early-evening twilight.

My ultimate dream was to get the quail back for my dad before he passed away, but I was too late. I wish I had known about the LIP program sooner and had someone like Mark - with his knowledge, drive, and hard work - encouraging me to do this 10 years earlier. I know Dad is up there still rooting me on to get the quail back. He was incredibly proud of this property, and he wanted to leave it for the enjoyment of his children, grandchildren and others for generations to come. I feel like I'm doing my part with my wildlife management efforts to not only realize his dreams, but also to continue building on them for

future generations, fostering appreciation and understanding along the way. When my dad made what must have been a very tough decision to undo much of his investment to re-establish native pastures, I later came to realize that, yes - he did it for the betterment of the land and wildlife - but, the reality is that he was, in very large part, also doing it for me. He saw how much this meant to me and loved that I took such a genuine interest - a deep love - for the property, just like he did. He never told me this directly, but looking back I now understand. I can't imagine how he must have felt being able to leave such a wonderful, beautiful asset behind for all to love and enjoy. I know I must do my part to cultivate that.

Now that I know what the native grass looks like, I notice it everywhere. The areas where we have not planted coastal, you can see the native grasses there, alive and well. We all need to do our part to give this land back and unravel the impact we've had for the benefit of our children and for generations to come. After all, our children and grandchildren deserve to have the pants scared off of them when they flush huge coveys of quail, just like they did to us as kids!

JILL NOKES, PRIVATE TEXAS LANDOWNER AND CONSERVATIONIST

*adapted by the author from an essay published in her blog, <http://nokeslandscapedesign.com/>*

## What I Learned from my TPWD Biologist

Like many other new landowners, in the early years of owning our place in southwest Llano County, I eagerly attended every workshop, field day and webinar in the region to learn as much as possible about land stewardship.

As we began the great adventure of restoring our land, these educational experiences introduced me to the vocabulary of land management techniques and strategies, and also made me aware of the biases and expertise of the different sponsoring agencies. Yet the most valuable outcome of those first tutorials was my introduction to Dale Schmidt, my local Texas Parks and Wildlife biologist.

During one of the first workshops I attended in Junction, Texas, I listened to Gilbert Guzman, another TPWD wildlife biologist, describe the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP). Afterwards, I asked Gilbert if we could get in on this cost sharing program to help us tackle some big projects on our property. "You need to call Dale Schmidt first," advised Gilbert, and so I did.

It wasn't long before Dale came out to our place and we were amicably sitting on the porch, talking about the application process for a LIP grant. I kept waiting for him to tell me, "You need to do this or that," but that's not how he responded. There was a pause in our conversation, then Dale turned to me and said, "Well, what is it that you want to do?" We got a good laugh out of that later as we got to know each other, but this first encounter does demonstrate that TPWD biologists in general don't have an agenda or to-do list for landowners. Instead, they are there to assist people in reaching *their* land management goals in the most scientifically sound and practical way.

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Before we bought our property, I did not realize that our Texas Parks and Wildlife Department provided wildlife biologists as a *free service* to landowners. These dedicated professionals routinely make “house calls” to offer guidance and support. As noted on the TPWD website, biologists are available to collaborate with landowners to “slow or reverse the decline in quantity of the state’s wildlife habitat and improve the quality of the remaining habitat ... (while) preventing waste or depletion of the resource, and providing aesthetic and economic benefits to the landowner.”

Over the years, many biologists routinely devote hours to writing individual 1-D-1 Wildlife Management Plans (frequently, though erroneously called “Wildlife Exemption Plans”) for landowners to submit to their local county tax assessor. Currently, landowners are given more online and workshop resources to get started on their own plan, though biologists are still available for advice and suggestions.

In addition to assisting landowners with a wildlife management plan and working with wildlife management associations, most biologists toil under an enormous workload that includes issuing tags through the Managed Lands Deer Program, offering advice on harvest goals, and qualifying hunters for an expanded hunting season. Recently their job has been made more difficult still by the emergence of chronic wasting disease. To monitor the disease, biologists must log long hours tracking sick game and taking samples.

There is a lot more to this, but since I am not a hunter I will just say it seems like a lot of hot, grisly work that is no fun for all involved. Still, it’s part of the job of a biologist, and these men and women of TPWD follow through because they are professionals, and they are committed to taking care of the land and the creatures who call it home.

When you have an opportunity to meet with your local biologist, please thank them for what they do. You will be fortunate to know someone who is passionate about the natural world, and who is ready to help you.

My friend Dale Schmidt retired on August 31, 2017, so let me take a moment here and thank him for his guidance and support. We were lucky to have him as our advocate and advisor. Best wishes, Dale, for a happy and healthy “next chapter” of your life, and thank you for all you have done for us, and for the natural resources of our state.



## Find a Wildlife Biologist

The primary function of the Technical Guidance Program is to work with individual landowners or landowner cooperatives on a one-on-one basis, providing advice and information to land managers for the conservation and development of wildlife habitat and the proper management of the various wildlife populations which utilize that habitat. Through this effort, the department hopes to slow or reverse the decline in quantity of the state’s wildlife habitat and improve the quality of remaining habitat. Biologists promote management practices which will maximize wildlife potential, prevent waste or depletion of the resource, provide aesthetic and economic benefits to the landowner, and offer increased opportunity for public use and enjoyment of renewable natural resources. This technical guidance service is strictly advisory and is provided without charge to cooperating land managers.

[www.tpwd.texas.gov/biologist](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/biologist)

LARRY GFELLER, FOR PINES &amp; PRAIRIES LAND TRUST



**Pines & Prairies Land Trust, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization in Central Texas, holds conservation easements and owns property in the five-county region it serves. It's all about protecting natural and cultural resources and promoting sustainable agriculture through education and preservation of open spaces. One such property, Billig Ranch, serves as a laboratory for what can be done with strategic partners. This story is about the effort to restore native grasses.**

## Going Native at Billig Ranch

With only the smallest fraction of the native tallgrass prairie remaining in Texas, why go to all the trouble of trying to bring back the past?

Much of Texas' pastureland has been "improved" by planting imported, invasive grasses. While there may be benefits for domestic livestock, grasses such as bermudagrass (and other imported exotics) work against our native wildlife and birds. They produce a low mat of dense, tangled grass structure. Most native grasses, by contrast, are bunch grasses. These clumps allow wildlife to develop intricate trails, critical to reproduction and foraging mobility. The taller overhead cover of native bunch grasses act as concealment from hawks and other predators while the tightly packed clumps of grass afford excellent nesting habitat. Lastly, many native grasses provide food, either directly in the form of seeds or indirectly as hosts for insects. Some of those insects are pollinators.

The enormity of difficulties facing prairie conservationists can be overwhelming. Everyone knows converting to native grasses is not easy ... but where do you start?

With 677 acres of overgrazed pastures filled with imported agricultural forage grasses, Billig Ranch is the perfect site for an aggressive prairie restoration project.

Pines and Prairies Land Trust (PPLT), headquartered in Bastrop, Texas, reached out to the Wildlife Habitat Federation (WHF) who are committed to helping landowners restore and manage upland game habitat. Armed with funding from both the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Landowner Incentive Program for two separate restoration projects, PPLT understood up front this would be a long-term exercise in patience and persistence.

Step one was to knock back the exotic grasses. We had to do this several times in some areas, using a combination of shredding and herbicide. Areas where native forbs

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were prevalent were avoided. Next came the planting of native grass seed. We used a mix of big bluestem, two varieties of little bluestem, side oats gramma, green sprangletop, Indiangrass and two varieties of switchgrass.

Given the light and fluffy consistency of native grass seed and the hard packed earth at the ranch, our planting crew used a 12½ foot Truax “no-till” seed drill. This implement has coulters in front to cut through stubble and litter, double disk openers to open a trench in the soil for the seed to drop into, depth bands and hydraulic controls to regulate the planting depth, and press wheels to insure good seed-to-soil contact. In short, a near-perfect fit for the task at hand. The idea is to plant at just the right depth without costly seed bed preparation. Not only does this save a lot of time and expense, it also provides for accurate seeding rates, precision seed placement and minimal disturbance. There are other benefits.

No-till seed drills don't kill existing desirable vegetation. No-till seed drills leave plant residue on the ground, which holds moisture with less evaporation. No-till also leaves higher populations of beneficial insects and a higher microbe count. Game and songbirds feed insects to their young and microbes in the ground can make the difference between a lush inflorescence and a half-naked, starved plot.

It may take several years for efforts to pay off—it's really a battle for survival between other plants and the native grasses we seek. The seed mix planted at Billig Ranch contained a mix of early, mid and late successional varieties. This improves the odds so that some “good guys” are always in the ground waiting for the rains—waiting for an opportunity to germinate.

Many exotic plant species work the same way, some lying dormant for years before germination. So, when the early

successional exotics beat out the early successional natives, the game plan changes. Other options need to be considered, like selective herbicides, controlled grazing or prescribed burns—and timing is important here to turn the tide so natives get the advantage. Do it at the wrong time of the year and it may be back to square one and start all over.

Other hurdles exist.

Conversion to native grasses is almost never a quick process and native grass seed is more expensive to purchase. This is why cooperative conservation programs like TPWD's Landowner Incentive Program are so important.

Billig Ranch serves as an experimental laboratory for PPLT. We continue to keep tabs on this restoration project through photo points, vegetation transects and special trips, including some by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Additionally, 2018 will hopefully see another prairie restoration effort on a different part of the ranch, this time working through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife program.

The University of Texas San Antonio is currently doing monarch monitoring on the property and has vegetation transects established which will be monitored by local volunteers and PPLT. The Texas Master Naturalists have completed the first ever bird census/bird count, which we plan to continue every winter and breeding season going forward. The return of wildlife measures our success.

PPLT considers strategic partners a crucial catalyst in conservation work. Cooperative programs, like TPWD's Landowner Incentive Program, not only provides partners but makes this work more affordable and, thus, practical. Together we can build models to help others learn how to put native grasses back on the land.

TIM BIRDSONG, CHIEF OF HABITAT CONSERVATION, TPWD

MEGAN BEAN, CONSERVATION BIOLOGIST, TPWD

JOHN BOTROS, RIVER ACCESS AND CONSERVATION AREAS PROGRAM COORDINATOR, TPWD

STEPHAN MAGNELIA, RIVER STUDIES PROGRAM DIRECTOR, TPWD

MELISSA PARKER, RIVER CONSERVATION PROGRAM LEADER, TPWD

SHELLY PLANTE, NATURE TOURISM MANAGER, TPWD

SARAH ROBERTSON, AQUATIC BIOLOGIST, TPWD

## Partnering with Private Landowners to Expand Paddling and Fishing Opportunities on Texas Rivers

**Texas contains 191,228 miles of streams, creeks and rivers, including 40,194 miles of perennially flowing waters.**

The state maintains public navigability laws that ensure the rights of paddlers, anglers, and other river recreationists to wade, paddle, or float many Texas creeks and rivers. Meanwhile, private ownership of riverbanks limits the number of locations where the public can legally access these waters from dry land. The preponderance of privately-owned river banks reflects general land ownership trends in Texas, a state where less than five percent of the landscape is in public ownership.

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*Kayakers paddle the Devils River in southwest Texas, location of two public river access areas supported through a lease agreement between TPWD and a partnering landowner.*





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*Devils River near Del Rio, TX*

### River Fishing in Texas

A recent national survey found that approximately 11.9 million anglers in the U.S. (44% of the freshwater angling community) spent 148 million days fishing rivers. As awareness increases of the diverse and high-quality river fishing opportunities in Texas, so does the interest and demand for improved fishing access. River fishing opportunities in Texas include kayak and wade fishing the clear, spring-fed rivers of the Texas Hill Country, such as the Llano, Pedernales, Blanco, and Nueces rivers. Here, anglers target Guadalupe Bass (the official state fish of Texas), Largemouth Bass, Rio Grande Cichlid, and various species of sunfish and catfish. For anglers interested in a rugged, wilderness fishing experience, remote reaches of the Devils and Brazos rivers offer high-quality fishing opportunities for Smallmouth Bass, Largemouth Bass, and Striped Bass. The Trinity River boasts a trophy-size Alligator Gar fishery that has produced numerous International Game Fish Association world records, including the largest Alligator Gar ever caught on a fly rod. The Colorado River downstream of Austin offers excellent kayak and float fishing opportunities for various bass, sunfish, and catfish species. It has also received special attention as home of the current state record Guadalupe Bass, caught by a fly angler in 2014. Seasonal fishing for White Bass during annual spring spawning migrations is also popular in reaches of river upstream of multiple Texas reservoirs, including the Neches River upstream of Lake Palestine and Colorado River upstream of Lake Buchanan. Sustained cool water temperatures in the Guadalupe River immediately downstream of Canyon Lake support over-summer survival of Rainbow Trout (in most years), offering year-round fly fishing opportunities. This reach of the Guadalupe River is recognized by Trout

Unlimited as one of the top 100 trout streams in the U.S. and the southernmost trout stream in North America. Supported through put-and-take winter trout stockings, additional fly fishing opportunities are available for Rainbow Trout in reaches of river statewide (while cooler water temperatures allow these naturally cold water species to persist). Above are just examples of the many unique river fishing opportunities available throughout the state.

Expenditures by river anglers contribute significantly to the economies of communities throughout the state, particularly in rural areas. A recent study examined the annual economic impact of river recreation in the Guadalupe River in Comal County. The study estimated that the combined economic impact of fishing, paddling, rafting and other forms of river recreation totaled more than \$85 million annually. Another reach-specific study of the Colorado River upstream of Lake Buchanan found that springtime White Bass fishing generated an economic impact of more than \$2.8 million over a three-month period. A 2015 study estimated that river fishing in the Texas Hill Country generated an economic impact of \$71.6 million over a 14-month period. Hill Country anglers identified wade-fishing as a method they often or always use (59%), followed closely by kayak, canoe or tube fishing (53%), bank fishing (48%), and fishing by motorboat (12%). Seventy-five percent of Hill Country anglers surveyed communicated high levels of support for efforts to increase river access.

### Trends and Motivations in Paddlesports

As evidenced by responses in the Hill Country river fishing study referenced above, non-motorized watercraft such as

*Anglers fish by canoe on the Brazos River.*



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kayaks, canoes, and rafts (collectively referred to as paddlesports) are popular among river anglers. National surveys conducted in 2008-2014 found paddlesports to be one of the fastest growing sectors of the U.S. outdoor recreation industry. In 2014, 21.7 million Americans (7.4% of the population) participated in paddlesports, an increase of more than 3 million participants since 2010. More than 50% of these paddlers identified their desire to experience nature as a motivation to participate. Furthermore, paddlers identified freshwater fishing (35%) and wildlife-viewing (23%) as preferred crossover activities, which closely followed exercise and fitness-related activities as the top responses. These findings are consistent with a 2015 study of Texas Paddling Trails Network users, which found that top motivations to participate in paddling consisted of enjoying natural scenery and getting exercise, while fishing/fly-fishing was identified as the top nature-oriented activity that paddlers participated in during their most recent trip. This same study found that lack of quality river access sites was second only to inadequate river flows on the list of issues of concern. Paddlers also identified access as the top convenience considered when choosing where to take a trip.

### Texas Paddling Trails Network



*A family kayaks the San Marcos River at the Luling Paddling Trail.*

To enhance river access opportunities and encourage fishing, wildlife-viewing, and other forms of nature-oriented recreation on Texas rivers, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department established the Texas Paddling Trails Network, which currently consists of 73 trails that encompass 592 miles of Texas rivers. The Texas Paddling Trails Network designation promotes existing public river access areas that offer safe and reliable

access and family-friendly paddling opportunities. Many of the 130 river access areas contained within the Texas Paddling Trails Network are located at city, county, and state parks and public boat launches. The Texas Paddling Trails Network has increased public awareness of river access and recreation opportunities, and enhanced the outdoor recreation economy for many local communities. A 2015 study of the Texas Paddling Trails Network conservatively estimated an annual economic impact of \$164 million from visits to these sites.

### Leasing of Private Lands for Paddling and Fishing Access

Despite the opportunities afforded by the Texas Paddling Trails Network, public river access continues to be limited because of the nature of land ownership in the state. However, Texas landowners recently became part of the solution for expanding river access for paddlers and anglers. In the year 2000, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department began leasing private lands seasonally for river access to winter trout fishing opportunities on the Guadalupe River. In 2004, an economic impact study found that for every dollar spent by the department on these public access leases and trout stocking, \$4.75 of economic value was generated for the local economy. In 2012, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department formally established the River Access and Conservation Areas program with the goal of engaging private landowners, anglers, paddlers, and local community organizations in projects that improve public access and encourage local stewardship of Texas rivers. Establishment of the program resulted in a significant expansion of the department's use of private lands leases as a tool to enhance public river access. Funded through a competitive grant awarded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP), the program negotiated lease agreements with interested landowners for public river access at seven private properties along the Brazos (n = 2), Colorado (n = 1), Guadalupe (n = 3), and Neches rivers. In 2014, the River Access and Conservation Areas program was awarded additional grants from VPA-HIP and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation to further support public river access leases. This allowed the program to grow to 19 public river access areas on the Brazos (n = 3), Colorado (n = 4), Devils (n = 2), Guadalupe (n = 4), Llano, Neches, Nueces, Sabine, San Marcos, and South Llano rivers.

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### Local River Stewards

In partnership with landowners, angling clubs, paddlers, and local community organizations, a litany of local stewardship projects have now been completed at the leased properties and adjacent reaches of river. Examples include removal of more than 100 tons of trash from one access area that previously served as an illegal dumping ground, improvements to parking areas and kayak launch areas, installation of kiosks that promote river stewardship, control of soil erosion and river sedimentation through reseeding and planting of native vegetation, control of invasive riparian plants, and installation of fencing and gated entries to control or direct public access or prohibit livestock from the public river access areas.



*A youth volunteer assists with trash cleanup on a Texas river.*

Keep Texas Beautiful, a state-based non-profit organization with numerous local chapters, has organized 11 river trash cleanups at the access areas, removing over 1,100 pounds of litter and debris. Another organization helping to care for these new river access areas is the Hill Country Alliance. The alliance was formed to raise public awareness and build community support around the need

to preserve the natural resources, heritage, and unique character of the Texas Hill Country. At river access areas in the Hill Country, such as along the South Llano River, the alliance has organized volunteers to clean up trash in and along the river, restore streamside habitats, and install kiosks and signage for users. The Devils River Conservancy has organized similar efforts, removing litter and developing educational materials and resources for river users and landowners to help ensure that the Devils River remains a natural and scenic treasure for generations of Texas. The Texas Council of Fly Fishers International has also played an active role in the River Access and Conservation Areas program by helping

identify species reaches of rivers where anglers desire improved access. The organization has also distributed nearly 5,000 citrus fruit bags (used for river trash cleanups) to their more than 20 local fly fishing clubs spread throughout the state. The clubs conduct river trash cleanups during their routine club outings to the river access areas.

### Recreational and Economic Benefits



*Public river access lease at Hidden Shores on the Colorado River upstream of the City of Smithville*

Through these public-private partnerships, public river access has been enhanced on more than 170 miles of Texas rivers, resulting in substantial economic benefits to local communities. Using 2015 angler counts and recently published data on river fishing trip expenditures, we calculated lease-specific returns on investment ranging from 10:1 and 19:1 at three river access leases on the Guadalupe River. The estimated economic benefit to local communities from improved access at the three leases in 2015 was \$380,081. By extrapolating these economic benefits across the network of leases supported through the River Access and Conservation Areas program, we estimate that the program is currently generating upwards of \$2.4 million in annual economic value to local communities.



*Guadalupe Bass, the official state fish of Texas, caught while fishing the lower Colorado River near the City of Smithville*

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Public river access areas on the Colorado River near the communities of Bastrop and Smithville



The recently launched Texas Rivers Conservation License Plate

### Continuing to Improve Public River Access

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department recently launched the Texas Rivers Conservation License Plate. The new plate sells for \$30, with \$22 going directly to support projects that help conserve Texas rivers and enhance paddling and fishing opportunities. This includes payments to partnering landowners engaged in public river access leases. The River Access and Conservation Areas program continues to seek out riverside landowners interested in multi-year public river access leases. As specific properties are being considered, a priority will be placed on access areas located along reaches of river that (1) offer a unique wilderness setting with intact instream and riparian habitats, (2) offer high-quality paddling and river fishing experiences, and access to other nature-oriented uses such as wildlife viewing, (3) currently have limited public river access, (4) are strategically positioned to connect with other upstream or downstream river access areas, and (5) have the potential to result in a long-term public river access lease arrangement.

If you are a riverside landowner interested in exploring a public river access lease agreement at your property, please contact John Botros (Coordinator, River Access and Conservation Areas Program) at (512) 754-6844 or [John.Botros@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:John.Botros@tpwd.texas.gov)

To learn more about Texas Paddling Trails or the River Access and Conservation Areas Program, please visit TPWD's River Fishing Web Page at: <http://bit.ly/FishTXRivers>

To purchase a Texas Rivers Conservation License Plate and support projects that conserve Texas rivers and enhance paddling and fishing opportunities, please visit: [www.conservationplate.org/rivers](http://www.conservationplate.org/rivers)

To learn more about ownership and navigability laws pertaining to Texas rivers, please review "Texas Stream Navigation Law" or "If a River Runs Through It, What Law Applies?" under the Legal Issues section of TPWD's River Fishing Web Page at: <http://bit.ly/FishTXRivers>

JUSTIN DREIBELBIS, TPWD PROGRAM DIRECTOR, PRIVATE LANDS & PUBLIC HUNTING

## New Private Lands Program Leader



We would like to welcome Tim Siegmund as TPWD's new Private Lands Program Leader. Many of you may know Tim through his extensive grassland restoration work with the

Pastures for Upland Birds program over the last several years. In his new role, Tim will be providing support to our TPWD staff statewide working on a variety of topics from wildlife tax valuation to securing additional financial resources for important conservation programs like

*Tim Siegmund leads participants at the Falls County Prairie Restoration Tour.*

LIP and PUB. Tim will office on the Texas A&M University campus in College Station.

Tim received his Bachelor's in Forest Wildlife Management/Biology from Stephen F. Austin State University and is a graduate from the inaugural class of the James G. Teer Conservation Leadership Institute. Since 2009, he has served as a regulatory biologist for District 5 covering up to seven counties. Tim's varied conservation interests and experience developing multi-agency partnerships make him a great fit for the position.

Please join me in congratulating Tim as he assumes this important new role with TPWD!



# FROM THE DESK OF ARLENE KALMBACH

TPWD LANDOWNER INCENTIVE PROGRAM COORDINATOR

## Partnership

Successful conservation is rooted in partnership. The Texas Landowner Incentive Program is founded in partnership. Partnership with private landowners is paramount to the successful conservation of natural resources in this state. In addition to the strong partnership the LIP program enjoys with the private landowner cooperators we work with, we also have a strong partnership with our funders, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. This program demonstrates the same conservation commitment on private lands in Texas as the TPWD LIP program and has knowledgeable staff ready to work directly with private landowners or through the TPWD LIP program.

While the LIP program is housed in the TPWD Wildlife Division, it operates in partnership with the TPWD Inland Fisheries Division Habitat Conservation Branch adding their additional expertise when assessing natural resources from a watershed perspective and getting LIP conservation projects accomplished. These strong partnerships are what enables the LIP program to implement successful conservation for the benefit of healthy terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in Texas.

At this time the LIP program has wrapped up many of the projects begun over the last year with seven active LIP projects still underway. We are currently in the process of reviewing project proposals submitted for the February 2018 request and are excited to begin many of these projects to enhance more habitat in priority watersheds this spring. Many of the projects focus on the reduction of invasive brush, native prairie establishment, riparian restoration and much more for the benefit of Texas wildlife and watersheds.



Think your property might be a good fit for the LIP program? Contact your local TPWD or USFWS biologist to learn more! Go to [www.tpwd.texas.gov/lip](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/lip) to learn more about the program and to find your local biologists. A deadline for new project pre-proposals will be set for February 2019 so be sure to check the website for updates and to see what's new with the program!

*Megan Bean, TPWD Inland Fisheries Division LIP Primary and Russell Martin, TPWD Wildlife Division Diversity Biologist, Trans Pecos – baseline fish surveys on potential LIP project site*

*Brendan Witt, Chris Chapa, FWS Partners Program Biologist and Arlene Kalmbach, TPWD LIP Program Coordinator – LIP project site assessment*



*Arlene Kalmbach  
and Brendan Witt*





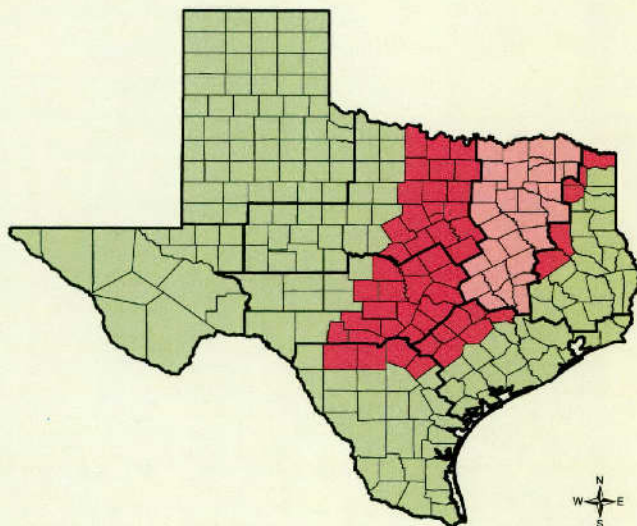
## PASTURES FOR UPLAND BIRDS

TIM SIEGMUND,  
TPWD PRIVATE LANDS PROGRAM LEADER

### Pastures for Upland Birds: Building Suitable Structure for Grassland Dependent Species

As agricultural practices across Texas have intensified, diverse prairie plant communities have been reduced in both scale and size across the state. This fragmentation has occurred through direct conversion to row crops or monoculture non-native pasture and through woody plant encroachment. Trees and shrubs such as eastern red cedar, mesquite, huisache, and others change prairie plant communities and the wildlife species associated with them. As a result of these habitat changes water quality may be impacted and gamebirds such as wild turkey and Northern bobwhite quail have been reduced in abundance or even disappeared across their eastern range in the state of Texas. Additionally, grassland songbirds, bees, and butterflies have decreased in abundance as healthy prairie systems have decreased across the landscape.

In partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Partners for Fish and Wildlife program, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department now offers landowners the ability to convert non-native, monoculture pastures back to a semblance of the original prairie through the Pastures for Upland Birds Program (PUB).



PUB Priority Area (F16AS00007 Funding Target - Minimum \$60,000)  
 PUB Priority Area (F16AS00007 Funding Target - Not To Exceed \$40,000)

The PUB program partners with landowners to restore native prairie by providing the materials and sometimes equipment for the project. While it is impossible to recreate the unique plant and animal assemblages associated with the historical prairie expanse, it is possible to create the correct habitat structure on restoration sites.

Diversity of available native plant species directly increases a restoration site's potential for utilization by grassland wildlife species. Bird species such as the loggerhead shrike, scissor-tailed flycatcher, eastern meadowlark, grasshopper sparrow, wild turkey, and northern bobwhite can all benefit from the increase in structure types and a diverse plant community.

The majority of non-native pasture grasses (Bermuda grass, bahia grass, Johnson grass, and old world blue-stems) are grown in monocultures (single species environments) that provide little in the way of insect or seed production for wildlife and bird species. These grasses typically are managed as a low growing and uniform habitat providing little nesting, foraging, or loafing cover for grassland bird species. With the PUB program, TPWD has contracted for 9 native grasses, 9 perennial forbs/wildflowers, and most recently an additional 32 species of wildflowers with pollinator benefit. This diverse mixture has the ability to provide the bunch grass structure necessary for ground nesting birds, seeds from wildflowers for food, and a greater abundance and diversity of insects for chick and poul production when raising young.

Conducting proper restorations take time and no two projects are the same. You can start this process by contacting your local TPWD biologist and determining if the PUB program is a good fit for your property.

**Contact your local TPWD biologist:** [www.tpwd.texas.gov/biologist](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/biologist)

**More info on the PUB program:** [arlene.kalmbach@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:arlene.kalmbach@tpwd.texas.gov)

**Pastures for Upland Birds:** [www.tpwd.texas.gov/pub](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/pub)



ARLENE KALMBACH, TPWD PASTURES FOR UPLAND BIRDS ADMINISTRATOR

**With Sincerest Gratitude**



The Pastures for Upland Birds program (PUB) uses herbicide as a tool to reestablish native prairie on private lands in Texas. In November 2017, the PUB program received a generous donation of herbicide from Monsanto for the benefit of native prairies and pollinators in Texas.

With a retail value of \$21,000.00, the donation will go far to help ensure PUB has a sufficient supply of herbicide in 2018 to control invasive grasses like Bermudagrass, bahiagrass and Old World bluestems that can crowd out native vegetation on prairie restoration sites.

For more information on the PUB program go to [www.tpwd.texas.gov/pub](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/pub).

*“Monsanto’s role in protecting habitat is rooted in our biodiversity strategy,” said Pam Bachman, Monsanto Environmental Strategic Engagement Lead. “We’re proud to add the Pastures for Upland Birds Program to our long list of partners that are fighting to eliminate invasive and harmful vegetation and preserve natural wildlife and pollinator habitat.”*

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*“To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.”*

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All inquiries: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744, telephone (800) 792-1112 toll free, or (512) 389-4800 or visit our website for detailed information about TPWD programs:

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