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NAPA HIRES KERRY OLENICK AS STEWARDSHIP DIRECTOR

In the fall of 2005, NAPA began a search for a land stewardship director to oversee the maintenance and monitoring of NAPA's ever-growing number of preserves. After a job search lasting several months, with more than 30 applicants, we are greatly pleased to announce the hiring of Kerry Olenick as NAPA's stewardship director. Kerry joins executive director David Bezanson as NAPA's second permanent staff member.

Kerry comes to NAPA most recently from the federal Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Kerry worked at NRCS offices in the South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley as well as the Fort Hood area in Central Texas, assisting landowners with planning and implementing land management projects such as seeding, planting, burns, and brush removal. Kerry has worked extensively on ranches, including his own family properties in South Texas and the Hill Country.

A Texas native, Kerry grew up in Pleasanton, near San Antonio. He received a bachelor's degree in rangeland ecology from Texas A&M University in College Station, and completed graduate work in the master's program at Texas A&M-Kingsville.

Kerry will be based in Austin, but he is already traveling across Texas to work at NAPA's preserves. He is taking on a wide range of tasks on NAPA's preserves, from cutting juniper (cedar) out of prairie and savanna habitats to controlling invasive non-native plants. Kerry will help establish NAPA's policies for appropriate management techniques such as herbicide use and prescribed burns. Kerry has also contacted new potential donors, surveyed endangered species and visited many prospective and existing properties. "I'm happy to be out in the field, making a difference," Kerry says. "It's noble work — actually going out and making a physical difference on the land. It's really rewarding."



This giant magnolia tree on Kate Hillhouse's property survived Hurricane Rita.

EASEMENT CONSERVES TRACT OF BEECH-MAGNOLIA FOREST

When Kate Hillhouse and her husband left Houston in 1992 and built a house deep in the woods of East Texas' Big Thicket, she had been many things — public schoolteacher, mother of five children, Scout leader, music tutor, and president of the Native Plant Society of Texas. But there were still other goals: to live in a unique place where she could start a small native plant nursery. So they named the house and property "Red's chance" (Red was her nickname).

"It was my chance to do something I wanted to do," Hillhouse says. Things never turn out as expected; she gave up on the nursery after a bout with cancer sapped her energy. "But I've spent the last few years doing informal education" (including presentations on natural history to a foresters' association, garden clubs, even a Mensa chapter) "and it has been very valuable to me. I didn't know it was what I wanted to do, but I've enjoyed it."

See OLD GROWTH, next page

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is my pleasure to tell you about changes that NAPA is going through this year. I want to share the good news that we are welcoming **Kerry Olenick** as NAPA's new stewardship director. Kerry brings a big knowledge base, experience working to assist landowners, and appreciation of the Texas outdoors which makes him very well qualified for expanding NAPA's activities. We will have a great time meeting the challenges of keeping NAPA lands natural.

It is a measure of the importance of NAPA's work that the stewardship director position attracted many qualified applicants. I hope that many of the applicants for the job can find ways to join and strengthen the land conservation movement in the near future.

We are sorry to lose **Rebecca Blecke** who has worked for NAPA for the last few months. Rebecca compiled NAPA's policies of governance and broadened their scope, borrowing guidelines from other nonprofit organizations that generously shared their policies. She incorporated the Land Trust Alliance's updated *Standards and Practices* which have been adopted by land trusts across the country. The new poli-

cies will define NAPA's current operations and future goals. Adopting and following defensible policies is especially important in the wake of abuses by nonprofits, including land trusts, that have been scrutinized in the media and by Congress. An accreditation program for land trusts is being created. A Texas Land Trust Council representative, **Jennifer Lorenz**, will serve on the committee to establish the program.

The Texas Land Trust Council, of which NAPA is a member organization, is another group which is going through changes in 2006. The Council, which represents the interests of the 40-plus land trusts in Texas, has taken a big step this year by leaving Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and becoming an independent nonprofit organization.

The Preserve News section mentions a number of threats to NAPA preserves. It's easy to get discouraged by the rampant opposition to conservation in our culture and the problems that affect even NAPA's small preserves. We must not forget that many people are devoting their lives to improving land and conserving wildlife. We who enjoy and value nature are the mainstream, and we are helping to make a better future for Texas.

— David Bezanson

OLD GROWTH continued from p. 1

And she certainly found a unique place: a cathedral-like stand of massive magnolia, beech, pine and holly trees (five species of hollies), which tower over ravines drained by permanent spring-fed creeks. Based on the growth of tree rings of downed trees, Kate Hillhouse believes that pines were logged off the property in 1900 and again around 1949.

"My guess is only pine was taken," she says. The oldest oaks and magnolias are "old growth," probably older than Anglo-European settlement in Texas. Her home is nestled in the trees, within an arm span of several large trees, and her driveway meanders between them. The house stays cool in the summer — "under an 80-foot canopy, it does not get as hot," Hillhouse says.

Hurricane Rita took many trees, and changed the forest for years to come, but Hillhouse notes that there are a lot of new seedlings in the openings. A large pine fell topside down over the house, but amazingly did no serious damage.

Hillhouse has donated a conservation easement to NAPA which will preserve the property's unique beauty. Her family, including 11 grandkids, are spread out from coast to coast, but all approve of the easement and its goals. One of her grandchildren, the same age as her former students, recently visited and made a list of animals he saw on the property. "He caught a 3 1/2 foot racer [a snake], and didn't care when it bit his toe," she says. "It's important to his parents that he know a lot about the world he lives in." Places like Kate Hillhouse's forest will give future generations that opportunity.

NEW EASEMENT PROTECTS “EAST TEXAS AS IT USED TO BE”

NAPA's newest conservation easement protects the home place of Bob and Jimmie Putnam, 88 acres in the East Texas woods near Peavy Switch (a former railroad stop a few miles outside Lufkin).

“We're trying to preserve things native to the area as they are now and help keep them, so our children can enjoy them and our grandchildren,” says Bob Putnam. “We hope to set it up so youth groups can have a place to come to and learn about nature as it is and has been.”

Putnam believes, in spite of other distractions, young people recognize that experiencing nature is “a very important part of enjoying life and God's creation.” The Putnams have opened their property to Boy Scout troops for day hikes and campouts, ornithologists from local universities, and the local Audubon Society. “We want to give our kids and others the opportunity to see east Texas as it used to be,” says Putnam.

Living at the ranch, Jimmie Putnam developed her interest for birdwatching. She has documented more than 115 species, including neotropical migrants such as the rare Henslow's sparrow, and observed nesting birds. She shared her data with Texas A&M University's Texas Breeding Bird Atlas project. That research also helped get the property into wildlife management tax valuation — the first one in Angelina County. “I handed them the documentation, an inch and a half thick, and about a week later they called to let us know we qualified.”

The Putnams have copies of the property's original deed, a Spanish grant to colonial governor Antonio Gil Y'Barbo. Most of the area is timber land (the railroad that formerly ran alongside the property went to a sawmill town across the Neches River) but early owners tried cotton farming in the creek bottom. At one time there were log-frame cotton houses on the property to store cotton and where strychnine was stored to kill pests. “When we started improving the pasture we could see outlines of irriga-

tion ditches where they captured water from the springs and took it over the fields,” Putnam says. The farmhouse (which the Putnams have added on to and live in) dates to the early 20th century.

Still on the property, near the former railroad, is a concrete dipping vat used to rid cattle of ticks in the years before spraying. “The railroad right-of-way was usually fenced on both sides, so they would herd their cattle over on the right-of-way. A lot of them were probably woods cattle, kind of wild,” Putnam has learned.

In addition to the birds, the property supports beavers, coyotes, bobcats, and from time to time, mountain lions have been seen nearby. The ranch may be in the country, but the growth of Lufkin has come almost to the Putnams' gate, and the proposed Rockland Reservoir would flood the creek bottom, which has led them to get active in opposing reservoirs. “So we've set the land aside and it will be passed down undivided to our children, and it'll be here long after we're gone.”

BUY THESE BOOKS!

Two new books published by Texas A&M University Press have a strong NAPA connection. **Matt White** has worked for NAPA and others to find and restore native prairies, including our Louise Hanes Preserve. Matt's new book, *Prairie Time*, gives many arguments — scientific, aesthetic, and emotional — for saving native prairies, discusses their natural processes, and describes many prairies in north Texas.

Richard Donovan's new book, *Paddling the Wild Neches*, describes the author's canoe trips which publicized the unique beauty of the Neches River. The book is an absorbing memoir of growing up in East Texas and traveling the river, combining natural and cultural history. Richard's efforts were rewarded with the recent designation of the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge. Richard also encouraged landowners to donate land to NAPA, including **Dessie Frazier**, whose donation of the Frazier-Runnels Wildlife Preserve is mentioned in the book.

FAREWELL FROM REBECCA BLECKE

Rebecca has worked for NAPA for a few months as program manager while obtaining a master's degree. She is leaving to pursue another opportunity. We asked her to share her thoughts about NAPA and land trusts in Texas:

I am very sad to be leaving, but I have an opportunity to further my career in land conservation back home in the mountains of North Carolina that I simply can't pass up. I will be joining a colleague in the "conservation real estate" business, helping buyers to find ecologically significant and unique land.

I have been involved in the national land trust community for five years, but I was new to Texas. Thanks to NAPA's "tour of swimming holes" at the Land Trust Alliance Rally, I arrived in Austin already inspired. It has been an honor to be part of the organization that protects such beautiful places.

It is amazing how much Texas land trusts have accomplished given their limited amount of resources. I was the land protection coordinator at a North Carolina land trust with eight staff members and 75 projects over a six-county region. It was a surprise to discover that NAPA, with only one staff member until recently, protects a similar number of preserves across the entire state. Texas is unique in the large number of all-volunteer or single staff land trusts.

I believe the next step for Texas land trusts should be building capacity to fulfill perpetual monitoring and stewardship responsibilities. The catchphrase of the land trust community today is: "the most difficult work begins *after* the transaction is completed." NAPA is unique with respect to the large geographic area in which it works, and within Texas, NAPA is also unusual for its long history of conservation. The benefit of serving such a large area is the impact NAPA can have on a variety of cultures. It also allows the organization to build support and recognition throughout the state. However, it's very difficult to monitor and manage properties and to maintain support throughout small communities in such a vast state!

I encourage NAPA to get out in local communities, celebrate our successes, and ask more individuals and organizations to get involved.

NAPA's board and executive director inspire community involvement, maintain relationships with longtime supporters, and have worked magic in meeting the needs and wishes of landowners. I found NAPA to be a very strong organization, with an incredible history and drive for conservation. I would like to thank David Bezanson and board members for the opportunity to contribute to the great work of NAPA.

— Rebecca Blecke

SEND US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS!

Do you use email? If yes, please consider **sending your email address** to napa@texas.net and sign up for our "Email Blasts," additional news bulletins in between newsletters. You'll also receive notices of NAPA's spring and fall field trips and other events. **This is an easy and important way to stay connected with NAPA through the year.**

PRESERVE NEWS

LOS RINCONES: In October, the annual state meeting of the Master Naturalist (MN) Program was held at Kerrville, and one of the field trips was a workday at Los Rincones! The event was organized by MN volunteer **Nancy Vaughan** and supervised by experts including **Barron Rector**, an ecologist with Texas A&M University, **Pablo Gutierrez** of Texas Parks and Wildlife, and **Susan Sander** with the Texas Forest Service. Activities included constructing five exclosures with fencing to protect ten species of hardwood trees, cutting juniper, and plant identification. Another MN training class at Los Rincones is already scheduled for this fall!

The latest news is less exciting: the Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) is proposing a 138-kilovolt power line that would run parallel to the north or south boundary of the preserve, fragmenting the area and disrupting the viewshed of the preserve. Neighbors are working to fight some alignments of the power line.

PRESERVE NEWS continued

LOUISE HANES PRESERVE: Native seed reintroduction continues at the Louise Hanes preserve, thanks to volunteer **Emerson Adams** with the Wildlife Program at Texas A&M University-Commerce. Using a seed drill loaned from the Nature Conservancy's Clymer Meadow Preserve, Emerson planted more than 20 pounds of native seed collected by **Matt White** at a nearby prairie remnant owned by the Clayton family. The seed includes gayfeather, rattlesnake-master, and other wildflowers that grew near the Hanes preserve. This planting of about four acres is part of the work funded by the Fish and Wildlife Service Partners Program. Before the end of the year, we plan to plow up an area of exotic grass and plant gammagrass, a native of Hunt County bottomlands.

RUSSELL-FRITZ PRESERVE: Sam Houston Electric Cooperative (SHECO) plans to build a 138-kilovolt power line which would follow the entire highway frontage of the diverse conservation property owned by **George and Suzanne Russell** and **Marjorie and Kenneth Russell**. The route would cross three NAPA conservation easements and impact the property included in a state wildlife trail. In a state hearing, representatives from SHECO and PBS&J, the consulting firm that prepared the environmental impact analysis for SHECO, refused to acknowledge any of the property's unique resources. (A PBS&J representative testified that the Russell-Fritz Preserve was poor red-cockaded woodpecker habitat, but later admitted that he never actually set foot on the preserve.) Subsequently, the Public Utility Commission approved the project.

The latest round goes to the Russell family, when a San Jacinto County judge ruled that SHECO must follow the letter of its easement, which allows them to trim their right-of-way. However, SHECO continues to argue that the trim easement allows them to conduct logging in a much wider strip than what the easement stipulates.

VEDA FARRINGTON PRESERVE: The Veda Farrington Preserve features hilltop views, woods and creeks that seem miles out in the country — but they're not. The preserve's location in Lancaster, an urbanizing city near Dallas, adjacent to Interstate 35 has brought inevitable pressure from developers.

In February, NAPA board member **Polly Shields**, who serves on the city planning and zoning commission, learned of a city proposal to build a road through the preserve to service planned commercial retail development, potentially involving condemnation. A dozen Lancaster residents of all walks of life spoke eloquently at a commission hearing opposing the road and supporting the preserve (there were no supporters for the road). Local media, including a Dallas TV station, covered the story. At a meeting with NAPA representatives, city officials agreed to take the road out of their plan and negotiate a different route with NAPA in the future.

In May, NAPA representatives met with city staff and consultants for a "charrette" to plan the future of the preserve's environs. We hope if the road is built, the route will avoid native prairie areas while allowing access and enjoyment of the preserve, a scenic amenity for Lancaster.



Earl Matthew and Dr. Heinz Gaylord lead a walk at the spring retreat at Ivy's Wildlife Refuge, which featured gorgeous spring weather.

PROTECTING OUR LAND

More than 75 percent of all Texans now live in cities. As our state becomes ever more urbanized, it is crucial that we 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 **79** 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!**

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