

**SEPTEMBER
2003**

Latest Parks Plan Still Works for ACC Goals

John Darling

At first glance, the most recent Parks Master Plan seemed to ignore one of my main concerns, the need to purchase and preserve natural areas in Arlington before it's too late. I saw little in the latest plan related to habitat acquisition. Granted that many people in Arlington love athletic fields and well-maintained parking lots more than I ever will, but that doesn't make me or my priorities wrong. So when I got the chance to talk things over with a Parks person, I jumped at it and came away feeling much better. Here are some points from our conversation.

There's no denying that the Parks & Recreation Department is in a tough spot. As the city's population grows, land is more expensive and there are fewer suitable parcels left—especially large areas with good wildlife habitat. The Parks maintenance backlog stands at \$40 million at a time when money for all city government activities is critically tight.

Over the last 25 years our parks have grown tremendously in all respects, but we're still below the DFW average in acres per 1000 residents. And in spending (dollars/person) we're far below average—the sixth lowest city in the DFW region. Given all this, the Master Plan has an air of high-minded optimism that is heart-warming.

The plan includes several strategic objectives:

- Re-invest in existing parks
- Invest in Parks Department employees
- Actively encourage volunteer and partnership opportunities
- Promote environmental leadership in the community

That first point is a way of saying that there's a price to be paid for all the expansion we've enjoyed. Much as I resist it in favor of buying more land, ignoring maintenance and other practical matters will only cost us more in the future. And the costs can be excessive: Recent news about possibly closing the Bob Duncan Community Center in Vandergriff Park shows what can happen in the absence of maintenance.

Having reluctantly accepted the necessity of upkeep, we spent most of our time discussing acquisition possibilities and the many implications of being an environmental leader.

September Meeting

TOPIC: Community-Based
Conservation Advocacy
Strategies

SPEAKER: Linda J. Pelon,
Executive Director,
Dallas Historic Tree
Coalition

WHEN: Wednesday, September 10,
7:00 pm

WHERE: First United Methodist Church,
313 N. Center at Division.
(Enter through north door.)

**Remember to bring
something for the raffle!**

From the President

Marian Hiler



Jan Miller, in her own quiet but steady manner, has gotten the ball rolling on the restoration of a rare treasure in Arlington. She proposed it as a

joint ACC project with the Cross Timbers Master Naturalists (CTMN) Chapter at its August meeting. That treasure is the Blackland Prairie Park, a 13-acre undeveloped lot in southeast Arlington, along New York Avenue just north of Bowie High School.

It is rare because 9 acres of it have never been plowed. Once part of a farm, it survives undisturbed because it was used as a hay field. If plowed, the native prairie system is lost, as plowing destroys the soil community that took millennia to develop. This site is an example of the native prairie that was here long before the early settlers arrived. Texas once had 12 million acres of blackland prairie; now it has less than 5,000 acres remaining in scattered

pockets of 200 acres or less. More than 200 species of plants occur on this prairie pocket, and many small animals make their home there. A key indicator that it is an undisturbed site is the presence of gilgai. Called "hog wallows" by early settlers, gilgai are typically circular depressions, formed as a result of the constant churning of the clay soils as they shrink and swell.

It wasn't long ago that this site was in danger of becoming another commercially developed property. John Snowden, native grass expert and owner of Bluestem Nursery, was responsible for calling our attention to its great value. He wrote to city officials urging them to preserve it as a park to "help large numbers of citizens understand the natural conditions which early pioneers found in the east Arlington-Grand Prairie-Webb area". In the summer of 1995, then-ACC president Julia Burgen pointed out the historical and ecological importance of blackland prairie and urged the Parks and Recreation Board to preserve the prairie as a city park at a public hearing on revisions to the Parks Master Plan.

City officials did indeed work to acquire the property, eventually via the 1997 parks bond program. Although the property is in the Parks Master Plan, there are no funds available at present for its development. As Pete Jamieson, Arlington Parks & Recreation Department director, pointed out at the July 31 Parks Master Plan hearing, now times are such that citizens should take an active role in supporting their parks.

And that is just what Jan is doing. She has been working with Jeff Quayle, CTMN and Native Prairies Association of Texas member, to research blackland prairie and contact experts on prairie restoration. They are checking on the feasibility of doing a prescribed burn, developing plans to remove woody plants and establishing a baseline plant list in cooperation with Parks personnel.

There will be plenty of opportunities to get involved—see page 3.

Thanks to Julia Burgen and Jan Miller and their collection of newspaper clippings for help with this article.

Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.

Edmund Burke

POST OAK

Published 10 times a year by the
Arlington Conservation Council
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The August Meeting

At our last general meeting Courtney Blevins, Regional Urban Forester from the Fort Worth Office of the Texas Forest Service, gave a well-received talk on basic tree biology. We are hoping to invite Courtney back for another of his enthusiastic presentations.



Special Master Composter Meeting

We're invited to hear Mike Bradshaw of the Dallas Trees and Parks Foundation discuss the social, community, environmental, and economic benefits of trees. Mr Bradshaw will also discuss Shadekeepers, a program of the foundation for tree planting and maintenance, and environmental conservation and restoration. Sounds like it's right up our alley, so don't miss this one.

When: Tuesday, September 9, 7:00 pm
Where: 201 E. Abram Street (Municipal Office Tower, 2nd floor. Park on north side, enter through north door.

Interested in Working on the Blackland Prairie Park Project?

There will be lots of fun things to do as the Blackland Prairie is restored: analysis, inventory, removal of woody material, maybe even a prescribed burn if we're lucky. If this sounds interesting to you, please contact Jan Miller, (817) 483-0579 or jmiller12@mindspring.com, to find out how you can get involved.

Master Naturalist and prairie expert Jeff Quayle recommends attending the Botanical Transects Workshop on September 20. He says, "Anything we do at the prairie site would be great. But learning to do transects and applying what we learn at the prairie would be great, too." What, you ask, is a botanical transect? It is a method of sampling plant species to determine their variability within a plant community. Helping with conducting transects at the prairie site will help you learn to identify our local native prairie plants. And all this education is at no charge!

Botanical Transects Workshop (FREE!)

Location: Cedar Ridge Preserve (old Dallas Nature Center)

Taught by: Marcy Brown (UT Dallas)

September 20, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Contact: Jim Varnum (North Texas Master Naturalists)

972-243-4098 jevvarnum@aol.com

Parks Plan *continued from page 1*

In terms of my favorite thing, acquisitions, over \$10 million are earmarked for potential purchase of 13 parks. Four are large, environmentally significant tracts that total more than 250 acres. Not all these potential parks are sure things; there is competition from developers for some of the land in question. But the plan identifies the best remaining natural areas, and the department's statement pledges aggressive pursuit of the properties.

I've been studying the department's two-page statement devoted to environmental leadership, and I'm happy to say that it looks like it belongs in some city with the most advanced environmental sensitivities. It doesn't describe a perfect situation, but acknowledges the department's high annual consumption of water, electricity, fuel, and fertilizer while pledging to improve on those and many other fronts, including green building practices. Along those lines are policies to define natural areas that reduce mowing and maintenance, turf maintenance to limit chemical usage, standards for more sustainable and recycled materials, and an incentive program for employees who reduce consumption while saving money for the city.

I've admired the professionalism of the Parks employees I've dealt with in the last few years. After talking over the latest Master Plan in greater detail, I find much to like. I look forward to working with the Parks & Recreation Department to realize our shared goals for Arlington.



Trash Bash All New This Year

Saturday, September 20, will mark the first time that Arlington will hold its Trash Bash in several sites at once. ACC has been chosen to sponsor one of them, and we will really need your help to do the job right.

We're the official sponsors at the Founders Park site, so we will be in charge of coordinating and guiding any groups of trash bashers that sign up for our site. The event runs from 9:00 am until 11:00 am and the city will provide breakfast and refreshments. We'd also like to set out a few recycling bins and make the can toss game available if we have enough ACC help.

We will park near the north end of Founders Park. The parking area is on the south side of Arkansas just east of Cooper. Look for a small road called Highridge, just a smidgen (according to a city official) east of the convenience store that sits next to the tiny park with several old cabins. Park anywhere along Highridge or the little streets connecting to it. Nearby you'll see a city setup where we will get oriented.

You may recall that Founders Park was the site of our award-winning trash collection effort last March. We didn't have time to pick up everything then and wanted to return. Now's our chance to make another dent, and we can with your help. If you have a leftover yellow Litter Challenge t-shirt, please wear it so other volunteer groups will know we're the official sponsors. Thanks.

**Is Arlington's litter
making you a little irritable?**



You can do something about it!

Once a month, the city selects an area for special litter cleanup and needs 10 to 15 volunteers to help from 9 to noon on a Saturday. If you hate litter enough to do something about it, contact Roni Crotty at 817-459-6587 or crottyr@ci.arlington.tx.us

Next Cleanup October 4

**Target: a trashy stream
south of Meadowbrook Park**

Wildscape Update John Daling



What's in Bloom?

I have no idea, but last Saturday there was a lot of green stuff all over the place, looking refreshed from the recent change in

weather. (Gita, how am I doing so far? Gita called in sick, and this is what happens when a composter writes the Update.) Just for this month let's forget about the joys of delightful colors and fragrant blooms enlivening the meadows and think about the really important things. Try this instead: Recent rains have stimulated the compost microflora, and as a result the bacteria, actinomycetes, and fungi are all happily sort of blooming.

August Saturday Workday

With a tiny taste of fall in the air, it's getting hard to recall the August workday. I think there might have been some perspiration. The funny thing is that we just keep showing up regardless of the heat index, which is overruled by the Molly Effect. Dale Denton showed



Dale Denton indulges the editor by posing patiently with his invaluable trailer. Here it holds a load of mulch on its way to fix up a trail.

up with his trailer. I showed up with a big screen, and Mike Warren showed up with some young persons involuntarily caught up in community service. This combination produced raggedy mulch that went onto trails, fine mulch/

compost for Molly et al. to use in propagation, and some kids who wished they had chosen an indoor activity. Dale and Warren Tingley encouraged the young men, and at the end we shoveled



Compost just keeps happening as participants in Arlington's Master Composter program earn credits toward their degree, gain satisfaction from the process, or both.

the fine stuff onto the trailer, Dale drove to Molly's, and we deposited a bunch of good-looking stuff right onto her broken concrete path. (We didn't break that path; it was broken when we got there.)

There was a First Saturday backyard composting class, too. Master Composter and ACC member Don Graves instructed a small class while our composters turned piles and built a new one.

Their timing was perfect; Anne Aldefer, Candi Halliburton, Pat Lovejoy, Kay Sekio, and Ann Trenton cut back the nearby mealy blue sage and immediately donated it to the new pile—a great nitrogen contribution and perfect lesson for the people in

Don's class. Jean-Marie and Stephen Smith tested the quality of the Wildscape's stream water as part of their Texas Watch effort, then joined in the seasonal maintenance. Work was

concentrated on those conspicuous beds between the parking lot and compost area, where volunteers dug out bermuda, weeded, and made that mealy blue sage a lot shorter.

Did I mention Molly Hollar? She was everywhere, doing a bit of everything. I think that about covers that.

Propagation

The plant propagation sessions at Molly's have been averaging about a dozen people every time recently, and they've grown more than 2600 plants this season!

Thanks to many of you, there was a fine response to the plea for plastic nursery pots.

The crisis has passed, but don't stop donating: She'll gladly accept more pots for use next spring. Thanks very, very much from Molly to the propagators and pot donors.

The Fall Plant Sale

The propagators have a plan. They're going to plant about 1300 plants in the Wildscape this fall (with a little help from all of us). Almost all of those will be gallon-sized; their big roots will make



A lot of work right where it shows. Volunteers made a big difference in the first beds visitors see as they arrive.

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Wildscape Update *continued from page 4*

them easier to keep watered and increase drought resistance right from the start. Most natives have about three times as much plant stuff below the ground as above, a logical arrangement for our tough summers. About 700 of the propagated plants will be offered for sale at the fall plant sale on Saturday, October 4, at the south parking lot of Veterans Park from 9:00 am until 3:00 pm. The rest of the plants will be nurtured until the spring plant sale.

The Molly Hollar Wildscape at Veterans Park Next Saturday workdays: October 4 and October 25

Time: 8 am – 11 am, refreshments will be provided.

Directions: Veterans Park is at the corner of Arkansas Lane and Spanish Trail. Parking for the Wildscape is at the second entrance, off Spanish Trail south of Arkansas Lane.

Our October plan is very simple: Go buy something at the plant sale, then get to work in the Wildscape. Fall is the best time to plant, so this will be a very important workday. We've got to get those 1300 plants into the ground, so we'll have a second October workday on Saturday the 25th to plant some more. And sometime in there you should probably go home and plant there too. Please bring your most serious planting equipment to both of the October workdays.

Weekly workdays

Tuesdays from 8 am – 11 am. Call Molly at 817-860-5580 if you plan on going.

Members Welcome at Board Meetings

If you would like to see what goes on at the monthly ACC Board meetings please contact a Board member for the secret handshake to get in. The meetings are at 7:00 pm on the fourth Monday of the month. The next one is September 22. We usually extend the meeting at a nearby restaurant. Please come; we can always use some new faces.

Thanks

To Shane Goetz for supporting our efforts. If you'd like to help and publicize your business, call any board member for details.

METRO 817/265-2902

ROSSETTI AND GOETZ
ATTORNEYS AND COUNSELORS

SHANE GOETZ

715 WEST ABRAM ST.
ARLINGTON, TEXAS 76013

Group Award Accidentally Given to Individual

Through no fault of his own, John Darling recently received the Tarrant County Corporate Recycling Council's Environmental Vision Award in the individual category. Two visions are actually involved: one, the award is removed and presented to ACC where it belongs; and two, his wife presents him with the psychotic psuitcase award and has him locked up.



Please join us in honoring
Julia Burgen
for her many years of dedicated service
to the City of Arlington

Sunday, October 5
2:30 – 5:30 pm

Historic Fielder House
1616 W. Abram at Fielder Rd.

Sponsors: Arlington Historical Society, East Arlington Renewal, Arlington Conservation Council



Help Needed For Julia's Reception

We want everyone to attend the Reception for Julia Burgen, but we also need help. ACC is one of the sponsors of the October 5 reception for Julia. Part of that includes providing some of the refreshments. We need volunteers to bring desserts that most folks won't mind eating with their fingers. About three people are needed to take a shift making sure the dessert trays are kept filled. If you can help, please contact Marian Hiler, 817-277-3998.



Arlington Conservation Council Membership Application

Memberships are good for one year, renewable each January. Your dues go directly to our public education efforts.

Membership Information

Please circle membership category.

Name _____

Individual \$12.00

Address _____

Student \$6.00

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Telephone _____ Fax _____

Supporting \$24.00

E-mail _____

Organization/Business \$36.00

How did you hear about us? _____

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Don't forget!

At the September meeting

Linda Pelonwill present

Community-Based Conservation

Advocacy Strategies.

Don't miss it!

Be sure to visit us at

arlingtonconservationcouncil.org



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