

**ARLINGTON
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL**

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES
VOLUME 8, NUMBER 8

SEPTEMBER 2007

**Note
meeting place:
Fielder Museum**

www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org

September Meeting

Greenprinting: Identifying Significant Resources for Conservation

**Jack Tidwell,
Manager, Environmental Programs,
North Central Texas
Council of Governments**

Wednesday, September 12, 7:00 pm

**Fielder Museum
1616 W. Abram St.
(corner of Fielder and Abram)**

WE NEED RAFFLE ITEMS!

Bits & Pieces

Solar Trash Compactor

Recently local distributors demonstrated the Big Belly solar-powered trash compactor to city and UTA officials. We care about this because the compacting feature means many fewer runs by trash trucks to empty it, and the solar power is a great idea for an unlikely object. Read more about the Big Belly at seahorsepower.com/index.html



Today's Inspirational Moment

Give a man a fish, and he can eat for a day. But teach a man how to fish, and he'll be dead of mercury poisoning inside of three years. ~Charles Haas

Trinity Trash Bash Almost Here



Once again ACC will pick up trash on Saturday, September 15, from 9:00 am - noon at Founders Park. The park is off Arkansas east of Cooper and west of Center. Wear long pants, bring work gloves, sunscreen, and water. City staff will hand out a limited number of free goodies for adults and children.

Headlines You Can Use (or not)

Funeral pyres take toll on living: Hindu cremations strip the country of more than 50 million trees annually.

Pope urges the young to guard world resources. The Vatican has joined a reforestation project to offset its CO₂ emissions and is installing solar cells on main auditorium.

Black terns at Drying Beds

Last week a number of these marvellous migrants paused on their way from breeding grounds in the northern U.S. and Canada to the coast of northern South America. Quite a graceful sight, despite the fact that most of them were in slightly dowdy nonbreeding plumage.



From the President John Darling



"Support." That's the shortest and most common response I got from you when I recently asked your opinion about ACC's endorsement of a detailed letter to city

council on changes to the gas drilling ordinance. This poll was the first I've seen since I became actively involved with ACC in 2000, and it was a real pleasure to hear from so many members I know only by name, as well as from those I know well. Here is a sampling of your responses:

"Fully support. I would also support an official commendation on the impressive work they have done."

"If a vote counts from one who is a non-meeting-attending member of ACC, I definitely support ACC's endorsement of the attached letter." *[It counts.]*

"As an ACC member I support this letter. My employment by an oil company makes me consider these

points seriously. Some of the points are a little exaggerated, but I would not want a 120-foot tall industrial operation and all the heavy action that goes with it within 300 feet of my beautiful yard. I would also like to see all the people who support this retire their lawn mowers and their damn leaf blowers!"

"Endorse, definitely. They have done their homework, haven't they?"

"I support the ACC endorsement. Are there good reasons not to? The contact person for that neighborhood group (Chris Bagby) is a lawyer and a good friend of mine. I suspect he drafted the letter to the Council."

"...All major points must be made within the first two pages and can be expanded as needed in following text. Good luck with this, and thank you for taking time to try the intervention."

"I agree with the concerns addressed in this letter. I have a feeling that it is so detailed that its important points may be missed by our elected folks."

"If ACC decides to sign on to this I'm all for it. If we choose to send a more

concise version I'd be good with that as well." *[Grace Darling edited it —from 11 to 2 pages.]*

"What a wonderful, well researched document. Even though I am not an active member of ACC, I definitely do endorse the letter. Will this topic ever be over?" *[You responded, so you're active.]*

"I wholeheartedly agree. The situations caused by this drilling are breaking my heart."

"Gas drilling scares me, the noise, the pollution, plus everything else concerned with this issue. I feel it will change Arlington, and not for the better."

"Please count me as an ACC member who supports the United Neighbors letter. It makes clear some issues and standards left out of the previous Gas Drilling and Production Ordinance and would strengthen others."

What a great pleasure it was to hear from so many of you, and to know that I'm a part of such a worthwhile group. Thanks.

THE POST OAK

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natural resources.

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New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Jan Miller



Summer 2007 on the New York Avenue Prairie: mild enough that we actually had a workday on July 14. A big 'Thank you!' goes to all the volunteers who cleared

small trees and brush from the 30' or so just behind the New York Avenue fence. This helped our curb appeal, considering the tremendous plant growth due to the spring and early summer rains.

Then, just when it seemed that the small trees might be getting out of hand and the brief summer window of opportunity for mowing was about to close, Arlington Parks and Recreation Department's district maintenance manager Scott DeGrant somehow managed to find very scarce time to mow the prairie. Many thanks to Scott, Paul and Perry!

The prairie is now growing back, minus the trees, and once again looks like a prairie.

There are signs of milkweed in bloom, and the bluestems are rapidly recovering. The fall prairie tour will probably be in October this year, so watch



for a date in next month's newsletter.

Master Naturalist Jim Varnum hosted a tour at Fort Worth's Stella Rowan Prairie on August 4. Who knew an early August Saturday evening field trip could be so pleasant? Almost 30 prairie enthusiasts from Tarrant County got to see the 'turkey feet' of big bluestem in bloom (right), lush little bluestem, and many midsummer wildflowers at this Grand Prairie site (not the city, the prairie).

It's always encouraging to hear how prairie restoration is being done elsewhere. Here are a couple of recent features:

Nature Conservancy magazine feature:
www.nature.org/magazine/autumn2007/

News Hour with Jim Lehrer, 7/31/07:
http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/environment/july-dec07/birds_07-31.html

Katy Prairie Conservancy:
www.katyprairie.org

Mark your calendar for fall prairie-related events:

September 15, 9:00 am – noon. Cedar Ridge Preserve. Seed ball making session. Come on out and learn the exact recipe and



make some seed balls for CRP and maybe a few for yourself, too. Bring your family and friends, kids especially. Contact Jim Varnum (JEVarnum@aol.com) for details.

October 18-21. Native Plant Society of Texas/Native Prairies Association of Texas 2007 Symposium in Georgetown. Focus will be on conserving and restoring our native prairies and grasslands, especially those of the Blackland, Grand Prairie and Edwards Plateau areas. Visit <http://npsot.org/symposium2007/> for program and event details.

November 6, 13 & TBD. "North Texas Grasses You Should Know" Botanical Research Institute of Texas & TCU continuing education. See www.lifelong.tcu.edu for more info.

Photos by Wesley Miller: left, snow-on-the-prairie. Thanks, Wesley.

Bear Creek Ranch Field trip

Want to get started birdwatching? Here's your chance. We've received this invitation for ACC members to experience birding on the Fort Worth Tallgrass Prairie sponsored by the Fort Worth Audubon Society:

Trip leader: Nancy Smith

Date: Sept 22, 2007

Take a look at the Fort Worth Audubon Society Web site link, fwas.org for more details.

Our July Speaker

We're indebted to Matina Garrett (right), UTWP Coordinator, North Central Texas Council of Governments, for her program last month on the upper Trinity watershed partners. Her wonderful model was also a big hit.



Wildscape Update Molly Hollar



Molly Hollar Wants You

to come to the plant sale, just long enough to buy a bunch of native plants, then get to the wildscape and plant stuff like crazy. And maybe plant even more on any September Saturday. And take a look at the brand new wildscape Web site while you're at it.

Web site and Fall Plant Sale Opportunity Days

Don't miss the fall native plant sale on Saturday, September 29. You can learn all about it as you visit the new wildscape Web site, thewildscape.org, which contains pictures of each of the plants we will have for sale as well as information on each species.

The Web site is now in its infancy, but soon you will find pages like "About us," "History," and "Wildlife." Others will follow, including events, outreach, volunteers, resources, benefactors, etc.

At the Web site you'll also find a map and directions to the sale site at Randol Mill Park greenhouse. And on the 29th you'll see directional signs beginning at the entry to Randol Mill Park with arrows marking the route to the greenhouse at the back of the park.

For more information, contact us at info@thewildscape.org.

In order to complete planting in the wildscape (as nearly as possible), we will have Saturday Volunteer Opportunity Days each Saturday in September and October. These are by far the best times to plant, when plants become established much more easily and require less watering and care than at other times of the year. The erosion control area (about an acre) is almost two-thirds planted, and we're hoping to get it finished this fall so our volunteers can then concentrate on maintenance, outreach, etc. I hope you can find a convenient Saturday to help for a while; more than one would be fantastic.



**Native
Plant Sale**

At Randol Mill Park Greenhouse
Benefitting The Wildscape
Sat. Sept. 29, 2007
10:00 – 1:00

Organically grown –
Most from local seed & cuttings-
For plants better adapted to our
local climate and rainfall.



Prices:
Quarts – \$4
Gallons – \$8
Trees – \$15 & up

Check www.thewildscape.org
After Sept. 1 for plant list



Green Building **Danny Kocurek**

[This is the seventh installment of one family's experience with building a green house.]

This not a news flash: The largest energy use in Texas homes is for air conditioning. By making our house as airtight as possible and insulating it heavily, we have tried to limit our need for AC as much as possible. We are using a 19 SEER heat pump, but there are many ways to make any AC unit more efficient.

One of the biggest wastes of energy in most Texas homes relates to the fact that the ducts that go from the rooms to the cooling unit run through the attic. Because most attics in Texas are not conditioned, they get really hot. It is not uncommon for temperatures in the attic to reach 160 degrees. As the ducts run through this heat, they lose a lot of the cool air they are carrying. Imagine running your AC ducts through your oven. Although ducts do have a thin layer of insulation, it is not sufficient.

There are ways to mitigate this problem. If the ducts rest on the floor of the attic, they can be covered by insulation. Often this is done by building walls out of cardboard on each side of the duct and filling the space with blown insulation. Additional insulation can be wrapped around ducts wherever they are. Increasing ventilation of the attic by using vents and solar fans can also reduce the severity of the attic temperature.

Programmable thermostats can save much more money than they cost to install. The way they save money is by automatically reducing AC usage when it is not needed. For example, if no one is in your house during the day, you can set the thermostat to let the house warm up while you are gone and then cool down by the time you get home. If you have a two-story house with a thermostat on each floor, and you don't spend much time upstairs during the day, you can set the thermostat to let the temperature upstairs rise to 80 degrees during the day and then cool down before you go upstairs at night. You can

do the reverse at night. Some people will argue that the extra work needed to cool the house in the evening is not worth the savings during the day, but this is incorrect. Even in a well-insulated home, most of the cool air being produced all day while you are gone is lost to leakage. Running the unit a little longer in the evening uses much less energy than running it repeatedly all day long and losing most of the cool air.

If you need to replace your AC, you will probably have trouble getting it done correctly. Probably the most depressing part of AC is how few of the professionals who install these units know how to properly size them. The reason this is important is because a unit is inefficient if it is too large or too small. Most people think that when it comes to AC, the bigger the unit, the better. However, when a unit is too large, it runs less efficiently. Constant cycling off and on is less efficient and causes more wear and tear on the equipment. It also makes humidity control more of a problem. In summer, the air inside your house is dehumidified by the AC coils but only if it is running for more than 5 minutes or so. If the unit is cycling constantly for short periods, the air is not dehumidified as well. Higher humidity makes any air feel warmer, so people often compensate for this by lowering the thermostat, which subsequently uses more energy. Units that are too small don't have the humidity or short cycling problems, but they can have problems with excessive wear and tear by having to run too long on really hot days.

For over a decade, the only approved method for sizing AC units has been precisely defined and easy to calculate. It is called a Manual J calculation and takes into account the size of the house, the sun exposure, the windows, the tightness of the house, and other factors. It can take an hour to gather the information and make the calculation, but the savings can be tremendous. Unfortunately, it is rare to find an AC

installer who knows how to do the calculations. They will tell you that it is not necessary and that they just base the size of the unit on the square footage of the house. In reality this goes against what their trade association recommends and what all building science research has proven. It is like the butcher telling you she never washes her hands after cutting up chickens because she doesn't believe all that "salmonella silliness."

In most cases, a properly sized unit will be smaller than a unit sized on the basis of square footage. The money saved by being able to use a smaller unit will usually pay for the cost of doing the calculation, so it is no more expensive even at installation. The savings during the life of the unit are pure profit from that point on. Unfortunately, the installer pockets more money with a larger unit than with a properly sized unit.

I was assisting a friend recently who needed an old AC unit replaced. I advised her to ask the contractors about a Manual J calculation and use this as a screening question. Only one of the 10 contractors she spoke with used the calculation.

Stay cool.

CYCLES

With every turn of wheels
I roll on years of memories,
Flushing them like dry leaves.
This road is one I haven't seen
Since cows loomed stately
Out of rough-hewn fields.
I miss the froggy ponds,
The snarky farm dogs chasing me,
The wildflower-wafting breezes.
Too soon the town erupted;
Too soon the horizontal
Concrete megaliths prevailed.
For miles the houses flow
In blocks, in rows, adrift
On mollycoddled lawns.
The past's erased.
Now's all we have. The future's
Onerous to contemplate.

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“Objectionable, unsanitary, and unsightly” John Darling

A former ACC president recently got a visit from Code Enforcement because someone complained about his native plant yard. The inspector knew nothing about alternative landscaping and referred repeatedly to wildflower meadows, which, he claimed, required a permit and had to be mowed at some point. Shocked and very unhappy, our wildscaper pulled out some weeds (actual weeds, that is) and spread new mulch in hopes of appeasing the city.

No such luck: He received an official notice that the city had found him in violation of the weed ordinance (see box opposite) and would mow the yard, at his cost.

The suburban radical reacted by arranging a visit with an area code supervisor. It all ended anticlimactically when the supervisor saw that the yard was based on a plan and said officially that the yard was okay by him.

One little catch from the supervisor: The city will want owners of such

subversive yards to submit their plans and post a sign. More on this as it becomes available.

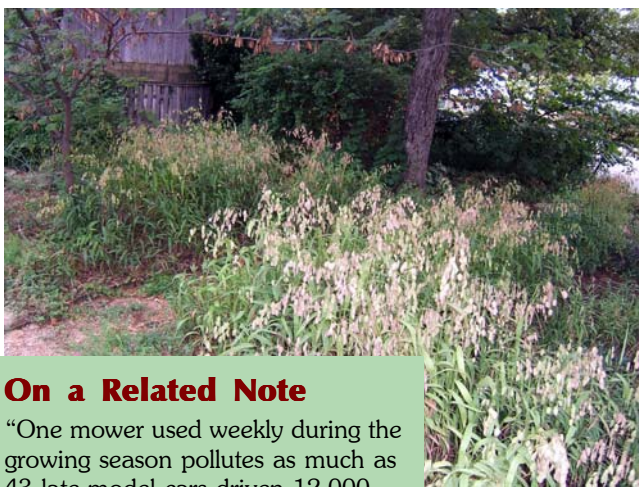
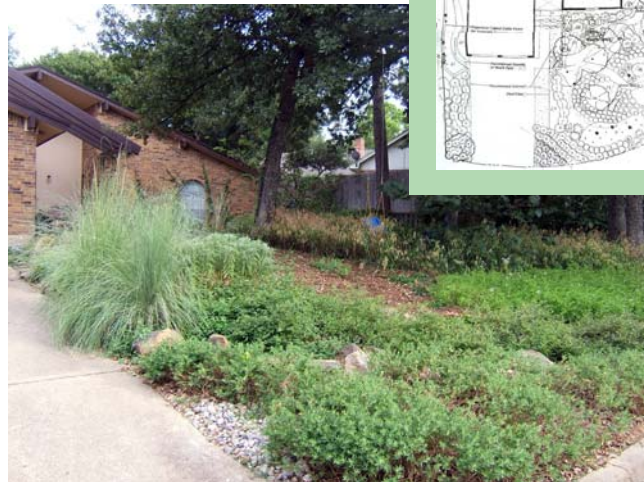
Meanwhile, a ray of hope emerged as the supervisor mentioned Roni Crotty and her Smart Yard contest several times during his visit. Are some Code people getting the word that part of city government is promoting something they're being paid to crack down on?

Let's hope everybody gets on the same native plant page soon.



Saved by the Plan!

If you don't have one, maybe you could make one up. (Just thinking out loud here.)



On a Related Note

“One mower used weekly during the growing season pollutes as much as 43 late-model cars driven 12,000 miles a year,” says Sam Atwood, spokesperson for the South Coast Air Quality Management District, the smog control agency for four urban counties in Southern California. “They’re little pollution factories on wheels.”



Objectionable from page 6**The Odd Code**Section 2.09 Weeds

Weeds, brush or any vegetation which is **unsightly, unsanitary or unsafe** growing to a height greater than twelve (12) inches upon any property. [Weeds and brush are vegetation, and what's a weed anyway?] It shall be the duty of all persons to keep the area from the line of their property to the curb line, edge of asphalt or point at which the roadway begins, regardless of the type of said roadway next adjacent to the property, free and clear of the matter referenced above. All vegetation not regularly cultivated which exceeds twelve (12) inches in height shall be presumed to be **objectionable, unsanitary and unsightly**. (Amend Ord 87-112, 05/26/87)

Does this make any sense at all? The words look simple but are incomprehensible in the wildscape context. Is there any help in the dictionary?

weed - any unwanted plant. (editor's preferred definition)

unsightly - unpleasant or offensive to look at; unattractive. See synonyms at ugly.

unsanitary - dirty or unhealthy and therefore likely to cause disease.

unsafe: involving or causing danger or risk; liable to hurt or harm.

objectionable - undesirable, offensive

Huh? Who writes this stuff? Must be lawyers whose idea of gardening is to keep an eye on the landscape crew as they manicure the grounds.

The Code words just don't apply to wildscapes as we know them. The way it looks, if you've got a homely post oak, it's certainly never been cultivated, and it's probably taller than 12 inches, so the city could mow it if they've got a really mean mower.

Beat Those Bag Blues John Dycus

Attention, shoppers. Those plastic grocery bags multiplying like randy gerbils in your pantry can be reused or recycled at many of their originating stores. Kroger, Tom Thumb, WalMart and Whole Foods all will reuse their own bags that you bring in for your groceries, according to representatives at various locations throughout the city, and this appears to be corporate policy, not just a decision at individual outlets.

Tom Thumb will not refill a Kroger bag (that's asking a bit much), for instance, but it will its own. Again and again.

The Tom Thumb store on Park Row also has large receptacles labeled "RECYCLE" at the entrance for plastics, including plastic bags. All types of WalMarts, including the Neighborhood Market at 303 and Bowen, also have bins for recycling anybody's bags.

The best deal may be at the Kroger on Bowen Road, which will refill your plastic Kroger bags — again and again! — and take a nickel off the bill per bag. This only applies to the bags you're using that trip — you can't dump 100 old Kroger bags on the counter and expect to walk out with \$5.

**For This We Lost Big Trees?**

It's been about 19 months since a number of large trees were torn out of the lot at Mesquite and Division Streets, a downtown green space that always looked like it should have become a little park in an area destined for urbanization. We got an ornate building and spacious parking instead. And one more thing: a completely vacant first floor whose only environmental contribution is the offer of habitat for some tough weeds.

This architectural marvel radiates energy hoggishness. So it's the same old story: Somebody wants to make money, city says great, let 'er rip, we lose green and gain a mostly empty thing that will gulp energy if anybody ever decides to move in. Our job? Guess we get to admire its looks.



Then: Looking south toward the Central Library from the outdoor dining area of the former Jim's Hamburgers.



Now: Looking south, all cleaned up and no place to go, unless you count the nearest urban heat island as a destination.

Perfect Parking John Dycus

The solution to our stormwater problem is in the parking lots at 1307/1309 W. Abram and 909 W. Sanford.

Permeable paving.

Thin concrete bricks or cinder blocks appear to have been turned on their side and tamped evenly into the ground. Perhaps on a bed of sand to facilitate absorption.

Drive on them. Nothing crackles or shifts under your tires.

Stand on them. You're not as warm as you would be on one of Arlington's signature hard-surface parking lots.

Roll on them in a wheelchair. Walk on them using crutches. Where the holes in the brick are full of dirt, there's no discomfort for the chair user and the holes wouldn't seem to grab a crutch tip.

Traverse these remarkable (in their simplicity) surfaces on an icy day. How much better traction than on smooth, slick asphalt or concrete.

Approach with your eyes closed. The texture underfoot changes. A visually impaired person familiar with the lot would know exactly where it ends and the sidewalk begins. Unless, even better, this was the sidewalk, too.

Maintenance? Use a weed snipper twice in the summer. Resurface every 10 years? Not necessary.

And when it rains, the water doesn't swoosh into the sewer, it soaks into the ground.

Spares the overburdened city drainage system, feeds the trees.

Saving trees was the motivation for the directors of the Arlington Federal Credit Union to put porous paving at the front and back of their new Sanford Street building in 1986. They paid an arborist for advice, then they followed it.

Over the years, storms have taken a couple of trees and disease felled another, but the porous pavers and notches in the building still bear noble



architectural witness. The credit union's Jim Merritt said the pavers were "a little bit more expensive than concrete," but the directors were not swayed. What visionaries.

If porous paving has worked here for 21 years and at the Abram Street location for 30 — enough spaces combined for about 35 cars — wouldn't it have worked all over town all this time? And we wouldn't have a stormwater fee increase today. And we would have saved millions in flood damage and a lot of soggy grief.

Lest you think something this far-sighted is illegal, a city official recently confirmed that "porous pavers are allowed as an alternative to asphalt or concrete" and that with the increase in the stormwater fee, "hopefully, folks will think about using this alternative in lieu of increased costs."

Or they won't. That's the problem.

"Allowed" will not work. What's needed is "required."

A high percentage of porous paving should be required for all new Arlington parking lots. Not suggested, not volunteer compliance. Required. With meaningful incentives for property owners who retrofit existing lots.

This should have been code for years. Had it been, maybe the shameful destruction of so many trees for Cowboys stadium parking could have been avoided. Maybe some of the magnificent trees bulldozed for the Shiny Almost Vacant Building on Division Street behind Mr. Vandergriff's old showroom might still be standing.

Observers might expect such a progressive stance in Austin or Portland or Chicago or Minneapolis, but never in Arlington, Texas. Let's be a leader here. Let's be known for this.

First do right by God's land.

How's that for a city motto?

I like it more than first do right by the developer.

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/Family \$24.00

Address _____

Student \$12.00

New member ☐

Telephone _____

Supporting \$36.00

Renewing member ☐

E-mail _____

Sponsor \$100.00

Other \$ _____

How did you hear about us? _____

Make checks payable to Arlington Conservation Council. Mail to ACC, Box 216, Arlington, TX 76004-0216. Contributions and dues are not tax-deductible. *I want to save trees; send my newsletter to my email address.* ☐

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THE POST OAK

Arlington Conservation Council

PO Box 216

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Don't Forget!

Wednesday, September 12,

7:00 pm

Jack Tidwell

North Central Texas

Council of Governments

Greenprinting:

*Identifying Significant Resources
for Conservation*

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arlingtonconservationcouncil.org



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