

**ARLINGTON  
CONSERVATION  
COUNCIL**

# POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES  
VOLUME 11, NUMBER 2

**FEBRUARY 2010**

[www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org](http://www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org)

## February Meeting

### Energy-Efficient Cities and How You Can Help

**Rita Beving,  
Dallas Sierra Club**

**Wednesday, February 10, 7:00 pm  
Fielder Museum  
1616 W. Abram St  
(corner of Fielder and Abram)**

**Come hear Rita Beving explain the expansion of Sierra Club's Cool Cities Program, an exciting new opportunity to help our local cities take part in reducing global warming, combating climate change, and increasing energy efficiency.**

**Remember to bring  
something for the raffle**

## Bits & Pieces

### More Heat!

It's too cold and way too wet, so our thoughts naturally turn to hot, dry things like our formerly common Texas horned lizard. If you cast a shadow on this beauty, it will move back into the sun on a hot August day. Ahh.



### Today's Inspirational Moment



From the point of view of a tapeworm, man was created by God to serve the appetite of the tapeworm.

Edward Abbey, *A Voice Crying in the Wilderness (Vox Clamantis en Deserto): Notes from a Secret Journal*

### Much More Heat!

It's too bad that the prickly pear so often tells us that a place has been overgrazed. It's hard to beat the glow of its flowers on a really hot summer day. And bees like them, too.



### Heat? Yes!



Roadrunners and heat seem to go together. These charismatic cuckoo relatives are often spotted warming themselves by raising back feathers to expose their black skin to the sun. Watch for them at Veterans Park or Tierra Verde, especially when it gets hot.

## From the President John Darling



Okay, the rumors are true: I haven't appointed myself President for Life; this is my last President's column, honest.

Here's a bit of what I said when I became presidential in February 2007: "It's hard to believe, but for the last 68 issues of the *Post Oak* my job has been to badger ACC presidents to hurry up and write their column. I can't tell you how odd it feels for me to be the one to fill this space (and this job). I can say that it's a lot easier to annoy other people about the dreaded deadline than to follow my own advice." (All still true.)

And now this is my 98th issue; a quick scan of the February 2007 *Post Oak* showed few changes from this one: John Davis was our speaker, we pleaded for volunteers at the prairie park, Molly praised Wildscape workers, and I whined a lot about the Cowboys stadium.

Well, John Davis has gone on to bigger things, and I've decided to smolder quietly about the stadium, but otherwise we seem to slog along, through the familiar mix of environmental ups (few) and downs (more than a few).

Something important to me has not changed one bit — my motivation for ACC involvement. Here are my three reasons, from 2007: Every good thing we accomplish now will take on much greater value in the crowded future. And this quote: *Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.*

(Edmund Burke). My third reason is the ACC people. It's learning that I'm part of a group that shares my values and concerns. It's knowing that the shared defeats won't be quite so bad, and the shared successes will be a lot sweeter.

On that note, I want to thank all the members who have so selflessly helped me act as your president for the past

three years. Even if you think you do very little, you're here with us. You've been important to me and you will continue to be a valuable part of the group that is the most important bunch of people in Arlington — those who truly care about its environmental future.

I hope you'll all help our new president, Jo Ann Duman, the way you've helped me. Here's hoping for bouquets of prairie celestials, possumhaws, and baobabs for everyone.

So here we go, off to another year. Let's see what happens.



## THE POST OAK

Published 10 times a year by the  
Arlington Conservation Council  
P.O. Box 216, Arlington TX 76004-0216.  
[www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org](http://www.arlingtonconservationcouncil.org)

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All memberships expired  
January 1st.  
It's past time to renew,  
so do it today.  
We need every one of you.

Thanks A.C.C. for working to  
conserve Arlington's  
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## New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park Jan Miller



### Big Prairie Workday!

Saturday, February 20, 2010.  
9:00 am – noon.  
Please mark your calendar! We have a great opportunity to

take back more of the prairie: On February 20 Arlington Parks and Recreation Department is planning to bring chainsaws to take down some of the larger trees and make fast work of smaller ones. Volunteers are needed to wield loppers and to clear the brush after cutting. Since we'll be partnering closely with APRD and in case of inclement weather, please RSVP to [jgmiller5594@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jgmiller5594@sbcglobal.net).

Please wear sturdy soled shoes/boots and long pants. Bring gloves, loppers and hand saws if you have them. Water and snacks will be provided. We'll work up an appetite, so plan to meet for lunch afterwards.



**Prairie Workday**  
**Saturday,**  
**February 20**  
**9:00 – noon**

### Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC)

February 12-15, 2010  
Count birds at any location from Friday, 2/12 through Monday, 2/15.  
For details about GBBC, see [www.birdsource.org/gbbc/](http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/)

### Count Birds at Southwest Nature Preserve

Saturday, February 13  
9:00 am – noon  
Meet at the northwest gate on Bowman Springs Rd.

Participate in the 13<sup>th</sup> annual GBBC event by walking the trails through post oak woodlands, savannahs, grasslands and around 4 ponds at this 58-acre city

park. A wide variety of birds has nearly always been reported here, with 30 species last year. Everyone's welcome!

Bring binoculars and bird guides if you have them; if you have extras, bring to share. Wear long pants and sturdy shoes or boots. Please note that although there are trails, the park is undeveloped and there are no facilities (water or restrooms). We'll meet for lunch afterwards to compare our species list and bird counts with those from previous years. Results will be reported to GBBC.

An RSVP would be appreciated, in case of inclement weather and to gauge parking needs, but isn't required. Contact [jgmiller5594@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jgmiller5594@sbcglobal.net) or 817/988-9341 for more information.



**Southwest Nature Preserve**  
**Bird Count**  
**Saturday, February 13**  
**9:00 – noon**

## ACC Makes Donation to Downwinders at Risk

At the first 2010 meeting of ACC's Board of Directors we voted to respond to Downwinders at Risk's year-end plea for money by donating \$1000 to that worthy organization. Specifically, we believe that ACC should support their lobbying efforts on behalf of clean Metroplex air by aiding Jim Schermbeck in his remarkable struggle with the forces

of big industry and the political establishment that so often appears to favor dirty air.

You can learn much, much more about Downwinders and their issues at <http://www.downwindersatrisk.org/>. And you'll surely see why your board members believe that this donation is your money well spent.

**Downwinders**  
reducing toxic air pollution in north texas *at risk*



## Cap-and-Trade Explained Grace Darling

If you are like me, you've heard of it but really don't know how it works. Journalist Mark Shapiro has been investigating how the system functions and the new, complicated bureaucracy that has developed around it. The following are annotated excerpts from his interview with NPR's Terry Gross (*Fresh Air*, January 28, 2010) that may answer some of these questions – and raise plenty of concerns.

**SHAPIRO:** The basic idea behind cap-and-trade is that the government issues limits on the amount of greenhouse gases that major industries can emit into the atmosphere, and then it permits companies to exceed those limits by purchasing an offset elsewhere. Offsets are essentially investments in emission-reduction projects, and can be anywhere in the world. The government establishes the caps on emissions but then allows you to obtain emission reductions so you can continue to pollute at home.

A significant portion of these offsets can be obtained in developing countries. An American company that exceeds its emissions cap can go to Brazil, China, or India, and can invest in, for example, a hydropower dam or a wind farm. You can also trade carbon offsets within the U.S., of course: If I'm Utility X and you are Utility Y, I'm emitting too much and you are emitting under your cap, I could buy the gap between your emission limit and how far under it you are.

**GROSS:** So the idea is that globally it all balances out, since people are trading in different parts of the world?

**SHAPIRO:** That's the theory. What's interesting is that the notion of greenhouse gases has suddenly given the world a startling realization that we are one planet, ecologically speaking. If you are polluting into the atmosphere in the United States and you have the ability to reduce pollution in Brazil or India or China, then the overall balance in the atmosphere is reduced.

**GROSS:** Who is already using this cap-and-trade system?

**SHAPIRO:** All 27 countries of the European Union, Japan, and several other developed countries, like New Zealand. These are the countries that signed the Kyoto Protocol in 1997; they are deeply invested in the idea of having



it's approaching more than \$150 billion – a huge market. What is it that's being traded? For example, you have a pig farm in Brazil that emits a lot of methane, a very potent greenhouse gas. Now somebody comes up with a proposal to reduce the methane emissions from pig farms, and you want to obtain money to incorporate that technology. You send that proposal to the United Nations and say that over the next five years you are going to reduce the emissions that otherwise would have occurred by a significant amount. The United Nations gives its stamp of approval, and you can then go sell that offset to an industry somewhere in the world that needs to reduce its own emissions.



emission limits on the one hand and the ability to purchase emission reductions somewhere else. The United Nations administers the program: the first time in history the UN is in the business of regulating a commodity. Because this thing called a carbon offset has been turned into a commodity. This is the fastest growing commodity market in the world, with companies buying and selling carbon credits like pork bellies or silver.

**GROSS:** What are people actually buying and selling?

**SHAPIRO:** A carbon credit is based on an emission-reduction promise. In 2005 this market was around zero, and now

**GROSS:** Wait, wait; that sounds so speculative. You are saying that company A has a plan to limit methane gas produced on a pig farm in Brazil, they go to the U.N. for approval of this plan, and then they sell that as carbon offsets to another company? But nothing has happened yet.

**SHAPIRO:** Exactly. You have a commodity that's based on a promise to reduce emissions in the future. It's about how you measure this commodity. With carbon, what you get is not something you can hold in your hand. What you get is a certificate that





## Wildscape Update **John Dycus**



What began in 1995 as a half-acre demonstration site has grown to more than four acres of urban wilderness restoration and wildlife habitat. The Molly Hollar Wildscape has

always been about educating the community to use native plants to attract wildlife, conserve resources and connect with nature, and now the outreach committee — volunteers Peggy Quinn, Hester Schwarzer, Callie Mitchell, Rosalie Rogers and Linda Zombeck — is stretching the education mission in exciting new directions.

Rosalie is out presenting the Powerpoint show to Lions Clubs and Rotary Clubs and recently to the Burleson Garden Club. Linda has created a self-guided tour, and soon signs will be up, with additional information on the website. Tours are planned for large student groups from Goodman Elementary and Rankin Elementary, and the wildscape continues to be a project site for Master Naturalists, Master Gardeners and the Native Plant Society.



Out in the city, the Arlington Parks and Recreation Department is planting more native Texas plants in our parks and some major building landscapes. City Hall, the APRD building and the downtown library have major face-lifts planned featuring Texas natives. To learn more about native plants, 60 park employees recently toured the wildscape.

More education, the first-Saturday mini-classes, continued in January on a

very cold day better suited for Mexican food — Mijo's! — than out communing with nature. Texas Parks and Wildlife urban biologist Jessica Alderson's talk on the importance of backyard wildscapes warmed a receptive crowd of 21 people. Hot coffee, chips and salsa were available, and some participants even knocked down a little breakfast or lunch. In more agreeable weather, the mini-classes meet at the wildscape pavilion. Jessica has agreed to lead a Powerpoint creation workshop for the outreach committee.



The APRD having all that inventory in its LEAF program turned the wildscapers green with envy, so they were thrilled to snag 35 big trees. While pondering the



prospect of digging 35 big holes, great wildscape friend Mike Warren at Tarrant County Juvenile Services called to see if there was anything his young men could do. Indeed, they could dig 27 holes (regular volunteers dug the other eight). Greenhouse volunteer Larry Norris made



numerous trips in his pickup to move the trees, and Callie Mitchell oversaw the planting. With only nine trees to go, APRD supervisor Martin Sanchez and



his Veterans Park crew finished the job. Hooray for all our friends.

The next spring plant sale, May 8, will provide indigenous native plants and information on their care. Available plants will soon be posted on the website, [thewildscape.org](http://thewildscape.org). Volunteers Josephine Keeney, Marylee Thomason, Kay Sekio, Jo Poppelreiter, Joe Martinez and Glenn Troutman meet every

*continued on page 6*





## Wildscape Update continued from page 5

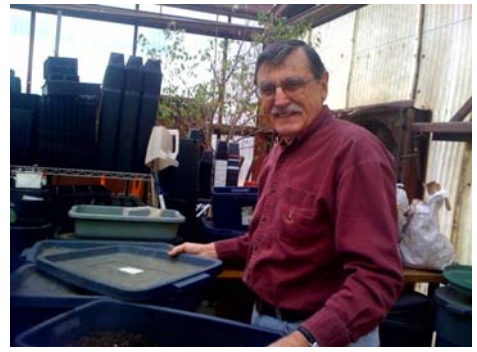


Tuesday morning at the Randol Mill Park greenhouse to propagate organically grown Texas native plants.

Glenn is expert at mixing greenhouse soil, repairing plant wagons and such, and he and Josephine and these super greenhouse volunteers are a huge part of the success of the wildscape. They have grown thousands of dollars worth of plants for actual planting and many more thousands of dollars worth for the twice-a-year sales. Their plants are usually better than commercial varieties because they're grown from local seed or cuttings without chemical fertilizers or pesticides.



On February 27 wildscape president Danny Kocurek will again lead the attack against Japanese honeysuckle and the privet that ate Pawtucket. Last year the APRD chainsaw crews and impassioned privateers eliminated the worst areas. But birds eat nearby privet and honeysuckle berries, and from their droppings sprout new shoots of Satan's weed. The small evergreen privet and honeysuckle are easy to find in February, and winter rains make the ground soft for pulling. Thus eradication has become an annual project of highest priority. Thank goodness it gets easier each year.



## January Business Meeting and Brunch



Thanks to everyone who came out to our annual meeting for all the great conversation and marvelous food. We're indebted once again to The Montessori Academy of Arlington for the use of the room. *(Note: The editor normally avoids photos of the president, but it can't be helped this time. It never occurred to your outgoing president that there would be gifts. Thanks to everyone for the privilege you've given me since 2007.)*



## Gas Well News Update **Danny Kocurek**

If you are thinking that the long awaited release of the TCEQ gas well air testing results last month was going to clear the air, think again. With great fanfare the test results were released and the TCEQ representative announced that the air around gas wells in the Barnett Shale was clean. Lots of questions were raised immediately about who did the testing, were the results potentially compromised by testing only on 3 very cold days in December, and why so few air samples were actually taken. Within a week, TCEQ had announced that the testing was just a “screening” and that more testing was to follow. A week later TCEQ released the results of another round of testing, which was actually done prior to the testing in December, which showed levels of benzene (a known carcinogen) that exceeded safe levels in 20% of the sites tested. Other chemicals, like carbon disulfide, ethane and isopentane, were also found at excessive levels at some of the wells. According to TCEQ, repairs were made at the sites with excessive benzene levels as a result of the study.

This is obviously a convoluted process and the reports are confusing, whether due to disorganization or incompetence is up for debate. But what is perfectly clear is that there is cause for concern for those living or working close to well sites. As a result of the studies, TCEQ announced the following plan:



- TCEQ has already instituted new complaint and investigation guidelines for oil and gas production areas that will see citizen complaints investigated within 12 hours. Investigations can result in enforcement actions against entities responsible for excessive emissions.

- Two new long-term auto-GC monitors (these monitors perform continuous, near-real-time VOC monitoring) will be installed at DISH and Eagle Mountain Lake to get a better understanding of long-term ambient air conditions and to help assess the emissions inventory of sources, including an actual gas analysis from each site.
- TCEQ will investigate sources for proper permit authorizations and require testing of sites with continued excessive emissions.
- TCEQ has undertaken a review of permitting rules that apply to oil and gas operations. The review will ensure that authorizations and permits are enforceable and protective of public health, and that they properly regulate all operations located at an oil and gas site.
- TCEQ will continue to provide compliance assistance to small operators, focused initially on condensate producers.

More testing is sure to follow, so stay tuned. The only good news is that TCEQ now appears to be challenging industry claims that “everything is okay, trust us.” Please remind your city council representatives today that you are very concerned about the health effects of gas wells in your city.

## What's in Those Gas Well Ponds?



On February 6 there were about two dozen Ring-necked ducks and four Canvasbacks on the Masonic Home gas well pond near Davis and Division Streets. Is this a happy winter resting spot or some sort of toxic trap?



## Cap-and-Trade Explained continued from page 4

promises X amount of emissions reductions over the next several years. It's these certificates that are becoming the hottest commodity in the world. Why? Because most of the developed world now operates under a cap-and-trade system, which means you've got hundreds of billions of dollars in search of offsets. These packages of carbon promises are also being speculated upon in a secondary market, which is essentially a derivatives market where people bet on the price of carbon, much like they bet on the mortgage derivatives [before the recession]. London is now the center of this international carbon trade, largely because the U.S. pulled out of Kyoto. Some of the major American financial houses, like Goldman Sachs, Citi Bank, Merrill Lynch, JP Morgan – which also owns one of the biggest carbon brokerage firms – have carbon-trading desks in London. These financial giants are very much looking forward to this market coming to the United States.

**GROSS:** How do investors make money on carbon trading?

**SHAPIRO:** Say that Company A needs to buy carbon offsets to meet its emission limits. It can go to company B and try to buy those offsets or go to an investment house that controls a whole group of offsets, like a million tons each. If you are a speculator, you can buy these bundles of carbon offsets at the current price – e.g., \$20 a ton – and put them in your pocket and hope that the price will go up to, say, \$22. Then you are going to sell it on the market either to another speculator or to a business that needs those emission offsets. A lot of people are making quite a bit of money speculating on carbon. It's a pretty liquid market and it's growing rapidly.

There are people who see parallels between the carbon markets and the derivatives markets, and this is the reason why. If you unpack those derivative bundles, each is based on many different projects. It could be a methane-reduction project in Brazil, a dam in India, a windmill farm in China – all bundled together into the same package. These projects all have various levels of

reliability, various means of measurement, various degrees of predictability. The calculations are very different when it comes to a methane-reduction plant, a wind farm, or a solar panel complex. There is a whole new array of companies that have been certified by the United Nations to do those calculations; they are called Designated Operational Entities. But there's a great deal of concern about how reliable the valuation of those carbon bundles is.

Think of it this way: These DOEs are measuring a promise. For example, a



company runs a pig iron factory in Brazil. The company used to use oil to fire up its factory, but then it proposes to the U.N. that instead of using oil, it's going to plant a bunch of trees. The trees will grow for seven, eight, nine years – during which time they are removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere but also soaking up carbon from the soil – and then the trees will be burned, turned into charcoal, and the charcoal used to fire up the pig iron factory. At several stages along the way, the company claims that it is reducing emissions by a certain amount and calculates what the net carbon savings will be in 10 or 15 years. Before the project is approved by the U.N., the DOE is brought in to validate those claims – the way that

Standard & Poor's and Moody's operate on Wall Street to establish the valuation of a company.

**GROSS:** A couple of these validators were found to have done very inaccurate valuations, right?

**SHAPIRO:** Yes, and they were the two major validators, who together are responsible for more than half of the offset emissions in the world. The U.N. suddenly found these firms did not have the technical skills to conduct the analyses, there was a lot of discrepancy in their findings, and essentially their calculations were flawed. Overnight, hundreds of millions of tons of carbon credits that were being bought and sold were called into question. Since then, both these companies have cleaned up their act and been reinstated as validators by the United Nations. But what remains is a doubt that the fundamental premise of cap-and-trade – a worldwide market based on buying and selling of carbon credits – will actually result in emissions reductions.

**GROSS:** The European Union has said that the system they're using for cap-and-trade works. Do you agree?

**SHAPIRO:** It works to some extent. As a market it works very well; in terms of greenhouse gases control, the system overestimates by 15 to 35 percent the emissions reductions achieved. You are getting emissions reductions, but not nearly as much as you think you are.

**GROSS:** What are the alternatives to cap-and-trade?

**SHAPIRO:** A carbon tax has been proposed, but that's unlikely to pass anytime in the near future in the U.S. This whole elaborate system I've tried to describe was created to detour a carbon tax. And the irony is, if you were to actually have this whole system working with the effectiveness that it claims, you would in some ways end up with a carbon tax.





## 2110 Bronze Leaf Nomination **Grace Darling**

*Editor's note: The Cross Timbers Urban Forestry Council gives annual awards in several categories to those who advance the goals of urban forestry. This year ACC has submitted the following nomination on behalf of Arlington Parks & Recreation's forester, Matt Churches:*

Matt Churches is a treasure. His career began on the West Coast, where he worked for the U.S. Forest Service and later as a firefighter with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. He then went to work as a utility arborist on vegetation management contracts to ensure quality service for utility companies and their customers. Along the way he received a Bachelor of Science degree on Forestry and Rangeland Management from the University of Nevada, Reno, and rose to be operations manager at ACRT for three years. In what turned out to be a pivotal move in his professional life, Matt joined the city of Arlington's parks and recreation staff in December of 2008: Thus he came over from the dark side and joined a peaceful world of high-minded colleagues dedicated to protecting and growing the urban forest.

Shortly after he came to Arlington, Matt was given the daunting task of conducting a city-wide tree inventory that would provide a baseline on the state of our municipal canopy and guide future management decisions by city officials. Never one to settle for less than the best, Matt organized an intensive, two-day training workshop for professionals and volunteers on UFORE surveying techniques, led jointly by Courtney Blevins and Micah Pace, Staff Foresters with the Texas Forest Service in Fort Worth and Dallas, respectively. After several months of scientific data collection by Matt and other Forestry Division staff, volunteers, and one contractor, the UFORE survey was completed and the data now await analysis.

Matt was also charged with the responsibility of maintaining the city's tree farm and running the LEAF (Let's Enhance Arlington's Forest) program.

With the help of a few dedicated volunteers from the community, he is slowly transforming a run-down, meager tree farm into a vibrant, valuable reservoir for plant material. On the LEAF program, Matt has implemented new processes to reduce paper usage, increase efficiency and improve coordination with citizen groups.

Matt is a great addition to our forestry staff, full of energy and enthusiasm, focused and good-humored, always researching and looking for new techniques to make us more effective in our goal to improve the urban canopy and increase efficiency of the city's operations. He has adjusted admirably from cutting trees to growing them and creating plans to install more. He recently passed the Municipal Arborist Exam and is a credit to his profession.

Please help us honor his achievements with the Bronze Leaf Award.

Recently, Matt Churches taught a class on winter tree identification at River Legacy Living Science Center. Despite very cold weather, about 40 people showed up to learn about buds, leaf scars, branching patterns, and bark texture.

Matt made a difficult subject accessible while his manner encouraged questions even as participants fended off hypothermia.



## Arlington Conservation Council Membership Application

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

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## THE POST OAK

Arlington Conservation Council

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# Don't Forget!

Wednesday February 10

7:00 pm

**Rita Beving:**

***Energy-Efficient Cities and  
How You Can Help***

Be sure to visit us at

***arlingtonconservationcouncil.org***

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