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NEW CONSERVATION EASEMENT NEAR GLEN ROSE PRESERVES PRAIRIES AND CANYONS

The Chalk Mountain area is located near Glen Rose, southwest of Fort Worth in the Cross Timbers region of Texas. But its cedar-covered limestone hills and long views are reminiscent of the Hill Country a hundred miles south, and the rolling grasslands are not unlike the Blackland Prairie east of Dallas.

A newly established NAPA preserve permanently protects 340 acres of upland prairie and canyon woodland in this scenic part of north Texas. The property is safeguarded by a conservation easement donated by Chuck Snakard, a long-time member and supporter of NAPA.

Mr. Snakard bought the property in 1994, impressed with the spectacular views and canyons. Parts of the property had been badly overgrazed, and he faced problems ranging from oak wilt to invasive weeds to removing an old Santa Fe Railroad boxcar (used as a hay shed) left in the center of the property. "I wanted a place I could work on," he says.

Mr. Snakard began controlled burns in 1998 to restore the property to help it revert to natural grassland. Now the pastures are studded with blue-tinged native bunchgrasses and clumps of wildflowers such as bluebell gentian and Indian paintbrush. He is working with Environmental Defense to encourage endangered songbirds to return to the property, and wrote specific language about these enhancement activities into the easement. To create shrub habitat for the black-capped vireo, he hopes to establish shin oaks by harvesting acorns from a nearby ranch. The golden-cheeked warbler has also been seen nearby and may use the wooded ravines along the spring-fed Panther Creek and other drainages, where hardwood trees and



Chuck Snakard's property features scenic views from the upland ridge called Chalk Mountain.

shrubs such as Texas oak, Texas ash, viburnum, plum, and Mexican-buckeye are increasing.

Chalk Mountain is located not far from one of Texas' fastest-growing rural areas. Rural subdivisions reach from Dallas-Fort Worth almost to Glen Rose. Most of Somervell County is still ranchland, but many areas are being subdivided and developed. Thanks to this easement donation, Mr. Snakard's land will keep its rural character and natural beauty.

Mr. Snakard and his wife plan to build a house which will fit the landscape, with Texas limestone and a metal roof, and to install a rainwater cistern. He also hopes to spread the word about conservation easements to other ranch owners. As he says, "a conservation easement is a great way to make sure that whatever we accomplish here will last."



Wildflowers such as bluebell gentian are common in prairies of the Chalk Mountain area.

NAPA RECEIVES GRANT FROM HOUSTON ENDOWMENT FOR PROTECTION OF RARE PLANT

More than 200 species of plants in Texas are considered threatened or endangered — and the majority are unprotected in parks or preserves. Unlike animals, plants can be preserved on smaller tracts of land, and as one of the only organizations able to protect smaller tracts of natural habitat, NAPA is looking for ways to protect threatened plant species.

The Houston Endowment, a private foundation which is one of the principal supporters of land and wildlife conservation in Texas, has awarded NAPA a grant to purchase a tract containing the rare Neches River rose-mallow, a white hibiscus which is one of the rarest species in Texas. The hibiscus is only known to grow at four locations in the wild. One of the few plants native only to East Texas, the hibiscus is limited in range and it has been picked and transplanted by trespassers. The plant also hybridizes with other members of its genus. Fortunately, efforts to grow the plant at East Texas universities have been successful, so extinction is unlikely.

The site's owner has agreed to sell the property to NAPA for a very reasonable price, and the purchase should be completed soon. NAPA hopes to work with growers to increase the plant's numbers and introduce it at other East Texas preserves.

THIRD CONSERVATION EASEMENT PRESERVES MORE OF BLANCO RIVER NARROWS

A new conservation easement donated by Nancy Symms of Austin was NAPA's first new project in 2003. Ms. Symms' property is the third tract to be conserved around the Narrows of the Blanco River, a unique landmark of the Texas Hill Country. The Narrows is a deep ravine formed by the erosion of the Blanco River through shell limestone. The canyon features deep springs, caves, and bluffs which support rare plants.

The conservation easement will allow Ms. Symms (or a future owner) to build one residence while preserving the remainder of the 50-acre property, which includes incredible views. Together with prior easements, the conserved area at the Narrows is now more than 460 acres. The generous donation of these easements creates a model for preserving the natural landscape and scenic values of unique places in the Hill Country.



View of the Blanco River from Nancy Symms' property.

**CONSERVATION EASEMENT
PROTECTS EXAMPLE OF SOUTH
TEXAS GRASSLAND**

Wildlife hunting and recreation are increasingly valuable activities on ranches in South Texas, which means good things for wildlife conservation. Unfortunately, the native grasslands and brush which are vital for wildlife have been replaced with improved grasses in many areas, and are becoming a scarce commodity.

That is definitely not the case at a portion of the Cascabel Ranch northeast of Pearsall, owned by the Stroube family of Houston. The family purchased the property for hunting and recreation, and are now making those uses permanent by placing the ranch under a conservation easement donated to NAPA.

The 200 acres covered by the easement contains native brush and grassland, seeps and springs, a tank used by waterfowl, and several types of soils and vegetation. The landscape is often colorful, with purple sage or cenizo mixing with the green leaves of guajillo and tall stands of pink pappusgrass, sideoats grama, and other multi-colored native grasses. Perhaps the most unusual feature is a pasture of native grass which covers several acres. The vegetation also includes persimmon, brasil, blackbrush, whitebrush, granjeno, prickly pear, bernardia, parralena, and other species used by wildlife. The vegetation is key to supporting high numbers of deer, quail and many other animals. Birds include white-crowned and white-throated sparrow, ladder-backed woodpecker, pyrrhuloxia, cactus wren, flycatchers, and hawks. A mountain lion was seen on the ranch six months ago. "Cascabel" means rattlesnake — an unpleasant but not uncommon resident.

This easement is a significant acquisition because it preserves native grassland in an area where most land is either cultivated or overgrown in brush. The South Texas brushland it preserves is some of the best wildlife habitat anywhere in Texas.

PRESERVE PROFILE: J. S. PEÑA BORREGA CREEK PRESERVE

Dr. Ben F. Edwards, Jr., passed away in Tyler on April 28. Ben was a biophysical scientist with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, a musician who performed in his church choir and the Tyler Big Band, and a preservationist interested in natural and cultural history of east Texas.

In 1990, Ben donated a conservation easement establishing the J. S. Peña Borrega Creek Preserve, a mature hardwood forest along Borrega Creek near Nacogdoches. NAPA Board member Anne Norvell talked with Ben last year as part of her ongoing project to compile land histories for NAPA's preserves. Ben shared with her this statement about the preserve:

"The land has a long and colorful family history. It is the southern half of a hundred acre farm purchased in 1862 by Louis Peña Chirino and Maria Gregoria Y'Barbo. After their deaths the land was divided and scattered. In the early 1940s, J.S. (Jesse) Peña, son of Louis and Gregoria Peña Chirino, was able to repossess the various divisions and subsequently divide the land among his five children. Ben Edwards inherited one-fifth of the land from his mother Celcie Edwards and purchased two fifths from his uncles Albert and Martin Penney (Peña).

"An interesting story regarding the Chirino name is related in the 2001 'Sons of the Republic of Texas Biographies.' Louis Peña Chirino (1820-1890), born of unknown parents in Mexico, is listed in Gifford White's 1830 "Citizens of Texas" as Louis Peña, a youth of 10 years aggregated with the Encarnacion Chirino family in the Nacogdoches District. According to family legend, Sr. Chirino observed Louis in the company of Indians passing through the Nacogdoches vicinity. Upon recognizing Louis to be of Spanish ancestry and apparently a captive, he purchased him from the Indians and raised him as an adop-

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ted son — hence the name Chirino attached to his name. Louis married Maria Gregoria Y'Barbo, great granddaughter of Gil Y'Barbo, in 1848 and together they had 15 children. Louis served in the Confederacy as a member of the Texas State Troops. He died in 1890 and his wife sometime after 1900...

“My grandfather, Jesse Peña, was a farmer, a woodsman, a naturalist, and, in today's term, a conservator. I am proud to honor him and my great grandparents by placing his name in the title of the preserve.”

We were fortunate to visit the preserve with Ben numerous times, most recently last year. We are deeply indebted to him for preserving his valuable forest land forever.

PRESERVE NEWS

Karen Eastman Galley, who with husband **John Galley** founded and cared for the El Coto de Los Rincones Preserve in Kerrville, passed away on May 1, 2003. Karen and John were world travelers, outdoor enthusiasts, and prominent lifelong naturalists who helped to direct the Audubon Society and the Nature Conservancy of Texas. They were exemplars of a generation that gave energy and purpose to the American conservation movement. The Galleys entrusted their house and property at Los Rincones to NAPA as part of their legacy.

Family and friends of Karen Galley met for a memorial service on June 21 and scattered the ashes of John and Karen near their beloved home at Los Rincones.

NAPA will manage the natural area following the guidelines of John and Karen. NAPA wishes to thank the Galleys' family members for their support of Karen and for their efforts helping to facilitate transition of the property to NAPA. We are also grateful, once again, to **Aubrey and Allan Duncan** for the many ways they have helped with the house and land.

MCAFEE NATURE PRESERVE: A lot of activity has taken place with the founding of a new nonprofit organization, the McAfee Nature Center, Inc., which will oversee the conversion of the preserve into a focal point for nature tourism in the Big Thicket area. **Christine Moor Sanders, Jack Whitmeyer** and **Keelin Parker** are the first officers of the organization, which plans to lease NAPA's property and use an additional 20-acre tract with a house as a Big Thicket museum. The group has hit the ground running, building a new parking lot and trails to access the preserve's beautiful beech groves and open area. The group has teamed with the Woodville ISD, whose agriculture students helped build new gates this spring. The Center will provide an outdoor classroom space for students learning natural history and forestry. As Christine says: “We hope to encourage others to incorporate an educational program at other NAPA lands to pave the way for the public to begin to recognize the need to preserve our natural heritage.” To visit the preserve, contact Heritage Village Museum at 409-283-



University of Texas-Dallas students standing over dead (hopefully) privet bushes at the Oak Cliff Preserve.

OAK CLIFF PRESERVE: In previous newsletters we have bemoaned the presence of the alien Chinese privet (*ligustrum*) at many of NAPA's preserves. Chinese privet is one of the most aggressive invasive plants in Texas and it's a serious problem at NAPA's Oak Cliff Preserve. In February, we held the first annual **Great Privet**

Pull. In spite of the 40-degree temperature, 18 volunteers showed up with shovels, trowels, saws and energy, among them members of a UT-Dallas botany class led by Dr. **Marcy Brown Marsden**. Some cut large tree-sized privets, others were on their knees pulling up solid carpets of privet seedlings, and others stacked or raked the results. By noon everyone was happy to sit down for a picnic lunch. We left in the afternoon with a great feeling of accomplishment, but discouraged over the amount of privet that was still there... we'll be back.

KENDRICK-RALSTON PRESERVE: Beginning in December, **Robb Kendrick** burned about 160 acres of his preserve; the effect on the native grasses and wildflowers this spring was dramatic. Robb reports that he also burned 40 square feet of his neighbor's property by accident — now “the greenest part of his 10 acres!”

WINTERS BAYOU: In February members of the Southeast Texas chapter of the North American Butterfly Association visited the preserve, guided by steward **James Jackson** and reported “The hike through old pine plantation, fern-strewn gully, riparian bottomland and baygall was peppered with interesting questions, intriguing answers, and exciting discoveries.” In spite of the cloudy conditions, the group found cloudless sulfurs and ten falcate orangetips (kinds of butterflies) as well as centuries-old trees and spring wildflowers.

MARYSEE PRAIRIE: For the third year, students from St. Michael's College in Vermont came to the Big Thicket to do volunteer work during spring break. The nine students spent two days at Marysee Prairie Preserve. Under the direction of **Susan Schinke**, they made great progress in removing Chinese tallow trees.

In March, **Sandy Penz**, **Sharon Reed** and **Katherine Goodbar** visited the Walker Creek, Hickory Ridge, Naconiche Creek/Grass Lake, and Banita Creek Preserves. The trees sported pale green new leaves, redbuds were blooming, springs were running, a luna moth was drying its wings, and there were spring

violets, trout lilies, bloodroot, bright yellow butternuts in abundance, and regrowth everywhere.

Chuck Snakard and **Russ Jewert**, new stewards for the Oak Cliff Preserve, made a first inspection in May. Both Chuck and Russ have donated conservation easements, and they will also be visiting each other's land. **Sally Evans** and **Ruth Hewes** made their first visit to the Palmer-Jewert Preserve in April and are eager to return.

Sandy, Sharon, and Katherine gave a presentation on land trusts and NAPA in particular to the North Texas Master Naturalists in May. **David Bezanson** gave a presentation to the La Bahia chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas in February.

Highlights of a May trip to Pope Creek Preserve include acres of lizard's tail under 80-foot old growth hardwoods, large buckeyes and a devil's walkingstick 40 feet tall. A torrential rain made walking slushy for Sharon, Sandy, Katherine, and Russ at the Glades, but we saw mushrooms of every size, shape and color.

LOU ANN GOMEZ PRESERVE: The City of West Orange has applied for a grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to install an elevated boardwalk through the marshes and woods of the Lou Ann Gomez Preserve. NAPA is very excited about the potential project, which will increase public awareness of the region's bayous and wetlands.

NAPA is looking for conservation buyers. Conservation buyers are individuals who are interested in buying scenic land and keeping part or all of the land undeveloped. Currently, a buyer is needed to purchase a 1,400-acre ranch in the western Edwards Plateau west of Rock-springs which includes spectacular canyons and native woodlands. The property is excellent for deer, quail, and other wildlife. The seller is seeking a buyer for the land who will donate a conservation easement. If you are interested in this scenic and ecologically significant property, please contact David Bezanson at (512) 804-1981 or by email at napa@texas.net.

PROTECTING OUR LAND

As more of Texas becomes urbanized and altered, it is ever more important that we continue to preserve the best of Texas' natural landscapes, including forests, wetlands, and prairies.

Please renew your membership now and consider making an added donation to help us meet the challenge of preserving more land for future generations of Texans to enjoy and appreciate.

In addition, NAPA's 64 existing preserves desperately need the time and efforts of members to maintain the land and enhance and restore habitats. Please contact **Katherine Goodbar**, stewardship director, at (214) 823-1848 or **David Bezanon** at (512) 804-1981 to get involved with NAPA's preserves in your area of Texas.

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