

ARLINGTON CONSERVATION COUNCIL

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

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May Meeting

Walk on the Wildside

Tarri Miller, Carrie Donovan,
Goodman Elementary School,
and Peggy Quinn,
Walk on the Wildside Coordinator

Wednesday, May 7, 7 pm
Fielder Museum, 1616 W. Abram St
(corner of Fielder and Abram)



Take a walk on the wildside and share students' wonder as they experience nature at the Molly Hollar Wildscape and learn about the benefits of this marvelous nature program.

Don't forget to bring something for the raffle.

Bits & Pieces

Not Your Average Mouse

For something you probably won't see, the nocturnal Fulvous harvest mouse is a small bundle of interesting facts: They're good climbers that build baseball-sized nests in plants; they eat invertebrates in season and seeds at other times; and they seem to live in monogamous pairs during their short lives of about 12 to 14 months.



Today's Inspirational Moment



Nothing is rich but the inexhaustible wealth of nature. She shows us only surfaces, but she is a million fathoms deep.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Native Plant Advice Made Simple

Overheard wisdom from a local expert: "If you don't like hummingbirds, don't plant flame acanthus."



Down with Bags, Please



A Prairie Fest highlight was a happy guy from Texas Campaign for the Environment wandering around dressed in hundreds of plastic bags. He even had a petition to sign to get rid of the nasty things.

Austin, Brownsville, Fort Stockton, Kermit, Dallas, and Laredo have regulated or banned bags. Aren't we overdue?

From the President Danny Kocurek



You might have read about the recent decision by the Executive Director of the Texas Water Development Board to include the Marvin Nichols Reservoir in the state's water plan and are wondering

why so many different groups are condemning it. The proposal is to build the reservoir in northeast Texas and pump the water to the Metroplex to meet growing demand. The land that will be taken by the state is mostly family farms and forests. As you can imagine, the owners of the land are not happy that the state would take their land, area businesses are not happy that their customers will be forced to move and many people are angry that more native forests will be destroyed, not to mention the downstream damage to wildlife, parks and rivers. And no one likes the thought of the \$2 billion the project will waste.

Which brings up the question of why we need all of this water in the Metroplex. According to the TWDB, the cities of Arlington, Fort Worth, and Dallas used 20 billion gallons in 2011 to water our lawns. Remember that is only for these 3 cities. That is 37% of total

residential water use. It appears the reason we are going to inflict this much pain on our neighbors to the east is because we want green grass in August.

I know what you're thinking. Surely reason will win out in the end before this wasteful plan is carried out. Traditionally, the Republican party believed an individual's property should not be taken away for the benefit of others. They also believed in fiscal discipline, which would not mean spending \$2 billion on an unnecessary project. Folks, this isn't your father's Republican party.

So what can you do? Most everyone reading this is already conserving water, but we all need to be more vocal and let our local and state representatives know how we feel. Most non-politicians don't understand this project either, so take time to explain what is really going on to your friends and family. If we leave it up to Rick Perry and Greg Abbott, it is not going to happen.

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Blackland Prairie Preserve Jan Miller



Both Blackland Prairie Preserve and Southwest Nature Preserve will be included in a "State of the Prairie" field trip on May 29. Workdays at both preserves will focus

on getting ready for these visitors. For more information about this statewide conference, see below.

Friends of the Prairie

An organizational meeting is being planned for the near future to strategize on next steps for the preserve. Please e-mail prairie@acctexas.org if you'd like to participate.



3rd Saturday Workday

May 17, 9 am – noon

Getting ready for State of the Prairie fieldtrip! We'll clean up around the entrance area and prepare for the state conference fieldtrip on 5/29; see more information below.

Wear sturdy soled shoes/boots and long pants. Bring gloves, loppers and hand saws if you have them. Please bring your own water, but refills will be provided. Highly recommended: sun protection and bug spray.

For map and directions: <http://goo.gl/maps/W01P9>

STATE OF THE PRAIRIE CONFERENCE:

"Prairies in a Changing World"

Fort Worth

Thursday, May 29 – Sunday, June 1

Fort Worth will host this prairie conference, a joint meeting of Native Prairies Association of Texas and Coastal Prairie Partnership. This is the 5th annual meeting, but the first time it's ever been hosted in North Central Texas. Field trips to some of our best public and private prairie sites will be offered on 5/29 and 6/1, including Tandy Hills, Southwest Nature Preserve, Blackland Prairie Preserve, FW Nature Center, LLELA and more. Conference topics will be presented in three subject tracks, with presenters from Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma.

For more information:

<http://prairiepartner.org/page/2014-sop-conference>

Wildscape Update **Molly Hollar, Marylee Thomason, and John Dycus**

Almost 80 third-graders, wriggling with excitement but quiet and well-behaved, piled out of two huge yellow school buses April 10 for the annual Walk on the Wildside.

Accompanied by about a dozen teachers and parents, the Goodman Elementary School students quickly got up to kid speed on a number of topics, thanks to the genius of wildscape volunteers.

Jane Oosterhuis and Josephine Keeney informed on butterflies and metamorphosis. Terry and Ramona Gratton discussed erosion. Molly Hollar and Anne Alderfer showed how to make seed balls and told the kids why seed balls are important.

Dawn Hancock and Joyce Duty demonstrated flower mutilation (or flower parts) and described the flower blossoms. Hester Schwarzer and Marylee Thomason talked about trees, and Marylee Thomason debuted her photo-

synthesis rap. You never know what you'll encounter at Walk on the Wildside.

WOW is a major element in the wildscape's outreach. Hopefully the students took their knowledge and enthusiasm home and passed everything on to their second-grader siblings (and maybe mom and dad).

Many thanks to the parents, teachers and other wildscape volunteers who took pictures, guided and helped with setup, and especially to Peggy Quinn for organizing the event.

Two other groups of youthful helpers invigorated the wildscape recently. Twenty seniors from Mansfield Summit High School's Summit Teen Leadership chose the wildscape for their volunteer project. They moved a mountain of mulch onto washed-out trails in the hardest-to-reach areas of the wildscape forest.

During a break, longtime bird expert Charlie Amos spoke to the group about birds he saw in the area and the incom-

parable value of volunteering. Appreciation swings both ways. The students invited Molly and Peggy to view the PowerPoint presentation of their impressive accomplishments in Veterans Park.

Still in mulch mode, UTA's The Big Event brought out 30 strong, environmentally conscious young people to continue the beneficial work. Park supervisor and super wildscape supporter Martin Sanchez supplied extra wheelbarrows and pitchforks and two proficient personnel to help supervise. Hours later, miles of trails were covered with fresh mulch.

Molly posed for pictures with sorority sisters from Delta Sigma Theta, who toiled with great industry in service to their community. All of the wildscape volunteers, whose average age hovers in the seniors range, sincerely appreciate these young people and their work.



Southwest Nature Preserve Jan Miller

Friends of Southwest Nature Preserve
Dinner meeting
Tuesday, May 20
6:30 p.m.
Southwest Branch Public Library (or at
SWNP, weather permitting)
3311 SW Green Oaks Blvd (east of Park
Springs & west of Bowen)

There are many ways to participate:
invasive plant management, trail man-
agement, erosion control, communica-
tion/IT, public outreach, organizational
planning and more, or if you'd just like to
be part of the Friends group, contact
prairie@acctexas.org.



2nd Thursday workday
May 8, 9 – noon

4th Saturday workday
May 24, 9am – noon

For information contact
prairie@acctexas.org



Thanks to Our Last Speakers



It was a beautiful evening for an outdoor meeting at ACC President Danny Kocurek's house last month. Danny and Dustan Compton, Arlington Water Utilities Conservation Program Coordinator, gave us the practical details of rainwater harvesting.

We learned about everything from outfitting basic barrels to designing big systems with ways to divert the first flush of leaves and gunk. We're indebted to Dustan and Danny for a fine program.



Make Arlington better: Join ACC today. Use the form on the back page.

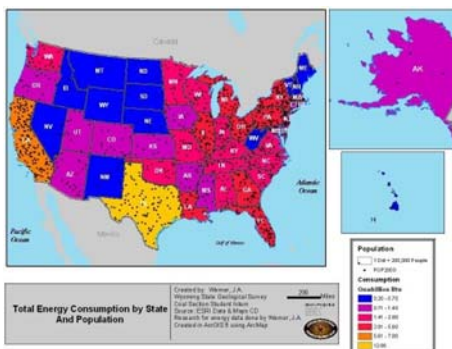
Renewable Energy Revisited: Part 1 Grace Darling

Two recent news items gave me the idea for this column. One was the bankruptcy claim by Dallas-based Energy Future Holdings, the parent company of Luminant, TXU, and Oncor. The second was a Supreme Court decision to uphold a federal rule designed to curb emissions from coal-fired power plants. It started me thinking, what's new about solar electricity? Where does Texas stand in the renewable energy landscape? When can we expect to put up those PV panels and start making our own juice? I'll share the highlights of my research below.

Background

From *U.S. Energy Information Administration*, the following facts:

Texas produces more electricity than any other state, generating almost twice as much as the next largest generating state. Two-thirds of the electricity generated is from independent power producers. Almost one-half of the electricity generated in Texas comes from natural gas-fired power plants, while coal-fired power plants account for about one-third of the net electricity generation. Six of the state's 10 largest power plants are coal-fired. Two nuclear plants, Comanche Peak and South Texas Project, supply about one-tenth of the state's electric power generation. The rest of Texas' electricity generation is powered by renewable resources, primarily wind.



Energy consumption by state. Yellow is the highest.



While Texas leads the nation in total energy production, largely from crude oil and natural gas, it also leads the nation in energy consumption, accounting for more than one-tenth of the U.S. total.

Texas is also the largest electricity consuming state. Unlike other regions where large net interstate electricity deliveries are available, the Texas power grid is largely isolated from the interconnected power systems serving the eastern and western United States. This isolation means the state is, for the most part, dependent on its own resources to meet its electricity needs, and it is not subject to federal rules. Among the nation's contiguous 48 states, Texas is the only state that has a stand-alone electric grid entirely within the state.

The largest portion of the retail electricity sales in Texas is to the residential sector. One-half of the households in the state use electricity as their primary heating fuel. The residential use of electricity is higher in Texas than in other states, in part because of population size, but also because of high demand for air conditioning during the hot summer months and the widespread use of electricity as the primary energy source for home heating during the generally mild winter months. The average annual

electricity cost per Texas household is \$1,801, among the highest in the nation.

Traditional vs Renewable Energy



Coal-fired power plants in Texas

The power that makes lights go on and many machines work is electricity. The electric system consists of three parts: a power-generating plant (for example, Luminant's Big Brown), a retail electricity provider or REP (e.g., TXU), and a distributor (such as Oncor) that installs and maintains the wires going from the source to our homes and businesses to deliver electricity — the grid.

Traditional power plants that run on coal are extremely polluting, spewing

continued on page 7

Renewable Energy Revisited continued from page 6

huge amounts of sulfur dioxide and CO₂. A report by Environment Texas finds that Texas ranks #1 in the country for most carbon pollution from its power plants, the state's largest single source of global warming pollution. From their report:

- Luminant Generation Company LLC's Martin Lake and Monticello Power Plants are the 3rd and 17th most carbon-polluting power plants in the nation.
- NRG Texas Power's W.A. Parish and Limestone power plants are ranked 5th and 19th most carbon polluting in the nation.
- Texas' power plants combined produce as much carbon each year as 45.9 million cars.

Fortunately for us, Texas is also the leader among natural gas-producing states, accounting for about 30% of marketed NG in the U.S. About half of Texas power plants are NG-fired and already meet the new EPA emission standards. In fact, 6 new generating units operating on natural gas are expected to go online by August, though ERCOT, the regulator of the electric distribution grid for most of Texas, said consumers could still be asked to conserve electricity during extremely hot weather or in case of outages to help avoid blackouts.

Renewable energy sources include photovoltaics, landfill gas, wind, biomass, hydroelectric, geothermal, anaerobic digestion, tidal energy, and wave energy. Collectively these sources have a much smaller carbon footprint than traditional coal- or natural gas-fired plants and, unlike those fossil fuels, will never run out.

Renewable energy sources contribute less than one-tenth of the net generation in Texas. However, with close to one-sixth of the U.S. total, the state is the leader in electricity generation from non-hydroelectric renewable resources and is rapidly developing more, particularly wind.



Wind Power Basics

Wind accounts for nearly all of the current renewable-energy electricity generation in Texas. The state leads the nation in wind-powered generation with 7 of the 10 largest wind farms, including 4 of the top 5, and is the first state to reach 10,000 megawatts of wind energy installations. Substantial new wind generation capacity is under construction, with more than 7,000 megawatts of new wind turbines scheduled to be built by the end of next year. And with the completion of Texas' \$7 billion Competitive Renewable Energy Zone project, there are now more transmission lines than needed to bring the generated power from wind farms in the Panhandle and Gulf Coast to metropolitan areas like DFW, Austin, and San Antonio.

The wind industry in Texas has come a long way since its beginnings in the mid 2000s. Unlike the experience of T. Boone Pickens, who in 2008 announced plans to build "the world's largest wind farm" and promptly lost \$150 million, many Fortune 500 companies are now jumping on the renewable energy bandwagon. For example, as part of an effort to become carbon neutral, Microsoft Corp. has entered into a 20-year deal to buy power from a new wind farm in Texas. And Google is investing \$75 million in a wind farm under development outside Amarillo, its second wind project in Texas and 15th in the nation. Named Panhandle 2, the farm will have 182-mW capacity and it's scheduled to begin operation by the end of 2014. According to the company's blog, Google

has set itself the goal of getting all its power from renewable sources.

Homeowners who buy electricity from Green Mountain Energy or choose the "green option" offered by their REP use the power supplied by the grid, but have their purchases credited to a wind source. Power prices in Texas are tied to the price of natural gas, therefore wind power prices are likely to stay low for years due to the shale drilling revolution.

As for applying wind turbine technology to residential use, SFGate explains the sobering facts:

- Powering the average home requires between 5 and 10 kilowatts (kW) of energy-generating capacity. A horizontal turbine with that much juice ranges in diameter between 12 and 25 feet, [costs many thousands of dollars,] and could generate enough to sell electricity back to the grid. Most homeowners who utilize wind energy install smaller systems that generate only a portion of their needs. For a wind turbine to be effective, average wind speeds must be over 12 miles per hour.
- To get clear of ground turbulence and slower winds, most turbines should be mounted on a building (for smaller models), a pole or a tower between 30 and 140 feet high. The average height for residential turbines is about 80 feet. State and local zoning codes may set minimum land requirements or maximum height limits.

Next month: Solar Power Basics



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THE POST OAK

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Don't Forget!

Wednesday, May 7

Fielder Museum

7:00 - 8:00 pm

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