

**PINEY WOOD LAKES CHAPTER**

The Piney Wood Lakes Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalist has been busy in the counties surrounding Lake Livingston. They are a 100% volunteer organization and a 501 (c) (3).  The Texas Master Naturalists are sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension.  Under the guidance of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Inland Fisheries Division’s, Mark Webb and the Trinity River Authority’s, Mark Waters, the Master Naturalist have been given permission to plant non-invasive native aquatic grass into the lake’s shoreline.

The official title for the project is “Lake Livingston Reservoir Fisheries and Riparian Habitat Enhancement Project”. Tom McDonough and Mark Webb started planning this project in the Spring of 2013. When you start a project of this size and scope, it does not take long to figure out you will need a lot of help on a lake covering 85,000+ acres. The first line of business was how to grow the grass in sufficient quantities and in an area large enough to hold the tanks. The Chapter’s goal has always been to plant 10,000+ plants per year into the lake, and to do that over the next 10 years. Resources, funding and logistics are key to the success of this project.

***What Happened?***

**Lake Livingston has traditionally been an exceptional Largemouth Bass fishery and a haven for ducks, wading birds, and other wildlife. The lake was completed in 1971. As the lake has aged, many acres of aquatic plants have vanished, and the quality of standing timber has greatly diminished. These issues, coupled with turbidity, have greatly hurt the shallow water habitat. The good news is we can help restore habitat for fish and wildlife populations resulting in better Bass fishing and improved water quality! It will also help the surrounding community economies!**

Our first problem is how and where to grow the plants. These plants are started in

4‘W X 16’L X 2’H tanks. The state donated three tanks, which are installed at Tom’s home. The additional 10 to 20 tanks required to get production started need a home. This is where Dr. Darrell Myers of the Livingston ISD came to the rescue. He told Tom that he wanted his students to build, grow, maintain and transplant the plants into the lake. He also suggested we should contact other area school districts. We now have nine ISD’s in three counties to grow, care for and transplant American Water Willow into the lake.

The next problem is funding for this project, and Mark Webb told Tom and Susan Tullos, PWLCTMN President, about the ***Friends of Reservoirs*** and their funding grants. Tom and Susan worked many long hours/days in developing a grant proposal to the Reservoir Fish Habitat Partnership “RFHP” and developing “Partners” for support of this project. In mid-September the final RFHP grant proposal was submitted, and in December, we were told we had won a $20,000 grant. So now we have an approved plan, a home for the tanks and a grant (with monies to come later).

Tom built a team of four Master Naturalists to handle the various tasks set forth in the grant. He serves as “Project Director” and has responsibilities for partnering, budgeting, solicitation, donations and over all project coordination. Jim Meyer is the “Project Manager” with similar responsibilities to Tom’s, but has the lead in Logistics. Susan Moran is the “Plant Propagation Consultant”, and has responsibility for plants, propagation thru splitting and transplanting, and associated training. Both Susan and Tom are also Master Gardeners. Don Keith is our “Education Consultant” to the teachers to ensure they have the material they need for classroom, field instruction and observation. A significant amount of time and funding is being set aside for student education and material.

Currently, the major focus is now on fundraising. With the assistance of the Polk County Chamber of Commerce, Sydney Murphy and others, we are in search of corporate sponsor(s) for this project. We have hit a “speed bump”, as Tom refers to it. Winning a grant does not necessarily mean “the check is in the mail”. We are learning the hard way, and we are in ***desperate need of a corporate sponsor(s)*** to get us 8 to 10 tanks by the end of March. What we are now being told is the grant money will most likely not be available until the end of May.

The American Water Willow plant has been selected as the grass most suitable for Lake Livingston. This grass has a growing season from March until first frost (late November – mid December time frame).  This delay in grant funding means the funding will probably come when school is out, so if we have the funds for the new school year (early September), the tanks will not be operational until early October, and the first frost is just around the corner.  We will lose 2014 and most of 2015 before we can plant any plants into the Lake. If we have tanks by the end of March, we will be able to plant Water Willow this Fall and then 5000+ plants two to three times a year from then on.

If you would like to donate to our project or inquire about being a “*Corporate Sponsor*”, please contact Tom McDonough at (832) 236-0723 or Jim Meyer at (713) 828-4660. ***We are bringing Lake Livingston “Back to Life”!***

***THE SCHOOL DISTRICTS THAT HAVE SIGNED OR HAVE INDICATED THEY WILL PARTICIPATE ARE***:

* Livingston ISD
* Goodrich ISD
* Shepherd ISD
* Coldspring-Oakhurst ISD
* Groveton ISD
* Corrigan-Camden ISD
* Leggett ISD,
* Onalaska ISD
* Big Sandy ISD

**ADVISORS** & PARTNERS:

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| **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department** |
| **Piney Wood Lakes Chapter Texas Master Naturalist**  **Livingston-Polk County Chamber of Commerce** |
| **Trinity River Authority** |
| **Coldspring/San Jacinto County Chamber of Commerce** |
| **Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership** |
| **Trinity Waters**  **San Jacinto Master Gardeners** |
| **San Jacinto Tourism Council** |
| **Coldspring Garden Club** |
| **Polk County Hookers** |
| **Onalaska Bass Club** |
| **Texas Association of Bass Clubs** |
| **Texas Black Bass Unlimited**  **Texas State Bass Tournament** |
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