

Natural Area Preservation Association, Inc.
P. O. Box 162481
Austin, TX 78716-2481
www.napa-texas.org

512-804-1981

napa@texas.net

NAPA ACQUIRES "FOOTHOLD" IN UNIQUE AREA OF BIG THICKET

The Rush Creek area sounds like a Big Thicket legend: a place with bluffs a hundred feet high, natural springs and creeks as clear as glass, and tall beech and magnolia trees growing out of deep ravines that were never logged. (Almost all of East Texas was logged a century ago, except for a few small, inaccessible stands of trees.) The Rush Creek area is little-known except to local hunters and foresters. Recently, though, the watershed has changed ownership along with tens of thousands of acres of timber land in southeast Texas, and more attention has focused on Rush Creek.

NAPA has secured the first foothold in efforts to conserve this unique area. Most of the Rush Creek watershed is owned by a timber investment company, but a 156-acre inholding was owned by Dr. Barbara Goodrich of Golden, Colorado. Dr. Goodrich wanted to sell the property, but before selling the tract to Saratoga Timber Company, she donated a conservation easement to NAPA to limit logging which could mar the uniqueness of the area. The easement allows logging on the upland part of the tract but prohibits logging of the two-thirds of the property which contains rugged ravines and giant beech trees.

"The whole tract is absolutely gorgeous," says Rufus Duncan, manager of Saratoga Timber Company, the Lufkin-based partnership which has bought the property. They will allow natural regeneration of the upland after it's logged, which should result in a mixture of hardwoods and pines.

This is NAPA's first easement to allow timber harvesting, and the easement includes language to address some of the concerns expressed by NAPA's members about logging practices. The importance of this project is twofold: to encourage conservation in the Rush Creek area and to promote responsible timber harvesting which does not



Massive beech trees, never logged, and spring-fed creeks are features of the Rush Creek watershed.

Those natural features are really unique: deep ravines, almost canyons, with spring-fed creeks and ferns. The ravines are potential habitat for the yellow lady's slipper orchid, though it has not been found. The tract borders Rush Creek, a large clear stream with sand banks. Walking through the area demonstrates how different the original East Texas forests were from the "piney woods" that you see today. Though the Woodville area is part of the Big Thicket, the beech woods of the property are open and easy to walk through, not "thickets." Seeing the property can be a workout, though, because of the steep topography.

Duncan hopes that donation of the easement will inspire more conservation efforts around Rush Creek. "There needs to be a plan for the basin... Somebody needs to go in and protect the whole

RAINBOW VALLEY EASEMENT PRESERVES BOTTOMLANDS, PRAIRIES

In the late 1970s realtor Ruth Foote, a former protégé of Dallas developer Trammell Crow, helped to establish the Rainbow Valley Agricultural Cooperative — a group of landowners who collectively bought about 200 acres of high hills and open prairie land north of Denton. Foote’s vision was a cooperative for landowners who were interested in energy-efficient houses, growing their own food, and “living lightly on the land.”

More than two decades later, the vision is perhaps not completely realized — of the 13 current full-time residents of Rainbow Valley, “maybe half have good gardens,” says Jerry Langley, president of the cooperative. “We don’t sell produce at the moment, but one members sells hay.” But the community has survived and its members enjoy rural quality of life not far from fast-growing Denton. Recently the cooperative achieved something equally lasting and important by donating a conservation easement to NAPA on part of their common land.

The conservation easement is one of the most significant tracts conserved in north Texas. The core of the easement is bottomland forest in perfect condition. Even in mid-day, the bottomland stays shady under cedar elms and hackberries, but the understory is open and the trees are surrounded by tall stands of wild ryegrass. Blue mistflower and red cardinal-flower grow along the banks of Clear Creek, a major tributary of the Trinity River.

The rest of the easement contains hilltops which support rare remnants of the Fort Worth Prairie, which has been mostly converted to farms or suburbs of Dallas. Rainbow Valley contains unbroken, high-quality examples of prairie with echinacea, big bluestem, Indiangrass, and other grasses which once ruled the plains. “The wildflowers are incredible,” says Langley. The wildlife includes lots of deer, foxes, painted and indigo bunting, and coyotes; a mountain lion was seen several years ago.

“I like [the easement] because it is honorable and it has long-lasting consequences,” says Langley. “We want to try to keep the prairie grass standing.”



View of rolling prairie from the land owned by the Rainbow Valley Agricultural Cooperative.

NEW EASEMENT CONSERVES RANCH IN GRANITE COUNTRY

Four years ago, Robb Kendrick and Jeannie Ralston donated an easement to NAPA on their ranch near Blanco, a mint-condition example of Hill Country savanna. Now they have donated an easement on a ranch conserving a different landscape, the granite country of central Texas.

Kendrick says they bought the ranch from the Grote family because it had been exceptionally well-managed. “The family had enough land to rotate their cattle, and they took really good care of the place. They would put [the cattle] on for three months, then off for six, then three months on, then rest the land for a year. The family kept on top of the cedar and mesquite, so when we bought it the mesquite was new growth and we’ve kept it controlled.” There is not much juniper on the ranch (“I counted six,” Kendrick says, “and they’re history”), just live oaks and native open grasses.

The ranch’s most unique features are the granite outcrops, which occur only from Burnet to the Mason area (Enchanted Rock is the best known example) including some of the oldest rocks in Texas. One granite dome, called Spies Rock,

Continued on page 3



Granite outcrops on the Grote ranch create natural pools which could hold unusual species.

is located near the ranch. Mounds of quartz and other minerals are scattered on the ground. The rock outcrops hold water and are the only habitat of unique plants and animals. “It’s pretty amazing,” Kendrick says. “The granite is so hard — when you’re drilling and you hit the granite, you’re done. But the oak trees grow out of crevices in the bare granite.”

Jeannie Ralston agrees: “It seems so different from other places in the Hill Country. I love the way the land breaks open with the granite and there’s all the post oaks — there’s something about it that reminds me of African savanna. Our kids love it because there’s rocks to climb, and water and mud to get into.” There are dozens of natural tanks on the property formed by the granite underneath.

“The place had been so well taken care of before we found it,” says Ralston. “So we didn’t have to use our imagination to see what it could be. It was easy to fall in love with.”

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE GRANTS HELP WITH RESTORATION PROJECTS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW) makes available funding specifically for helping landowners to restore wildlife habitats — which is crucial in Texas, a state where most habitat is in degraded condition. The Service has entered into a partnership with NAPA to share the costs of restoration projects on three preserves, with the potential for partnering on other projects in the future! We are very pleased about this funding, the first federal grants NAPA has received.

PFW funding will be used to remove Chinese privet or ligustrum from NAPA’s McAfee Preserve near Woodville and replant the area in longleaf pine. NAPA will hire a contractor to grind up or uproot the privet and treat resprouting privet with herbicide, then plant nursery-grown longleaf pines, after a prescribed burn to prepare the site. If successful, the project will greatly enhance the preserve. Longleaf pines originally grew on the property but have become uncommon in East Texas. Privet is an invasive hedge plant, as serious a problem as the better-known Chinese tallow and saltcedar.

Speaking of Chinese tallows, the second PFW grant will support controlling tallow trees at Marysee Prairie, our preserve in the Big Thicket with more than 300 plant species. Volunteers have been fighting tallows at Marysee for years. Now NAPA has hired a contractor to help them with the job. (The best grants make funding available for work you’re already doing!)

The third partnership grant will give NAPA an opportunity to improve habitat at the Louise Hanes Preserve near Commerce, which was entrusted to NAPA after the owner’s death as a bird and wildlife sanctuary. With this funding, the formerly plowed open land will be reseeded with native grasses and wildflowers. NAPA will work with landowners in the area who own properties with native prairie, and the project will potentially involve students at local schools and other volunteers who will collect seeds from tall grasses and wildflowers.

NEWS and KUDOS

The spring Preserve Treks were a big success, thanks to the organizers who made them happen! On May 14, **Chuck Snakard** and **Dorothy Prengler** hosted a field trip for NAPA members and Master Naturalists to their preserve on Chalk Mountain near Glen Rose. More than 20 hikers spent the morning touring the preserve's hills and canyons, led by Chuck and botanist **Jeff Quayle**.

On May 28, more than 25 members of NAPA and the Native Plant Society of Texas (NPSoT for short) visited The Glades Preserve. **Scott Riddle**, manager of the Mill Creek Farms property which includes the Glades, spent half a day showing NPSoT and NAPA members the Glades, a beaver pond and other features of the property. NPSoT member **Sonniah Hill** helped organize the field trip, and returned again later in the month to add to the plant inventory.

NAPA members also enjoyed a trip to **Johanna Smith's** amazing Eagle Rock Ranch on Cypress Creek near Wimberley. The field trip included a briefing on development in the watershed.

Thanks to NAPA member **Lisa Stone** for her work in migrating the NAPA mailing list and donor list to a more efficient database! Also to **Walter Bezanson** for getting out the mailouts!



Landowner Chuck Snakard talks about restoring habitat at his preserve near Glen Rose during a NAPA field trip in May.

GRANT GIVEN TO NAPA TO HIRE LAND STEWARD

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) has awarded NAPA a grant toward hiring a Land Stewardship Director. The stewardship director will oversee the properties that NAPA owns and, together with our volunteers and other staff, will monitor NAPA's ever-growing number of conservation easements.

We are very grateful to NFWF for this grant which expresses the importance of land stewardship. Acquiring land is only part of "saving" land — we must also be able to take care of it, which often involves active management and restoration. The Stewardship Director will lead efforts to remove invasive species and restore natural diversity at a number of NAPA preserves, along with recruiting volunteers, reaching out to neighbors, and other needs — in short, a huge job. If you know anyone who can do the impossible, please let us know!

MARK YOUR CALENDARS...

Oct. 22: Workday at Los Rincones.

NAPA's Los Rincones Preserve at Kerrville has been chosen as a work project site for the 6th annual state meeting of the Texas Master Naturalists! **Nancy Vaughan**, MN and NAPA volunteer, and MN program coordinator **Michelle Haggerty** are organizing this field day. Activities will include building photo points for monitoring, creating exclosures to protect trees, and seeding native grasses. NAPA volunteers are welcome; call 512-804-1981 for details and directions. To register for the Master Naturalist meeting, contact Michelle Haggerty at 979-458-2034 or mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu.

Nov. 12-13: Retreat at Ivy's Wildlife Refuge.

Every spring and fall we welcome NAPA members, friends and family to the Ivy Payne Wildlife Refuge near Palestine. Please join us for camping at this scenic East Texas preserve and hikes led by NAPA trustee **Earl Matthew** and naturalist **Dr. Heinz Gaylord**. For information or to confirm, please call 512-804-1981 or contact napa@texas.net.

MORE NEWS

Rebecca Blecke has joined NAPA as an office assistant. Rebecca is working part-time while finishing a master's degree at Texas State University in public administration. She has extensive experience working with the Catawba Lands Conservancy in North Carolina as a coordinator of land acquisition and stewardship, and as an intern and volunteer for the Nature Conservancy and the Texas Land Trust Council. NAPA will benefit from the perspective which her experience brings from other organizations!

PRESERVE NEWS

We are just learning the damage that was done to some of NAPA's preserves in southeast Texas by Hurricane Rita. High winds from Rita downed many trees on our preserves, which has blocked some access roads. More information about the storm's effects will be coming soon.

ACACIA: In June, staff at Austin's Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center assisted landowner **Nancy Moore** by conducting a "hot-season burn" on 20 acres at Acacia — a summer prescribed burn intended to kill non-native pasture grasses such as King Ranch (KR) bluestem. KR bluestem is of low wildlife value and infests many ranches in central Texas. Wildflower Center ecologist and "burn boss" **Mark Simmons** revisited Acacia and reported to Nancy in September: "It appears that where the fire went, the KR was eliminated... I was presently surprised with the recovery of many native shrubs and grasses. There was very little regeneration from KR 'bunches' but as we predicted the native [grasses] are resprouting. Many other natives are coming back too, including sotol, Yucca and even lace cactus." (But not juniper!) It looks like the burn was a big success.

BRUSHY TOP RANCH: In December 2004, owner **John Byram** donated a second conservation easement covering another part of the 3,100 acre Brushy Top Ranch near Blanco. The second easement is a 512-acre area at the north end of the ranch, with rugged canyons and more than 300 feet of relief. The area contains some

of the best native grassland on the ranch, plus habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler.

BANITA CREEK RESERVE: For years the Banita Creek Reserve has been the location of the city of Nacogdoches' animal shelter. The preserve's donor, **Charlotte Baker Montgomery**, founded the animal shelter with her husband, **Roger Montgomery**, and **Winifrid Hall**. The founders expected that the shelter would be removed when a more permanent facility was built, which has finally happened. At Charlotte's request, the city has now removed the old shelter and dog runs from the preserve without removing large trees, and returned the lot to open space. Thanks to preserve steward **Kay Humphreys** for working with Nacogdoches city officials and staff to make this happen!

Jerry Baker, Charlotte's nephew, and NAPA have amended the original conservation easement to better preserve Charlotte's house. The house was built before 1900 by noted East Texas architect Dietrich Rulfs. Jerry has also approached local organizations to offer use of the house after it is willed to NAPA. We are grateful to Jerry for his work, and to trustee **Gina Donovan** for appearing in court to approve the easement for NAPA.

HIGH POINT PRAIRIE PRESERVE: NAPA's founder, **Ned Fritz**, and his wife **Genie** visited the High Point Prairie with the donor, **John Wood**, in June. They report seeing brown-eyed Susans, prairie pinks, herons, and cuckoos.

RANCHO MADERA: Owner **Jesse Wood** relocated more prairie dogs to the Rancho Madera preserve in May after fencing an area to protect them from coyotes and snakes. After a recent visit, he thinks that the majority have perished but at least 10 are established at the preserve. "They are digging in and look content," he reports. The property is receiving another contingent of 150 dogs from a colony near Midland which is about to be destroyed. Jesse has also discovered an orchid, the crested coralroot, in woods on the preserve. "It made a lot of seeds this year, and I spread them around likely spots they might like," Jesse says.

PROTECTING OUR LAND

More than **three-fourths of all Texans** now live in cities. As our state becomes ever more urbanized and altered, it is important that we continue to conserve the best of Texas' natural landscapes, including forests, wetlands, and prairies.

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

NAPA's **75** preserves desperately need the time and effort of our members to maintain the land and to enhance and restore habitats. **Please contact David Bezanson at 512-804-1981 to get involved with NAPA's preserves in your area!**

Natural Area Preservation Association
P. O. Box 162481
Austin, TX 78716-2481
(512) 804-1981
<http://www.napa-texas.org/>

MEMBERSHIP OR GIFT FORM

To: Natural Area Preservation Association, Inc.
P.O. Box 162481
Austin, Texas 78716-2481

___ Membership \$30.00

___ Special Gift \$ _____

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, Zip: _____

FOR MEMORIALS

In Honor of: _____

Address to Notify: _____

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
AUSTIN, TX
PERMIT NO. 258