

# Lost Pines Master Naturalist



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## **Pardon our ashes...**

The Bastrop Complex Fire was extremely disruptive to our community, our chapter and our members. This issue of the newsletter contains first-hand accounts of the fire and recovery. We will return to the normal publishing schedule for the November newsletter.

## **THE WILDFIRE—ONE STORY**

—by *Liz Pullman*

During the Labor Day fires I was able to see the burn area map for Bastrop and get a look at the general affected area and scope of the fire. I saw Judy Turner's street and sent her an e-mail asking "Where are you? Are you OK?" Soon Judy began sending regular updates to those of us who had inquired about her situation and offered support. For days she was in limbo and could not find out if the house was still standing. Finally, we received an update with the good news that the house itself had not burned.

When allowed to re-enter the property Judy found that a protective "moat" had been bulldozed around the house. It worked! There were burned and scorched trees but the house was fine. A few issues such as no water and no power prevented Judy and Fran and B'Lanna from moving back but some clean up was still possible such as clearing out all the spoiled food in the refrigerator and stocking the bird feeders.

After the water and power were turned on, Judy sent a final update to "all" and invited us to bring tools

and gloves and to assist in getting the property back to something that did not resemble a war zone. Included was an invitation for lunch!

On Saturday the 24th of September (but as Judy said "not before 9 AM") we began straggling in. Some of us are Master Naturalists, some from Audubon, and some were friends or as Judy says "kind souls". The roster plus Judy and Fran and I included Tina, Bob, Tricia, Pat, Terry, Becky, Susan, Sarah, Marian and Barbara. Shovels, wheelbarrows, lengths of rebar or



metal fence posts, loppers and clippers were distributed. Next, Judy gave a Demo and Instruction - How to Deal with Ash Pits:

First, look for circular black areas of various sizes, usually surrounded by a white circle of ash and frequently with a long straight line of ash indicating where a tree fell and burned. With a length of rebar or a fence post, one starts poking around the edge of the black hole and discovers many "tunnels" where the horizontal roots

burned. All of these must be collapsed and any remaining roots pulled and lopped. Next, insert the rebar perpendicularly down into the black hole. It can go down as far as five (Yes!! 5) feet, depending on how deep was the taproot. When the rebar is removed it needs to be checked to see if by chance it is hot to the touch meaning there is smoldering wood still at the bottom (we found none). This deep hole must be filled with sand and tamped to get sand to the bottom. Also, sand needs to be worked into the top of the hole until all is level. One of our most labor intensive jobs



was pushing wheelbarrow loads of sand from the back area and across very uneven ground out to these pits.

Next step; find the next pit and start over!

Aside from working the ash pits, we lopped scorched shrubbery—mostly Yaupon Holly, and piled the brush up for removal. One final job was clearing the impressive collection of debris off the roof of the house: leaves, pine needles, bark fragments, ashes, etc were all swept off to be taken away.

Some of us left early, some stayed a great deal longer and finished by loading the brush to be hauled away. The ash pit work was not completed but we left Judy with a couple of acres of clear and walkable land around her house. She estimates that 80% of her acreage burned with 100 to 200 trees lost. With some rain this fall, there is a possibility that some trees can put out new growth. Cross your fingers for the rain!

## From the Ashes

—Andy Butler

On September 5, I awoke in a strange bed. I was lucky to have it, thanks to the kindness of a friend. It was the first of four different beds we would sleep in over the next few weeks.

We dressed. It was easy enough, as I had just 3 T-shirts and two pair of cargo shorts to my name. Bits and pieces of information and mis-information came through TV, radio and social media. We drove back into Bastrop to the Middle School shelter, seeking information. Looking for an answer to the Big Question: did we still have a home in the Lost Pines? There were no clear answers yet. But amongst the crowd, a familiar face, that of Scott Moore, one of our LPMN members, volunteering. One of many, seeking to help

their friends and neighbors. Isn't it great to live in a small town with the spirit of Bastrop?

We were lucky. We had some warning when the smoke plume appeared, and we put a few items into our cars. But when we saw a notice on NOAA calling for evacuation, and when the smoke cloud above us began raining ash and blocking the sun, and when, finally, the power went out, we knew it was time to go. Time to leave the 6 acres along the Colorado, and the house we built 15 years ago.

During the smoke-filled days of the next week, we couldn't turn a corner without meeting friends, co-workers, or LPMN members, whose homes had also burned. It wasn't a surprise when ours was finally confirmed as destroyed. The magnitude, the number of

people affected, almost made it easier to deal with. Almost.

After we were allowed back to the rubble that had once been our home, it was the same bleak picture that so many of our members, our friends, our community faced. Nothing but ash. Blackened toothpicks of trees. And yet, a couple of days later, while sifting the rubble for whatever remnants of a former life we could find, there was a hint of green: new green leaves at the base of an otherwise blackened American Beautyberry. Even without rain. Life continues. The land will eventually recover. Our community will, as well. It will take time, work and a little rain, but recovery will come.

## Bastrop Wildfire—Up Close and Personal

—by Larry Gfeller

The Bastrop Complex wildfires hardly qualify as a financial topic for this month's presentation, but it is a relatively easy story for me to tell and apparently it harbors some degree of interest with some of you. It is not uncommon for natural disaster survivors to embellish details, either from an exaggerated perception of danger, a misunderstanding of the facts or from a desire to appear more courageous, smart or lucky than they really are. With those caveats laid down, I will describe my experiences this Labor Day weekend past.

The Bastrop fire started 6 miles Northeast of the city, somewhere around 2:00 pm on Sunday, September 4, 2011. It actually started out as two separate fires, but soon combined into one massively destructive fire. It pushed South, whipped by strong winds—residual effects of the counterclockwise movement of tropical storm Lee, which inundated much of the Southern U.S. to the East of us. Of course, most are aware that Texas is in the midst of the most severe drought since 1895, a time when Texans were living in crude cabins with no air conditioning. The tenacious drought that set the stage for the fire shows no sign of loosening its grip. This fire resulted from a confluence of factors that formed the perfect storm, which many ecologists and foresters had known was inevitable. My log home is 6 miles East of Bastrop, buried in the unique ecosystem known as The Lost Pines (they are not lost, they have simply established a genetically modified community of Loblollies ~80 miles West of where they occur as native growth). The findings of the formal investigation, released by the Texas For-



est Service, stated the cause of the fire was electrical, not human.

My wife was out of state on Sunday afternoon and for the duration of the worst of the fire. Sometime after 2:00pm, I took my two small dogs outside to do their business. What I saw was unmistakable—heavy smoke broiling over the tops of my 70ft Loblollies and I knew time was short. I'll save you the details; it was all about scurrying around, gathering what was considered important and loading it into my SUV. From the standpoint of fire prevention measures, I took the time to put out the sprinklers to the North, place ladders against the roof, leave the front door closed but unlocked and back our second

car away from the car port, into the gravel driveway. All windows were left closed. As I was loading the dogs into their crates at the rear of our SUV, a large pickup briefly turned into the driveway, saw that I was nearly ready, waived for me to follow, backed out and sped away. Other residents were rolling along Kelley Road, my only street out of the pine forest. 5 or 6 minutes had passed.

Safely out onto Highway 21 headed toward Bastrop, I pulled off the road to watch the activity through my rear view mirror, about ½ mile from my street. Emergency vehicles, fire and brush trucks were streaming into the affected area on the opposite side of the four lane highway. Evacuating residents, some with loaded horse trailers, were moving out of the area in the opposite direction. The wall of smoke transformed from a dirty grey-white to an ominous shade of black—a signal that homes were being incinerated in place. You could see the wind whipping the tops of the pines back and forth. What happened next was unforgettable: The sky behind me suddenly changed. It was mixed with a cocktail of

pitch-black smoke and occasional bright orange flames—reminiscent of freshly dropped napalm. Both sides of the highway were now filled with escaping vehicles of all types as the inferno lit up the pines along the leading edge of the road. You could hear the preheated wind roar. 100ft. flames effortlessly shot the entire distance of the four lane highway like a supercharged blowtorch, igniting the crowns of trees on the opposite side. This event abruptly dislodged all onlookers as we immediately left our stations and headed West. It now had been about another 6 minutes after pulling to the side of the road. No number of firefighters on the ground could have possibly done anything to slow or stop this fire. It was too big, too fast, too hot.

I spent the first night, of what was to eventually become the next two weeks, with friends who live in Bastrop proper. As it turned out, I (and my dogs) crashed a planned social evening with a houseful of dinner guests. Note to diary: natural disasters are how one sorts out true friends from friendly acquaintances. The generosity of this family was a Godsend. The shelters—functional as they are—are basically refuge camps, hastily thrown together with bare necessities only. I was living in what was essentially my own suite and the dogs had the run of the house. On the third day, with the fire still burning furiously, my wife received a phone call from our builder, who had mysteriously found his way onto our property. Our house was saved, he said. She called me from California with the news. As the addresses of confirmed destroyed homes were posted on the walls of the Bastrop Convention Center, ours was not on the list. At one point I counted 44 such homes on Kelley Road alone. . . . each one, totally destroyed. I didn't even know that many people lived on Kelley Road. Eight days after the fire started, I was allowed to put my own eyes on our property. It was true. Our home, the carport/garage and our second car were in near perfect condition. Our property, however, had been roasted to a

ghoulish, blackened, crunchy moonscape carpeted with ash and soot.

Wildfires have been an integral part of our region for thousands of years. In fact, early Native Americans and settlers purposely burned the land to reduce the understory, improve hunting, release valuable nutrients and rejuvenate the post-oak savannah. In modern times, Texas has gone from open wildlands to 97% privately owned. The land has been sectioned off, plowed up for farming, overgrazed for ranching, razed for urban housing projects and natural water resources have been diverted to growing population centers and burgeoning agriculture. The habitat loss has been staggering and the ecosystem has become unrecognizable from its original state in just the last

200 years. The balance of nature (of which wildfire is a major component) has become significantly upset with invasive non-native vegetation and an emphasis on fire suppression. We've been very lucky having the forest for as long as



we have. As people like me have moved to the solitude of these majestic forests, many simply carved away small spaces deep in the woods with little provision for the wildfires that Mother Nature uses to cleanse herself of these unnatural conditions. In our case, there is no doubt there was a large helping of something external—call it luck, a guardian angel, or what you will—for which our family remains eternally thankful. But there were several major additional contributing reasons why our house is still standing, and I want to share them with you now because I know the Bastrop fire is merely a wake-up call. Travis and surrounding counties are equally



vulnerable and this will happen again, perhaps on an even bigger scale.

Many people mistakenly think that log homes are firetraps. Not true. Logs are dense and do not burn

as easily as homes built of dimension lumber. Having a log home actually decreased the likelihood of fire loss. Our very first act upon moving here was to clear the Yaupon and other brush 50 ft or more from around our living space—and we keep it that way—what is known as a “soft edge” in forest lingo. We also limbed all trees around our home 7-8 feet up from the ground and kept the pine needles off our roof and out of our gutters, denying “ladder fuel” for a fire to travel to sensitive structures. This not only provides space for sunlight to reach the forest floor to encourage the growth of valuable native plants and forbes but it also creates a “defensible barrier” around us that denies wildfires the fuel they require to engulf the house. As the forest burns, when it reaches this protective space, the fire comes down out of the trees and uses what fuel is available—short grasses—that burn with much less intensity, increasing the odds the fire will go out when it reaches the concrete foundation. Propane tanks become “roman candles” when the safety valve blows from intense fire, shooting flaming gas directly into the surrounding trees and underbrush. We made sure this tank was located a safe distance from our house and also cleared a 15 ft area surrounding it of all possible fuels. Our “soil” is basically sand and sand does not burn. Several weeks before the fire, I attended a wildfire preparedness seminar and invited a fire inspection of our property. This resulted in removal of random fuels from around our homesite, the addition of hose splitters (turning four water outlets into eight) and the protection of our propane tank already mentioned.

Some potentially important things I did not do that may be helpful to others include leaving an intact hose inside the house before I evacuated (many of my outside hoses and sprinklers burned), turning off all

gas pilot lights and shutting off the air conditioning system. I cannot emphasize how important leaving hoses and ladders for firefighters is. In rural areas, firefighters use brush trucks (3/4 ton trucks that carry a renewable water supply with internal hoses) to get into remote locations. Having working hoses and quick access to roofs and second story rooms can save costly trips for firefighters to restock their water supplies—they can use what is already there. Entry roads need to be clear of overhanging branches, gates need to be unlocked and addresses need to be clearly visible on mailboxes along improved roads. Always leave the doors and windows closed, but unlocked, so firefighters can get inside quickly. In our case, an elite



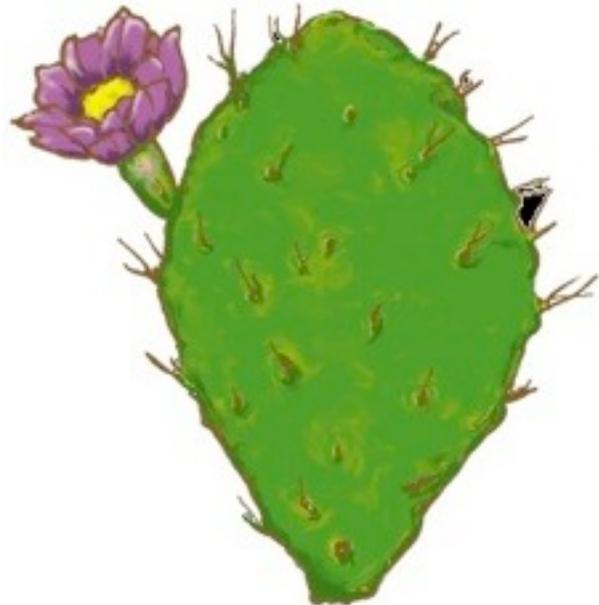
group known as Task Force One came onto the property 4 days after the fire to rake any remaining fuel away from the house foundation, put out hot spots (which were numerous), and assess damage. With a finger, this group had written out the following message in the accumulated soot on our abandoned car’s windshield, “TF1, 1630 (four-thirty, civilian time), 9/8/11, God Bless.” Later, as I was inside the home cleaning out the rancid refrigerator, a representative of the U.S. Forest Service came to the door, checking on me and passing on valuable information about the hazards of a burned forest. He was from Mississippi. All of these heroes are appreciated beyond words.

As this is being written, my family is staying in an extended stay hotel in Austin. Water service at our home has already been restored. We are awaiting replacement of the junction box to our underground electrical system, so that power can be restored. Once that is done, a professional disaster relief cleaning

team will descend on our home and clean it well beyond Martha Stewart standards. This will include removing, cleaning and disinfecting light bulbs, carpets, clothing, interior surfaces, furniture, appliances—the works. The outside will be powerwashed and wiped down. Screens will be removed and cleaned, windows and skylights thoroughly cleaned, the roof washed down. Our builder will replace the railing on our front porch, which burned through on a small portion. I will keep our Texas flag in its holder as a reminder of how well everything survived. (the flag has burn holes from flying embers, but was waving defiantly in the breeze when I first returned). As time permits, I will be busy with a chainsaw, cutting up large oaks that have toppled to the ground and working with debris removal specialists and the Texas Forest Service to identify other trees that need to be felled and removed. We have five acres. This is going to be a long-term recovery for our property, but we will take our time and do it right to protect against the effects of erosion and rebuild the numerous benches and structures that were consumed by the conflagration, including our 50 foot dog run. By the time you read this, we should be back in our home and operating normally. We are so fortunate!

As you all know by now, this was the biggest wildfire in the recorded history of central Texas, and perhaps the whole state. 34,000 acres were burned and 1,500 families were rendered homeless. We were indeed fortunate that the loss of life was extremely small. The resources made available to fight this fire were mind-boggling and the outpouring of support from surrounding communities—financial, material goods and services and moral support—was overwhelming. I appreciate all the comforting comments from you, our clients, and your expression of concern. Know this: the Gfellers are safe and in great shape—it's the thousands of our neighbors who didn't fare so well. I counted only 8 homes standing on Kelley Road. I know from talking with a number of victims that your immediate response and support is genuinely appreciated and was personally felt. It is, of course, too early to know the full extent of the environmental damage

but I have seen enough to know it will be huge. The fire rampaged over some of the most sensitive parts of the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer system, which provides drinking water for the Bastrop area. The largest unfragmented tracts of the approximately 100,000 acres of pine forests were located in Buescher and Bastrop state parks, and 98% of Bastrop state park was destroyed. We are not moving. Many undoubtedly will. But Bastrop is already on the mend. From my discussions, people are not feeling sorry for themselves, they are not looking for handouts. . . .they are dedicated to rebuilding their lives and this tremendous natural resource that has been scarred. Most immediately, I will be volunteering with the Texas Forest Service to help assess damage and assist surviving landowners to make their forest areas safe again. Later, I will lead weekend hikes through Bastrop state park, helping interpret the fire to those of the interested public. The good news is that, while the wildfires were bad for people and wildlife, it will rejuvenate the forests the way it has for thousands of years. I just hope I live long enough to see it come back. The bad news is that this will happen again; please take the time to assess your own situations to be as prepared as you can; it could happen where you live.



## How much is an ecosystem worth?

—Andy Butler

Like many things in life, it's hard to value an ecosystem until it's gone. Indeed, you can't truly put a monetary value on the loss of a huge swath of the Lost Pines ecosystem due to the Bastrop Complex Fire. We've heard that insurance claims for lost property in the area are in the ball park of \$250 million. Unfortunately, the trees, shrubs and critters were not so well insured.

How do you even go about restoring over 6000 acres of scorched earth in Bastrop State Park? Quoting Lost Pines Complex Manager Todd McClanahan, "Probably the hardest part of this recovery effort is slowing people down. This will be a very long process and we must be good stewards and restore this forest to its most natural state. We cannot do this by just haphazardly planting various types of trees and grasses. Just because something is native to Texas or Central Texas does not mean that it is appropriate for the Lost Pines."

No doubt there will be ample opportunity for members of the Lost Pines Chapter to assist in the recovery via volunteering. As a Chapter, we will be in contact with park personnel, including Katie Rainey and Todd, both to help the restoration efforts, and to assist visitors to the park in understanding the cycle of fire and regrowth

through interpretive programs. If you have specific skills to contribute, Katie is keeping a database with volunteer and service offers. To be added to this database, please email her at [katie.raney@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:katie.raney@tpwd.state.tx.us). When the time comes, she will put out a call for volunteers far and wide—you will be able to help your favorite state park.

The cost of restoring an ecosystem: it will be huge. The value of restoring the Lost Pines will be immeasurable for our community, and for each of us. We all know how tight the state budget is. If you can help financially, a restoration fund for Bastrop State Park is being handled through the Friends of the Lost Pines Parks. Recently, Judi Hoover, with the Bastrop Film Commission, presented the Friends with a check from the Austin 'Bernie' film premiere, which Richard Linklater, the director, Ginger Sledge, the producer, and Jack Black, one of the stars, used to raise funds for fire relief for various groups. Matthew McConaughey was not able to be there, but had donated \$25,000 to get the fund going. This contribution was for \$45,000!!! If you would like to make your own donation, of any size, you can send a check to:

Friends of the Lost Pines State Parks  
P.O. Box 1714  
Bastrop, Texas 78602

Make the check out to "Friends of the Lost Pines State Parks", and note that it is for "restoration". Note that the Friends is a 501-3(c) organization, and 100% of these contributions will go towards restoration. Alternatively, you can make a contribution by credit card or Paypal via the Friends' website: <http://www.friendsoflostpines.org/>. And if you're not already a member of the Friends, you might consider joining. It's a great advocate for both Bastrop and Buescher State Parks.

In addition, as part of the Bastrop County's recovery, an ecosystem recovery plan is being developed by the Bastrop County Lost Pines Habitat Conservation Plan, administered by LPMN Chapter member Roxanne Hernandez. The county is accepting donations to assist with the recovery of the Lost Pines ecosystem. To donate, make checks payable to Bastrop County and send them to Lost Pines Habitat Conservation, Attn: Resource Recovery, 901 Pecan Street, Bastrop, TX 78602.





## President's column

What a lot has happened since I wrote the President's Column for September! As we were anticipating cooler weather, we had no idea our community would be assaulted by a firestorm of epic proportions. Our deepest

condolences go out to those of you who have lost homes and/or property. Hopefully, most folks have at least secured a place to live and are in the process of rebuilding their lives. The volunteer effort from all over the state has been staggering, and is so gratifying to witness. We anticipate that support will continue for a while as the community recovers.

As naturalists, we see not only the devastating human impact of the fires, but also the destruction of acres and acres of the ecosystem we love. Bastrop State Park is a notable example; our monthly interpretive hikes have been discontinued, but TPWD is already exploring the possibilities of developing public programs to reveal the recovery of the land and the habitat. We as Master Naturalists will eventually be called on to help facilitate these programs.

Our fellow Master Naturalist chapters in the Capital area, along with Native Plant Society members, Master Gardeners, Wildflower Center mentors, and others are developing a program called Healing Hands Healing Lands. Volunteers will use donations to procure materials and native seeds for creating seed balls. The seedball kits will be distributed to community non-profit groups, including scouts and schools, who will assemble the seed balls. These will then be distributed to groups like ours in areas affected by the fires, who will be responsible for getting the seedballs to landowners and public areas. At last report, they expect to have between 125 and 140 thousand seed-

balls in paper bags to be given out. This will happen in November and/or December. So there will be a huge need for volunteers from our chapter to help distribute these gifts to begin restoring the land.

Meanwhile, many of our regular fall activities have resumed, and volunteers are always needed. Paulette Boudreaux has agreed to lead the committee to plan and facilitate a training class in early 2012. Contact Paulette at [pboudreaux@eccwireless.net](mailto:pboudreaux@eccwireless.net) to help. The Lockhart Fifth Grade Outdoor Science classes are starting up again this month; if you enjoy working with kids' groups in an outdoor setting, contact park interpreter Josh Oyer at [Josh.Oyer@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:Josh.Oyer@tpwd.state.tx.us). The classes are held on four separate Fridays from 8:00 to 12:30. Thursday morning classes for home schoolers at the Colorado River Refuge have resumed this month. We can always use more help; Susan Crone ([smcrone48@gmail.com](mailto:smcrone48@gmail.com)) is the contact person for this activity.

The Colorado River Refuge crew is hard at work extending trails and building bridges. They meet on Wednesdays at 9:00. If you'd like to join them, contact Dale Morrison at 629-3345. Dale would like to schedule two work days later this fall to tackle some of the more labor-intensive tasks.

Our October meeting, to be held at Red Rock Community Center, features Matt Warlock Turner, author of *The Amazing Plants of Texas*. We'll meet on October 17 at 6:30 pm. In November, Rob Schmidt of the A. E. Ward Fish Hatchery in San Marcos will present the program, to be followed by a field trip to the hatchery on December 3.

Thanks to all of you for your commitment and dedication to the mission of our organization. I hope to see some of you at the state meeting later this month!

—*Louise Ridlon*

## Volunteer Activities

**Colorado River Refuge Workgroup**—If you like making a direct impact on improving the environment for boating, picnicking, fishing, hiking and enjoyment of the great outdoors, this will be for you. Pines and Prairies Land Trust (PPLT) owns a beautiful stretch of land along the Colorado River with contiguous property and depends on LPMN volunteers to help improve/maintain it. This is where the Home School Nature Studies sponsored by PPLT are conducted, and there is no terrain like it in Texas available to the public for free. Usage and popularity are growing as the area develops and word spreads of the breathtaking natural beauty found there. We are looking for LPMN volunteers who have interests in identification of flora and fauna; trail layout, building & maintenance; sign-making & illustration; landscaping with native plants; wetlands ecology; or just simply helping cement the relationship between man and nature. This is gratifying work, as there are no government restrictions and results are immediate and obvious. We work every Wednesday morning (except during July & August) from 9:00 o'clock till noon, so if you need volunteer hours, this can fix you up in no time. Other dates/times may be arranged, depending on the project. If interested, contact Dale Morrison ([angie.morrison@studiosdallas.com](mailto:angie.morrison@studiosdallas.com), 512-629-3345), Jim Estes ([jestes@ionet.net](mailto:jestes@ionet.net), 512-620-0322) or Robert Vaughn ([vaughnrobertj@gmail.com](mailto:vaughnrobertj@gmail.com), 512-237-1148) for details.

**Colorado River Monitoring**—First Saturday of each month, 8 AM. Contact Claude Morris ([mailto:cgmorris@flash.net](mailto:mailto:cgmorris@flash.net)) to participate or for more information call Kevin at 972-1960. You must have your own canoe or kayak! For more information about the project, go to: <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/water/downloads/coloradofinal2.pdf>

**Outreach Booth Volunteer**—Motivated individuals have a wonderful opportunity to meet people, discuss the Master Naturalist program, and the personal satisfaction gained by being a member. Explain the many and varied volunteer projects and the ways

they support conservation, education, and recreation in our communities. Demonstrate the chapter's rainfall absorption simulator and discuss the importance of proper land cover in water conservation. Discuss the CoCoRaHS program and its benefits to science, the public, and to the individual volunteer. No previous experience is necessary. Training is available. For more information and to volunteer contact Jim Estes at [jestes@ionet.net](mailto:jestes@ionet.net).

**McKinney Roughs Nature Survey**—Kathy McAleese is coordinating a long-term project to survey trails through the burned-out areas of McKinney Roughs. Plans call for at least two surveys per month, one during the week and one on a weekend. Actual days and times will vary based on the weather and Kathy's schedule. Please contact her at (512) 718-1313 or [kmcaleese@austin.rr.com](mailto:kmcaleese@austin.rr.com) if you are interested in leading or participating in either weekday or weekend surveys, or both.

## Advanced Training

**Jacob's Well Field Trip**—Jacob's Well is a highly significant artesian spring that surges up at the rate of thousands of gallons per minute from one of the longest caves in Texas. The spring, located near Wimberly, Texas, is the headwater of Cypress Creek that flows through Wimberly, the Blanco River, recharges the Edwards Aquifer and finally replenishes Aransas Bay estuaries. We will hear the history of the spring as a sacred place to many people for 10,000 years and home to a rich and diverse ecosystem. We will also learn how that ecosystem is being restored from overdevelopment and the efforts to keep the springs flowing in the face of draw-down of the aquifer. Videos taken by divers show some of the 5500-ft. long underwater cave. The tour will take us on a discovery trek through the fragile and highly diverse hill country terrain and to the well. Our group tour will be on **Saturday October 29**. The tour is but donations are always welcome. Directions to follow. If you haven't already signed-up, email Walt at [walt.elson@gmail.com](mailto:walt.elson@gmail.com).

**AE Wood Fish Hatchery tour**—Saturday, December 3. Tour the Hatchery in San Marcos. Robert Schmidt, manager, will present a ~2hr program on Ichthyology, discussing specifics of common Texas fresh water fish, including preservation and management of native species. For information, contact Rik Martinez ([martinez\\_rik@hotmail.com](mailto:martinez_rik@hotmail.com)).

**Wildfire Preparedness for Homeowners**—Saturday, Nov. 5, 3N1 Fire Station, 142 High St., Rosanky. Learn how to assess the wildfire risk on your prop-

erty; how to reduce that risk; what on-going mitigation activities are needed in future seasons; how to prepare for any disaster; and what to expect if you have to evacuate. For information or to register, contact Michal Hubbard at 512-517-1416 or E-mail [michal\\_firecap@yahoo.com](mailto:michal_firecap@yahoo.com).

## Buescher Volunteers needed

—Katie Raney

Enjoy the Milky Way and (almost) winter constellations at Buescher State Park on **November 19**. I am looking for volunteers for our semi-annual star party. This is a causal event where visitors and campers join us to spend some time under the clear night sky. I could use folks in the following areas:

- Greeting: greet everyone, give out star charts, help visitors with red plastic wrap on their flashlights, general support. No astronomy knowledge necessary!
- Sky Guide: Do you have a telescope or know something about the stars above? I will have a couple of green laser pointers but currently do not have a working telescope. Bring yours and let us enjoy it!

This event will take place on Saturday, November 19 from

6:30pm-9pm. Plan to arrive by 6pm. Please email me if you are interested in helping out: [katie.raney@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:katie.raney@tpwd.state.tx.us) or give me a call at 512-718-0211.



I also need volunteers to lead a hike at Buescher on **Nov. 5** for a group of girl scouts (about 24, with parents). They are flexible on the time of day, and I expect it to be about an hour commitment. The hiking trail at Buescher is pretty good for a hike – starting at the trailhead and going to the gas line, then back, is about a mile. There are great trees, stump holes, a couple of hills and LOTS of wildlife activity (tracks, scat, nests, etc.). Please email or call me if you are interested in helping out: [katie.raney@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:katie.raney@tpwd.state.tx.us).

## Colorado River Refuge Workday



Dale Morrison has a number of projects lined up for a workday at Colorado River Refuge on **November 5**. One project involves extending the Dragonfly Trail. Dale also has seeds for the wetland area, and needs a group to plant them. There are funds for purchasing trees and plants for that area, also, if anyone would like to research this and do some planting there. Runoff water will be diverted to the wetland area by a new system now in place. The area just needs to be raked, seeded, and erosion netting placed over it. To help, contact Louise ([fridlon@hotmail.com](mailto:fridlon@hotmail.com)), or Dale at (512) 629-3345.



Advanced Training field trip to Natural Bridges Cavern and Bracken Cave. Back row Craig Stacup, Walt Elson, Anna Stalcup, Bob Crone, Rick Martinez, Jim Estes, Miriam Hall, Muriel & Pony Lem, Young boy in front of Walt is Scott Stalcup, Front row Mary Del Martinez, Louise Ridlon, Susan Crone and Tammy Vickery.

**Surviving pins!**



## Lost Pines Master Naturalist Monthly Meeting Schedule

**November 21, 2011.** 6:30 - 9:00 pm. Lockhart State Park. Rob Schmidt, Manager of the A.E. Wood fish hatchery in San Marcos will be the speaker.

**December 19, 2011.** 6:30 - 9:00 pm. McKinney Roughs Dining Hall. Chapter Annual Meeting, election of officers and holiday party.

## Newsletter Deadline

Deadline for the next issue is November 4, 2011. We welcome relevant contributions, photos, announcements, or other material relating to the mission of the Texas Master Naturalist program, particularly those pertaining to our local area. Please send information to Jeannie Jessup: [magicgenie@gmail.com](mailto:magicgenie@gmail.com). PLEASE send text either in an email or in doc format. I cannot open any other form! Pictures should be sent as attachments of jpegs as big as you can send them. Please do not embed images in the email. Doing so greatly helps in the newsletter creation! Thank you!

## STATE PROGRAM CONTACTS

Website: <http://txmn.org/>

State Coordinator: Michelle Haggerty, [mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu](mailto:mhaggerty@wfscgate.tamu.edu); (979) 458-2034.

The Texas Master Naturalist program is sponsored by the Texas AgriLife Extension Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

## SPONSOR CONTACTS

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Bastrop Co. Extension Office: Rachel Bauer, CEAAG/NR; [Bastroptx@tamu.edu](mailto:Bastroptx@tamu.edu); (512) 581-7186.

Bastrop/Caldwell Co. TPWD Wildlife Biologist: Meredith Longoria, 804 Pecan, Bastrop, [Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:Meredith.Longoria@tpwd.state.tx.us); (512) 332-7280.



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