



Rolling Plains Chapter NEWSLETTER

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<http://txmn.org/rollingplains>

March 2022

The Rolling Plains Chapter partners with River Bend Nature Center and Wild Bird Rescue, Inc. in Wichita Falls; Lake Arrowhead State Park in Clay County; Copper Breaks State Park in Hardeman Count, Whiteside Museum of Natural History in Seymour; and Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus in Crowell. Our Chapter covers Archer, Baylor, Clay, Foard, Hardeman, Jack, Montague, Wichita, Wilbarger, and Young Counties.

MARCH 1: Rolling Plains Chapter Meeting - 7:00pm at MSU's Bolin Science Hall, room 209. If you would prefer to attend via Zoom, watch for the link to the meeting in your email. Either way, I hope you will join us.

The program: Larry Snyder with a report on the Quail Project and Richard Brown will have a presentation on Astronomy.

MARCH 3: Spring Training Classes begin at the Bolin Science Hall Room 213, from 7:00pm to 9:00pm.

AT MARCH 3: Biodiversity Center's seminar with Dr. Harry Greene at 2:00pm. **Talk title: Rewilding the Earth, Rewilding Our Lives** About the talk: "What does 'wild' mean, and how can we have a wild future on an Earth



I don't know about you, but I feel like our Chapter is a hive of busy bees! So many things are going on it's hard to keep up with it all. Thankfully, we have Debra Halter on the website calendar, and Paula Savage putting out our newsletter so we can all stay up-to-date. There's something for everybody to do this spring.

With luck, we will kick off another Spring Training at 7:00 pm on Thursday, March 3rd. The Training Committee has worked hard to get an exciting schedule together for the trainees this year and we may even have a new Archaeology Advanced Training opportunity with the class (more on that at a later date). As always, you are welcome to come to any or all of the training classes or field trips. And, while you may not get training or volunteer hours, you will get the benefit of refreshing your past training, making new friends and inspiring the new trainees. Who knows? The trainees may even inspire you!

By the time you read this, the snow and ice will be melted and the Home & Garden Show will be over. I would like to thank everyone who volunteered their time to work at the show, in the booth or on the hikes. I am very excited to see how the hikes went over this year. I also hope you got to visit with the Featured Artist, our own Paula Savage, and be amazed at her art and photography.

The March meeting will again be hybrid. We will meet in person at 7:00 PM in Bolin Science Hall, Room 209 at Midwestern State University and we also on Zoom at the same time. (Watch for a link in your email.) Our programs will be Larry Snyder with a report on the Quail Project and Richard Brown will have a presentation on Astronomy.

I hope you have been able to get out and enjoy some of our spring weather between the snow and ice storms. See you soon!—*Laura*

Spring Training Schedule for March 7:00-9:00pm Bolin 213

March 3—Welcome: Program Orientation statewide program mission, local program goal Texas Master Naturalist program

March 10—Ornithology, bird watching and conservation

March 24—Fish Biology

March 31—Overview of local geology and soils, stratigraphy, lithologies, fossils and minerals and geologic features of North Texas

evermore dominated by people? I'll propose some answers to these questions by mixing some key concepts from environmental philosophy with natural history—especially of dangerous snakes, humans past and present, and Longhorns.”
Join Zoom Meeting
<https://utexas.zoom.us/j/95575630319>

VT MARCH 5: *Plum Lake - Kid Fishing Rodeo*, 10:00 - 12:00

VT MARCH 6: *Clean Up at Wild Bird Rescue*, 2:00 - 4:00

AT MARCH 9: *Saving Our Night Sky—FREE WEBINAR* at 7pm Central Time Since 1988, the International Dark Sky Association, at www.darksky.org, has been the global leader on artificial outdoor light pollution, its consequences and how to save our night sky. The IDA has a presence in more than 60 counties. It has almost 500 delegates globally. Currently, there are more than 170 IDA certified dark sky places. <https://sagmoraine.org/save-our-night-sky/> This was brought to our attention by Becky Trammell - Thanks, Becky!

VT MARCH 12: *Lake Arrowhead State Park!*

A Prescription for Fire – Abiotic Necessity of the Prairie

text and photos by Lynn Seman

At the end of January, I was able to attend the Prescribed Fire School at Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus conducted by Keith Blair of Red Buffalo, LLC. Keith has been a “Burn Boss” for over 30 years and



Buring a black line.

has overseen prescribed fires all over Texas from Blue Mountain Peak Ranch in Central, TX to his home range around Lubbock, TX. In fact, he conducted the prescribed fire in February of 2021 at the Comanche Springs Astronomy Campus which I was able to witness. Growing up in the Texas Panhandle, it didn't take long to find out that I “knew someone that he also knew” which happens quite a bit with Panhandle folks.

The purpose of the workshop was to train participants in understanding of fire and how to use fire in a safe manner to accomplish certain habitat management objectives in Texas (which explains why the room was filled with mostly landowners wanting to know more about how to make improvements for their ranch property). It seems that insurance companies require this if they plan to burn on their property and most participants were hoping to successfully



Mike with the Prescribed Fire vehicle.

complete and pass the final exam on day four. As a mere landowner of less than a quarter acre of city land in Burkburnett, I did not intend on taking the exam, but only wanted to take the course for continuing education

and my own personal continuing education!

To start off, I learned that historically in the Rolling Plains about 4.1 million acres of land burned each year by natural causes, mainly



Demonstrating the drip torch.

lightning strikes. Eventually, cowboys in the early Texas days learned to burn “black lines” around the ranch land for protection from these natural fires. In the High Plains to Oklahoma, historical natural fires would happen in November. This would cause a “mosaic” of burned areas. For our area, March with its seasonal “lightning filled” thunderstorms seems to be the most abundant for fires while South Texas had more of a summertime fire threat. Civilization, urbanization, and development brought a halt to those natural fires for fear of losing personal property and homes. Therefore, to keep our native grasslands managed,

You can start off by helping with the *BIRD OUTING at 8:00am* - meet at the dump station at the campground area.

At *2:00pm*, let's all get out to the park and help with the *TRASH PICK* up on the trail. The recent prescribed burn has opened up the area so that the trash is much easier to find and see on the trails! Ranger L will be there to haul off whatever trash we can pick up. We need to bring our "grabbers" to help with the trash pick up, but the park will have the trash bags for us.

Then at *8:30pm* that evening, we can join Ranger L for a *NIGHT HIKE* on North Onion Creek trail. Meet at the Horn Tunnel.

VT MARCH 19: *River Bend Nature Center at 1:00pm until 2:00pm.*

This will be a Public Outreach program in which we will have educational stations set up for families to participate in. The subject will be about plants.

We need someone who will speak for 10 to 15 minutes on the importance of native plants. We need someone to help with a few activities that are come and go types such as helping them plant a native

prescribed fire has become a necessity. Note that I said, "prescribed fire", not "controlled fire". Keith made it clear that a "controlled fire" is when someone burns some trash in a trash can with a lid (this is sometimes mistakenly used when someone is talking about "prescribed fire").

Evidently, many ranchers fight the battle of an over abundance of mesquite and prickly pear. During this workshop, I learned one way to keep mesquite down, is to burn it before the mesquite seedlings get to be 7 years old and continue every 7 years. Once a mesquite gets to be 7 or older, it is difficult to control it with fire. One question that arose was "when can you return cattle to an area that is burned?" According to Keith, if you want to control the prickly pear population, you should graze cattle immediately. The fire burns the spines and if there is still some green prickly pear, the



Keith measuring the LFM



Keith Blair getting a sample of juniper for LFM test.

cattle will help by eating the rest that the fire did not take! He also said that curious cows seem to be drawn to the smoke of fire so you must be careful, or they will head there anyway! For other

plants though, you should wait until there are at least around 5 leaves on the plant before any grazing occurs.

I learned that soils are positively affected by fire. It helps to release nutrients back into the soil and raises the pH of the soil. The nitrogen that is initially lost from the fire is recovered and exceeded by symbiotic nitrogen fixation after the fire. Some say that fire might allow for more erosion and runoff, but if the grass roots are established, this is not the case. Even though fires can temporarily displace wildlife, sometimes it is only for half a minute!

We looked over and learned about the safety equipment used for prescribed fires. Being the "Burn Boss" ensues much responsibility. You must protect your crew! Pre-measurements must be made before any fire is started. One important measurement to take is the LFM (Live Field Moisture). If the LFM is too low, the fire might be too dangerous to start that day. I was impressed with all the math involved with determining just the right temperature for prescribed burns. In fact, as a former math/science educator, I wish I had taken this course because it explains a lot of the "why" we learn to take certain measurements and the practical use of those skills! He also showed us an app that is specifically used for wildfire prediction.

It is important to have two sources of water for fire control so when the temperature dropped below freezing on the campus, we couldn't conduct the practice fire that we were planning because the water tanks on the vehicles might freeze. Another interesting part of the training was learning how the smoke gives so much information about the fire. There is a distinct connection between the weather and the fire/smoke behavior which was fun to me because I absolutely enjoy studying about weather phenomenon.

When the conditions were favorable, we went to a west field on the campus to do some practice "black line" burning. The "black line" is a vital part of the safety with

plant to take home, using the microscope to view leaf parts, and a few others. Let me know if you want to help out.

River Bend is also continuing to have STEM programs with school groups. If you want to help out, let me know! —Lynn Seman

AT MARCH 19: *Seed Collecting and Processing* class is live on the website: <https://www.wildflower.org/event/seed-collecting-processing>. 10:00am - 12:00 pm
The class is now set to \$20 per person in accordance with our class pricing standards. Texas Master Naturalists receive a \$4 discount. The code is TXMN22.

Minnette Marr
Conservation Botanist
and Research Associate
Lady Bird Johnson
Wildflower Center
The University of Texas
at Austin
o: 214.232.0240 | m:
214-908-1161

prescribed fires and its size and position is relative to where the fire needs to go. The black line provides a safety barrier to prevent the fire from leaving its desired location. First, we watched as Keith and his number one crew member, Mike, worked together to start the line. Keith used a drip torch filled with a 50% diesel fuel to burn a line while Mike drove parallel to him with the spray of water to put it out as needed. Next, we got our chance to use the drip torch. I immediately volunteered and walked along while “pouring” fire out on the grass as I walked. What an experience! I made a couple of passes before I had finally let someone else use the torch. It almost felt like having a temporary superhero power

when you spread fire as you walked along!

With the onset of a cold front and snowstorm on the way, I left earlier than I wanted and did not stay for the final exam, which I hadn’t planned to take anyway. My reward was the new information gained and the experience of trying something new. I now have a much better understanding of all that it takes to conduct a prescribed fire safely which will contribute the enhancement of the grassland ecosystem and management of Texas natural resources.

A huge thanks to Christena Stephens and CSAC for setting up this workshop! ✨

City Nature Challenge 2022

April 29—May 2



Want to participate in this year’s City Nature Challenge?

Sign up on Eventbrite to stay informed of events related to this year’s challenge!

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/city-nature-challenge-2022-tickets-266507189177>

Let’s put the Rolling Plains region on the map for this global event!

Chapter Contacts:

Laura Gillis, President, to 733-4467, gillis.laura5319@gmail.com; Alex Nelson, Vice President 882-0936, alenelson96@gmail.com; DeAnna Bullock, Secretary, (972)523-8108, deanna@dfwnetworking.com; Lynn Seman, Treasurer 867-3006, rlynnseman@gmail.com

Committees Chairperson:

Paula Savage, Newsletter Editor and Designer 691-0231, pasavage15@gmail.com; Debra Halter, Website Manager 632-8557, chickadeekees@aol.com; Debra Halter, Communication Chair 632-8557, chickadeekees@aol.com

Advisor: Robert Mauk, TPWD Advisor 766-2383, Robert.Mauk@tpwd.Texas.gov