



A little information on one aspect of our water resources

The following information is summarized from an article titled "Restoring Native Texas Rangelands for Increased Water Yield" that was sent to us by the National Resource Conservation Service. The complete article can be found at our website; www.wcwildlife.org.

Deep groundwater resources can be depleted during mere decades, but they take countless years to replenish. Groundwater is a precious common resource that should be protected to the limit of our abilities.

Another water resource is stored - and used - in the more transient near-surface zone. We have nearly no control over rainfall that recharges this zone, but we can practice vegetation management to increase water resources available near the ground surface.

Vegetation in our part of the state has undergone significant change during the last 150 years, shifting from a grassland savanna to a heavily wooded landscape. This is largely due to the invasion of Ashe juniper ("mountain cedar") and mesquite trees. Such woodland transformation reduces water available for short-term groundwater recharge and stream flow, and these two particular species intercept and use lots of water. Their invasion can be reversed through rangeland restoration. (See *Stephanie McKenzie's* article on page 5.)

A Texas A&M study funded by the Texas Wildlife Association Foundation concluded that an additional acre-foot (325,850 gallons) of water is available for other uses for every 5 to 8 acres of brush converted to native rangeland in the Edwards Plateau and for every 15 to 30 acres converted in the South Texas Plains. Of course, restored native grasses use water, too, but the study found that evapotranspiration rates (water lost to the atmosphere through evaporation and use by plants) at areas cleared of junipers were 1.6 inches/acre/year less than areas with intact junipers.

Save the Date!



South Central Texas Water Conservation Conference
Planning for the Future

October 3, 2009

Washington County Fairgrounds Events Center

What are you going to do when the well runs dry?

Brought to you by: Texas Wildlife Association, Washington County Wildlife Society, Texas Parks & Wildlife, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Native Plant Society of Texas/LaBahia Chapter, Texas Master Naturalist/Gideon Lincecum Chapter and Bluebonnet Master Gardeners.

More information will be coming to you soon!

WASHINGTON COUNTY Wildlife Society

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Tom Yates, Society Treasurer, (979) 836-7941
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President's Remarks

Greetings from Sandtown Co-op!

There are many programs underway that WCWS is sponsoring or participating in that will help us in our quest to encourage good wildlife management in Washington County.



I was able to attend several of your co-op meetings this spring. Good speakers, good food, and good fellowship all around. The concern of wild hogs is a big problem for landowners. **Bobby Eichel**, Technical Guidance Biologist, gave a program on feral hog management at the New Years Creek/Post Oak shared meeting in early March. Habitat Management was the focus of the Rocky Creek meeting with **Ernest Everly** speaking about his experiences as Somerville Lake Manager with the Corps of Engineers. **Juliana Lehmann**, Brenham Jr. High School student, gave a brief overview of her Science Project on Quail followed by a presentation by **Kyle Brazil**, Quail and Grassland Bird Program Manager with Audubon Texas at the Greenvine/Mt. Vernon shared meeting.

We are in the early stages of planning our August 22nd Semi-Annual meeting. **Greg Pleasant**, TPWD Wildlife Biologist, will speak on identifying wildlife tracks and signs. You won't want to miss this program so mark your calendars.

Reaching even further into the future, Washington County has awarded our first scholarship to a student from Brenham High School. We are committed to working with our local youth and to helping them on their career path in wildlife management and natural resource conservation.

Finally, I would like to welcome 18 new members to our Society so far this year, and a special thank you goes to **Bob and Shirley Welker** of Post Oak as our newest Lifetime Members!

Let's all continue our journey towards making Washington County *WILD!*

Richard Thames,

WCWS President 2009

COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES:

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Activities & Events Committee: Sara Byman, Ann Thames
Scholarship Committee: Jack Taylor, Russell Borgstedte, (936) 878-9933, russ-borgstedte@earthlink.net, Jacob Hetzel, Debbie Wellman

Volunteer! It's a great way to have fun, meet new people and support WCWS.
Contact a committee member to join.

Aquatic Weed Control

By Larry W. Pierce, Jr., Washington County Extension Agent

Many pond owners become concerned when they see aquatic vegetation on their ponds in the spring. These concerns peak when it is time to go fishing. The mere presence of aquatic vegetation in pond does not constitute a problem. Whether chaotic vegetation causes problems or not depends on the goal for the pond, and the type of vegetation present.

The best time to address potential aquatic vegetation problems is during pond construction or reconstruction. Many aquatic plants are depth limited and grow only in certain water depths. Many aquatic vegetation problems can be prevented by creating adequate depth through most of a pond and shaping most banks to a 33% slope from full level down to at least 4-5 feet of depth.

Generally, it is not practical to drain and reconstruct an existing pond simply to control an aquatic plant problem. If a pond has an over abundance of aquatic plants, usually at least three options are available to landowners to reduce them: (1) modify the pond environment in a manner that makes it less conducive to plant growth, (2) stock herbivorous fish to eat the plants, or (3) apply aquatic herbicides.

Aquatic plants need a supply of light and nutrients to grow and develop. Adding a dye or colorant in the water effectively limits light penetration through the water, therefore limiting submersed aquatic plant growth. However, colorants or dyes do not affect immersed or floating plants. They also do not enhance the natural food chain of the pond. Ponds can also be fertilized to add color to the water. Fertilization of ponds causes a phytoplankton bloom which gives the water a greenish color. This phytoplankton not only colors the water but also provides food for organisms that are eaten by fish, thus enhancing the natural food chain of the pond. Ponds that are infested with weeds should not be fertilized until the problem is corrected.

Grass carp is the primary herbivorous fish species stocked into ponds to control many species of plant growth. To obtain this fish, a landowner must apply for a permit from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Applications for permits are available from the Washington County office of Texas AgriLife Extension Service or Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.



Effective use of herbicides generally requires accurate identification of the problem plants. Some herbicides control only certain plant species or plant groups and leave other problem plants unharmed. Most aquatic herbicides contain one of the following ingredients; copper, 2-4D, diquat, endothall, fluridone or glyphosate. All herbicides provide only temporary control. Please read and follow all of the instructions on the herbicide label. Pay close attention to use restrictions regarding livestock watering, fishing, swimming, and/or irrigation.

To minimize risk of fish kills, herbicides used to control aquatic plants should be applied early in the growing season before problem plants dominate a pond. April and May are the best months to control aquatic vegetation. Fish kills can be caused by the decomposition of large quantities of vegetation because this process uses dissolved oxygen in the water. If the dissolved oxygen concentration falls below 2-3 parts per million, fish will die.

To obtain more information on the management of your ponds contact the Washington County office of Texas AgriLife Extension Service at 979.277.6212 or stop by 1305 East Blue Bell Road in Brenham. Also visit this website for information on aquatic weed identification and management: <http://aquaplant.tamu.edu>.

Conservation Planning and Financial Assistance Available to Agricultural Producers

As an agricultural landowner or lessee, would you like to protect and improve your land in such a way that you can pass it on in better shape than when you got it? Would you like to leave your children land that is highly productive and well conserved? Would you like to have the satisfaction of working the land and feeling that you have done your part, to the best of your ability, in protecting the watershed you live in? Would you like to receive financial assistance to help you accomplish these goals?

If you answered "Yes" to any of these questions, there are certified specialists in your county that offer one-on-one professional assistance and voluntary programs to help you plan how to protect and optimize your land and natural resources for crops, livestock and wildlife. You can request this assistance, without a fee, through your local USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) office. All programs are voluntary and offered to all agricultural producers.

The 2008 Farm Bill authorized some key programs for technical and financial assistance for producers and they include:

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

EQIP offers technical and financial help to install or implement structural, vegetative, and management practices that can benefit the soil, water, air, plants, livestock, and wildlife. Practices can include prescribed burning, prescribed grazing, vegetative buffers, brush management, grass planting, pipelines, wells, fencing and many more. Each county in the state is funded yearly to assist producers financially for these practices.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

WHIP provides assistance for producers who want to develop and improve wildlife habitat primarily on private lands. Plans are developed in consultation with the local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) and provide both technical and financial assistance to establish and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

WRP is designed to restore and protect wetlands on private property. It is an opportunity for landowners to enhance wetlands in exchange for retiring marginal agricultural land in primarily wet areas. WRP also serves to provide fish and wildlife habitat, improve water quality, protect biological diversity, and provide limited recreational opportunities.

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

FRPP is an easement program that helps farmers and ranchers keep land in agriculture. The program provides funding to state, local, or tribal entities with existing farmland protection programs to purchase conservation easements or other interests.

Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

GRP can provide financial help which enables landowners to protect, restore and enhance grasslands on their property. The program protects grasslands from conversion to cropland or other uses, and conserves the grasslands by helping maintain viable ranching operations.

Also a grass-roots effort, not considered a Farm Bill program, is the Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI). The Texas GLCI works with NRCS to promote grazing land management and to provide needed training to landowners, NRCS personnel and partners. This is done through producer grants, workshops, tours, reference material and other supporting activities.

You have the opportunity to work with the county SWCD and NRCS in a voluntary, cooperative partnership to develop a conservation plan based on your goals and objectives. The conservation plan will provide you the tools to help you conserve, manage and care for your land, natural resources, livestock and wildlife. Conservation plans are not contracts; they are recorded objectives on your land (or land that you operate), that you have in mind for you and your family's future. A conservation plan is tailored to your situation and is a confidential document. Only when you receive financial assistance on practices identified in your plan, will you have contracts drawn up for those specific practices.

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Restoration of Native Grasses

By Stephanie McKenzie, TPWD Biologist

Restoring and managing native grasses can contribute significantly to forage production for livestock grazing and habitat for a wide variety of wildlife species. Forbs or broadleaf herbaceous plants represent a major component of native grasslands or prairies. Annual and perennial species are found in native grasslands and prairies and comprise the majority of species present. Species diversity is a key component to managing native grasslands. Without a good diversity of plant species, the site can have less of a value for livestock grazing and wildlife forage.



(May) and then about 2 weeks later plant the native seed. This factor reduces late winter, early spring competition but it also leaves you very vulnerable to low moisture if seasonal rains do not occur in June.

Ideal mixes for the Post Oak Savannah often include little bluestem, big bluestem, yellow Indian grass, Eastern gama grass, side oats, and switch grass. Some of these grasses vary between dry uplands and moist bottomlands so consult with professionals before deciding on a mix. Common forbs may include Englemann daisy, maximillian sunflower, and many more. Forbs are important to add to the mix.

Site preparation is perhaps the most important element to be addressed before planting native grasses. Each site will be different and an evaluation should be done to determine what type of vegetation and soils exists and what steps will be necessary to set back plant succession so that planted species can germinate and grow. In most settings, herbicide will be needed to kill existing competing vegetation such as 'improved' grasses (i.e., Bermuda and Bahia). Herbicide applications are best conducted in late spring or early summer when grasses are very actively growing.

After killing the competition, light discing or burning may be required to remove rank vegetation so that seeds may be drilled into the soil. There are 2 different periods for seeding native grasses and both have advantages and disadvantages. The first method is winter planting of seed after competition has been killed the previous summer. Winter plantings may help insure that there is adequate moisture in the soil for seeds to germinate in the spring. However, remember that moisture is not the only factor. Day length and soil temperature are major factors. A disadvantage to this method is that winter forbs and grasses and early spring vegetation may outcompete the native seeds. The second method is to spray herbicide in late spring

Once native grasses have been established several tools can be used to maintain the grassland. Control burning, mowing, grazing, and disking can be used for site management. Fire is a natural event for grasslands and prairies and they benefit from its occurrence by stimulating growth of dormant forb seed, promote growth of above ground vegetation, improve soil fertility, and help control the invasion of undesirable woody plant species found in the area. Fire releases nutrients back into the soil and reduces shading of new grass and forb seedlings. All of these management tools can be used on a 3-4 year rotation to keep plant succession at a desirable stage and to promote growth for a healthy native grass stand. When using a tool such as fire, mowing, and disking, the area should be divided it strips of a checker board design depending on the size of the area. By using this method, you can make sure the area always has native grasses at different stages of succession.

For more information contact Stephanie McKenzie, Wildlife Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 979-277-6297, slmckenzie05@sbcglobal.net .

South Central Texas Prescribed Burn Co-Op

The first prescribed burn of 2009 was held at Charlotte von Rosenberg's property on Quebe Rd in Washington County in January. It was a small (2-ac) area that she is trying to restore to native grasses. We had very low wind, but also low humidity and 12 volunteers who were able to make it successful and safe. It was a pretty day to be doing something good for the earth. *-Dave Redden*



(Continued from page 4)

All these services are provided through NRCS conservation planning assistance. NRCS specialists combine knowledge of you and your land with the science-based knowledge and tools they have, to develop your conservation plan. After the certified specialists inventories and evaluates the soil, water, air, plant and animal resources on the property; they will review several options with you, and the options you choose are recorded in your conservation plan. This written plan becomes your primary tool for long-term management of the natural resources on your property.

A Conservation Plan Includes:

- 1 Aerial photo or diagram of your fields;
- 2 Soil map and soil descriptions;
- 3 Resource inventory data, which can include forage or crop production potential, or potential livestock carrying capacity;
- 4 List of your treatment decisions;
- 5 Location and schedule for applying and maintaining conservation practices and systems.

"Benefits of a conservation plan go a long way in helping you protect and improve your land so you can pass it on in better condition to future generations," said Veronica O'Donnell, District Conservationist with Washington County NRCS. "The plan will help you qualify for NRCS financial assistance to implement the conservation practices to make the changes on your farm or ranch. It will also serve as your planning tool, and can be modified as your objectives and goals change throughout the years."

For more information about conservation planning, and how you can get help in creating your own conservation plan, and sign up for financial assistance, contact the Washington County NRCS office at 2305 C Becker Drive, in Brenham, or call (979) 830-7123 ext. 3; or the Austin County NRCS office at 520 S. Front St., in Bellville, or call (979) 865-3139 ext. 3. Applications for financial assistance are accepted throughout the year.



Contact: *Melissa Blair at (361) 241-0609*

Washington County 4-H WHEP Team Scores on First Try

Earlier this year, Washington County 4-H formed its first Wildlife Habitat Evaluation Team (WHEP) and began practicing for state and national competitions. The 4-H program is designed to encourage critical thinking skills in youth, ages 8 – 19, using wildlife science and wildlife management practices as the basis. The members of the team learn to identify wildlife species, what they need in their habitat, and how to make improvements in that habitat to encourage or discourage various species. Then they use those skills to compete against other teams following a set of rules.

After only six weeks of training, our local team under the leadership of Mrs. Joy Nutt and Mr. Dave Redden, went to regional competition in Houston last Saturday, March 14 with one junior team and one senior team. It was a cold, rainy day, beginning before light and lasting late in the day. The two teams performed well and finished fourth place overall out of 8 junior and 5 senior teams. Two of the junior team members, William Corn and Austin Derkowski, and one of the senior members, Faith Nutt, received special recognition for their individual scores. They all had a good time, learned a lot, and are looking forward to next year.



From left: Joy Nutt, Coach. Haley Nutt, Faith Nutt, Emily Seeker, Carter Williams, Colby Seeker, Austin Derkowski, Jon Wellmann, William Corn.

Declining Nesting Species in Washington County

There are a good number of nesting bird species in Washington County, but several species are in decline. Oftentimes more than not landowners clear property of all its understory and leave a scattering of trees. This provides very little nesting and foraging habitat for birds. Birds are partitioned in the canopy so as not to compete with each other for food, shelter, and nesting sites.

One of our county's declining species, the Swainson's Warbler, requires moist, shady woodlands with a dense understory and leaves on the forest floor. This warbler can be found along creeks and the Brazos River in our area. They are a highly sought-after species by birders the world over. Swainson's Warblers spend most of their lives on or near the forest floor flipping over leaves for insects. This species nests a few feet above the ground.

Another declining nesting species is the Kentucky Warbler. This species requires similar habitat to the Swainson's Warbler, but they will tolerate a little more sunlight in their habitat. They nest and forage in the mid to lower canopy. Kentuckys will be arriving in our area in mid to late April. White-eyed Vireos are found in dense yaupon thicket and can be found in association with Swainson's and Kentucky Warbler.

Chuck-will's-widow, a member of the nightjar family, is a nocturnal species that nests in our county in post oak-juniper woodlands. Chucks nest on the forest floor in the leaf litter. They call their name at dawn and dusk from early April till late June. Chuck-will's-widows and their close relative the Whip-poor-will are in serious decline over all of their nesting range due to loss of habitat.

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo is a species of the upper canopy. They forage and nest in tall oaks and pecans in our area. One of their favorite foods are tent worms. Cuckoos will perch adjacent to one of these webs and gorge on these worms to their heart's delight. This declining species is often killed by window strikes and hit by cars, as they fly low over roads.

Painted Bunting is perhaps the most beautiful bird species in North America. Sadly, they are in decline over much of their range. Painted Buntings require woodlands edges and prefer to nest in yaupon thickets. They nest in the mid-canopy and forage in mid to upper canopy. Indigo Buntings

are found in the same type of habitat, but usually near a water source.

One of the most highly underrated habitats are brushy fencelines. Fencelines with trees and shrubs provide habitat for nesting species such as Northern Bobwhite, Loggerhead Shrike, Lark Sparrow, Blue Grosbeak, and Orchard Oriole, all of which are in decline. Loggerhead Shrikes impale their victims on barb wire fences and on the thorns gum bumelia and Hercules club trees, which often grow along fencelines. Brushy fencelines also provide excellent winter habitat for kinglets and sparrows.

The melodious song of the Eastern Meadowlark can be heard in the open fields of our county. Meadowlarks prefer to place their nest near the ground in a thorny shrub or adjacent to a bull nettle, as do Wild Turkey. These type of plants are often tilled up to make way for hay meadows. I have seen the population of meadowlarks in the county really plummet since I was a child.

In a nutshell, the higher diversity of habitat on your property equals a wider variety of bird species.

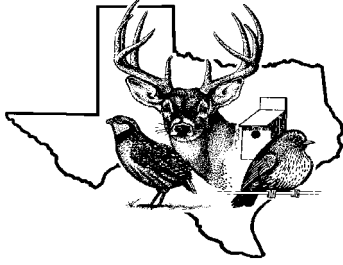
*Darrell Vollert
Chappell Hill, Texas
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On Sunday, April 26th I am leading a birding tour for the Washington County Wildlife Society. We will meet at 7:30AM at the Shell Station in Chappell Hill and bird the eastern portion of the county till around 1:00PM. It will be the peak of spring migration at this time and we should see many of the bird species I mentioned above. We should also see other vireos, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, and orioles. The rate for this tour is \$20.00 per person with a maximum of 15 participants. Those interested in attending this tour should contact me and send their payment to my mailing address at: P.O. Box 27, Chappell Hill, TX 77426.

Participants should bring binoculars, a hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, drinking water, and pack a lunch. Wear sturdy hiking shoes or boots. Participants should not wear anything white. Light green, brown, or other dark-colored clothing work best in the field to see birds.

I guide individuals and groups over much of the state. Memorial Day weekend I will have a nesting warblers tour in east Texas.

Visit my website at www.DarrellVollertNatureTours.com for more details on this tour.



Washington County Wildlife Society
1305 E. Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, Texas 77833
Telephone 979-277-6212 Fax 979-277-6223
www.wcwildlife.org

WCWS will host a **Birding Trip** with Darrell Vollert April 26, 2009—Sunday, 7:30am—1pm

The trip will coincide with the peak of spring migration for neotropical migrant birds.



The tour is limited to 15 participants at a rate of \$20 per person. We will bird various sites in the Chappell Hill area. (See Darrell's article on page 7)

Contact Darrell Vollert at 979 251-4986 or dvollert1967@yahoo.com with questions or to sign up. Additional information: www.darrellvollertnaturetours.com.