



Texas Wetland News

and WETLAND CONSERVATION PLAN UPDATE

TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE

JANUARY 2008

MASTER NATURALIST PROGRAM SEEKS APPLICANTS

Twenty-two chapters of the Texas Master Naturalist program are conducting spring training classes for volunteers wanting to learn about natural resource and conservation management.

The Texas Master Naturalist program, with 41 chapters located across the state, aims to develop a corps of well-informed citizen volunteers who educate their communities about the wise management of natural resources. The main qualification needed to become a certified Texas Master Naturalist is an interest in learning and playing an active part in conservation.

Volunteers who sign up for the program will receive a minimum of 40 hours of training from educators and specialists from universities, natural resource agencies, nature centers and museums, to include training topics on interpretation and management of natural resources, ecological concepts, ecoregions in Texas and natural systems management. Volunteers are expected to give 40 hours of service a year in community education, demonstration and habitat enhancement projects and are also expected to pursue a minimum of eight hours of advance training in areas of personal interest.

See class schedule on pages 6-7.

Old River Cove Marsh Restoration Project at the Lower Neches Wildlife Management Area

The low level coastal plains that surround the rivers, bayous and shoreline of the northern portion of Sabine Lake are components of an ecosystem that is important to wildlife, fish and water quality. The Old River Unit of the Lower Neches Wildlife Management Area is composed of these coastal marshes that are vital to the Southeast Texas area. Located on the northeast corner of Sabine Lake in Orange County, the Lower Neches WMA is 7,998 acres of emergent marsh between the Neches and Sabine rivers.

Over the last half century, a large portion of this emergent marsh has been lost due to human activities. The dredging of numerous navigation channels in the area caused an increase in saltwater intrusion and surface subsidence. Due to

(Continued on the next page)

Dredged material being stacked and slurried before being used for mound and terrace restoration in open water areas.





Aerial photo of marsh mounds and terraces during construction.

Old River Cove Marsh Restoration Project, continued

the fragile nature of the highly organic soils, the emergent marsh has been slowly degraded and converted to open water from the impact of fast flows of tides in and out of the marsh.

In order to reclaim some of the emergent marsh and historic hydrological flow in the Lower Neches Wildlife Management Area, the Old River Restoration Project began. This project has used two phases in order to accomplish these goals.

One phase of the project uses the placement of two earthen plugs and culverts to restore the historic hydrologic flows that the marsh once had. The other phase of

the project uses dredge material mined from an old disposal site to restore elevation of the open water areas back to emergent marsh levels and allow vegetation to regain coverage. By restoring the hydrologic flows and bringing open water areas back to marsh level, the marsh can regain its historic hydrologic and vegetative form.

The restoration of hydrologic flows to the marsh began with the construction of two earthen plugs and culverts under nearby Lake Street. One plug was built across a ditch beside SH 87 just outside of Bridge City and functions to attenuate tidal fluctuations and prevent frequent inflows of saltwater into the marshes north of

the highway. The newest plug crosses a ditch along Lake Street on the east side of the project and serves the same functions in addition to forcing tidal waters to follow the historic water course of Old River Bayou. The plugs slow the normal tidal surge in and out of the marsh to reduce spikes in salinity and also deter the ill effects of strong tidal flows.

The culverts are located under Lake Street near the old bayou channel, and aid the re-direction of tidal movement back to historic flows. These plugs were constructed at a level that would still allow high water to crest over the top, but not allow the velocity of the water to be as high as it enters and leaves the marsh. With the plugs put into place at this elevation, normal tidal flow is forced through the historic system of bayous and marsh, and hydrology is restored to its historic patterns.

The other phase of the Old River Restoration Project is the reconstruction of lost emergent marsh using dredge

material. Material used for this phase of the project was already in place in a mound located directly adjacent to the project on Texas Parks and Wildlife Department land. This material was dredged from the Gulf States Utilities canal when it was constructed and provided an excellent source of material near the project. The material from this mound was excavated, slurried, then pumped into open water areas of the marsh to create mounds and terraces that will allow the marsh to regain its historic emergent cover.

The reconstruction of lost emergent marsh would not be complete without the reestablishment of vegetative cover. This was accomplished by planting the mounds and terraces with beneficial marsh grass clusters in order for bare ground to regain cover and maintain soil stability. Once the newly placed dirt had settled, marsh grasses were planted by hand and have already increased in coverage in many areas in the short time they have been in place. With the new plantings and the

Marsh grasses on mounds after recent planting.



number of volunteer plants, it is expected that the mounds and terraces will regain vegetative cover relatively quickly.

The benefits of this project have already become evident. Submerged vegetation has increased greatly as this project has progressed. This increased amount of submerged vegetative cover provides vital cover for marine organisms and food for migrating waterfowl. Many small wading birds and migrating waterfowl have already been seen in the marsh restoration area, with high numbers of fish and shrimp utilizing the submerged vegetation.

The benefits of this project go beyond the immediate footprint it has made and have had a positive impact on the marshes that surround the area. The surrounding marshes benefit from the restoration of hydrologic flows

to the marsh by no longer being subjected to the stress of salinity spikes and strong tidal currents eroding the fragile organic soils. Increasing the amount of vegetative cover in the project site provides a source of new plants to colonize the surrounding marshes, helps reduce the strength of wind-generated waves within open water areas of the marsh, and increases the size of habitat patches, benefiting all wetland wildlife. This has increased the overall health of the marsh surrounding the project.

The Old River Restoration Project has been a shining example of how dredge material, once thought of as waste, can be used to repair emergent marsh. Along with the increase in emergent marsh and the example of how historic water flows benefit submerged vegetation, the knowledge gained from this project can be applied in other marshes in need of restoration.

**For more information, contact
Andrew Peters at (409) 736-2551.**

*Old River Marsh Restoration Site at the foot
of the Rainbow Bridge in Orange County.*



Carter Smith Named TPWD Executive Director

SAN ANTONIO, Texas — Carter Smith was named executive director of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department on Dec. 5 at a special meeting of the TPW Commission in San Antonio. Smith will be leaving the helm at The Nature Conservancy of Texas to take the top job at TPWD.

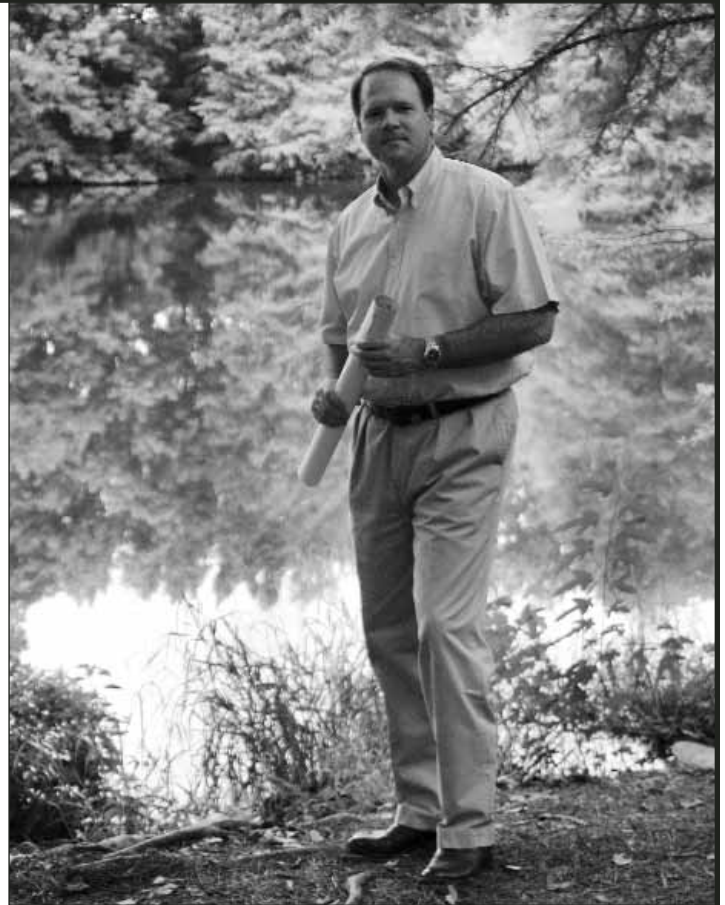
“Carter Smith is a well-respected conservationist and has proven his ability to develop successful partnerships with landowners and others,” said TPW Commission Chairman Peter Holt. “He is a hunter and angler and a seventh-generation Texas landowner. He understands the conservation challenges we face in our rapidly growing and changing state and will provide a fresh perspective as we strive to meet our mission.”

The Commission took action to accept the recommendation of the search committee in a public meeting after discussing the issue in executive session. The search committee consisted of TPW Commission Chairman Peter Holt, Chairman-Emeritus Lee Bass, Vice-Chairman Dan Friedkin, Commissioner Mark Bivins, and former Chairman Joseph Fitzsimons.

Smith has been with The Nature Conservancy of Texas since 1998 and has been the state director since 2004. Prior to his promotion to state director, Smith served as director of conservation programs, where he was responsible for conservation, external affairs and science programs. Before working at The Nature Conservancy, he was the first executive director of the Katy Prairie Conservancy and continues to serve on their Advisory Board.

Smith is a native of Central Texas and began his career in 1992 at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department as a management intern, assisting in the Private Lands and Public Hunting programs. He has a wildlife management degree from Texas Tech and a master's degree in conservation biology from Yale University.

Smith has served on numerous science, conservation, land trust and advisory councils. Besides the Katy Prairie Conservancy, he has served on the Texas Land Trust Council



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and advisory boards for Texas Tech, Texas A&M and Texas State University. Most recently, he served on TPWD's State Parks Advisory Committee.

“I am deeply honored to accept this new challenge,” said Smith. “I was very fortunate to begin my professional career at Texas Parks and Wildlife, and have had much contact with the professionals at the agency through the years. I look forward to working with people I admire and respect to further TPWD's conservation mission.”

Texas Parks and Wildlife is the state agency responsible for managing and conserving Texas' natural and cultural resources. The agency has an annual budget of \$405.8 million and a full-time staff of about 3,100 in 11 internal divisions: Wildlife, Coastal Fisheries, Inland Fisheries, Law Enforcement, State Parks, Infrastructure, Communications, Administrative Resources, Information Technology, Human Resources and Legal.

Smith will replace Robert L. Cook, who retired on August 31, 2007. Cook has been executive director since February 2002 and is serving as interim executive director until Smith takes the helm in late January.

Master Naturalist Training Classes

Texas Master Naturalist Chapters that are offering volunteer training this spring are listed below with contact information. Enrollment is limited in most chapters and some registration deadlines are approaching fast, so contact a chapter near you to see if seating is still available.

ABILENE–Big Country Chapter

Training begins April 7, 2008 and registration closes April 2. Call (325) 672-6048 or e-mail jaeger@hughes.net

AUSTIN–Capital Area Chapter

The 2008 class registration has closed. Contact the chapter to be included on the wait list for the next class. For chapter information, visit <http://camn.org>

BRENHAM–Gideon Lincecum Chapter

Classes begin February 2. Registration deadline is January 25. For details, call (936) 878-1988 or visit <http://gideonlincecum.org>

BURNET–Highland Lakes Chapter

Training starts March 6 and registration accepted until then unless the course limit is reached. For information, e-mail hlmninfo@281.com

CAMERON–El Camino Real Chapter

The initial class of this new chapter begins on January 15 with an early December registration deadline. Enrollment information available at (254) 605-0669 or e-mail michael.mitchell@tpwd.state.tx.us

CONROE/HUNTSVILLE–Heartwood Chapter

Classes begin March 1 and the registration deadline is February 15, 2008. For information, call (832) 381-6921 or e-mail training@heartwoodtmn.org

DALLAS–North Texas Chapter

The chapter will host an Open House on January 8, 2008 and the registration deadline is January 12. Classes begin February 12. Call (972) 248-7980 or e-mail glferris@mac.com for more information.

EL PASO–Trans Pecos Chapter

Register no later than January 17, 2008 to begin the class on February 13. Class is limited to 25. For specific information, call (915) 851-2515.

GALVESTON–Galveston Bay Area Chapter

Training begins February 14 and registration ends February 8. Class is limited to 20 students. For details, call (281) 534-3413, ext. 2 or e-mail jk-massey@tamu.edu

Houston–Gulf Coast Chapter. Classes begin February 25 and the registration deadline is February 9. Call (281) 855-5600 or e-mail gcmn@tamu.edu



Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas Cooperative Extension co-sponsor the Texas Master Naturalist program. For more information about existing chapters or forming a new chapter, contact Sonny Arnold, Assistant Program Coordinator, 111 Nagle Hall, 2258, TAMU, College Station, TX 77843-2258. Call (979) 458-1099 or e-mail sarnold@ag.tamu.edu

Master Naturalist Training Classes

JEFFERSON—Cypress Basin Chapter

This new chapter starts classes on February 7 and needs applications no later than February 1. Details available by calling (903) 679-9817 or e-mail bwbailey1@peoplepc.com

LUBBOCK—South Plains Chapter

The first class is set for January 17 with a registration deadline set for January 11. More information available by calling (806) 785-5079 or e-mail samcwhitehead@nts-online.net

MIDLAND—Llano Estacado Chapter

Classes begin January 19 and your registration is needed by January 5. Details available by e-mail at lsh@lyntegar.com

NAVASOTA—Cinco Tierra Chapter

Training starts January 12 and the registration deadline is January 1. More information is available by calling (936) 825-9242 or e-mail cinco_tierra@yahoo.com

PLANO—Blackland Prairie Chapter

The first class is set for February 13 and applications due by February 1. Call (972) 248-6283 or e-mail svevans@sbcglobal.net for information.

ROCKPORT—Mid Coast Chapter.

Training begins February 9. For dates and information, call (979) 245-4100 or visit <http://midcoast.tamu.edu>

SAN ANTONIO—Alamo Area Chapter. Classes start February 28 with applications accepted until February 1. For information, call (210) 842-7967 or e-mail pball0908@earthlink.net

SAN BENITO—Rio Grande Valley Chapter

Training begins February 6 with a registration deadline on January 25. Call (956) 361-8236, e-mail fwiseman@rgv.rr.com or visit the chapter Web site at www.rgvctmn.org

SAN MARCOS—Hays County Chapter

Classes begin in February. For details, e-mail jcheath42@msn.com

TYLER—East Texas Chapter. Classes begin January 19 and registration ends January 11. Call (903) 849-2939 or e-mail: genedgordon@aol.com

WACO—Heart of Texas Chapter

Training begins January 19 with a registration deadline of January 4. For details, call (254) 848-9654 or e-mail noras@ci.waco.tx.us

WICHITA FALLS—Rolling Plains Chapter

Training begins March 25 with the registration deadline on March 14. For details, contact Mark Howell at (940) 766-2383 or e-mail mark.howell@tpwd.state.tx.us

WANT TO GET ON THE MAILING LIST?

Send your name and physical mailing address to jennifer.key@tpwd.state.tx.us to receive *Texas Wetland News* twice a year free of charge.

HAVE AN ARTICLE YOU'D LIKE TO SUBMIT?

If you would like to submit an article or announcement concerning wetland-related activities, initiatives, or workshops* for the next *Texas Wetland News*, please e-mail the editor at: jennifer.key@tpwd.state.tx.us

**Please note that the newsletter cannot include announcements of for-fee seminars or workshops for which Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is not a sponsor.*

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Your input is a valuable resource and we're always open to suggestions.

Jennifer Key

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All inquiries: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744, telephone (800) 792-1112 toll free, or (512) 389-4800 or visit our Web site for detailed information about TPWD programs:

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