

# FOREST STEWARDSHIP BRIEFINGS

Timber ◇ Wildlife ◇ Water ◇ Soil ◇ Best Management Practices ◇ Forest Health ◇ Recreation ◇ Aesthetics

## LONE STAR LAND STEWARDS

from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department news release, April 27, 2017

For more information:

- <http://tpwd.texas.gov/newsmedia/releases/?req=20170427b>
- [http://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/private/lone\\_star\\_land\\_steward](http://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/private/lone_star_land_steward)

They restore vital woods and waters, help bring back diverse wildlife ranging from rare species to popular game animals, share their knowledge with neighbors, and open their gates to youth groups and researchers. They are recipients of the **2017 Lone Star Land Steward Awards**, bestowed each year by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the nonprofit Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation.

Six ecologically diverse regions of the state were recognized. The prestigious Leopold Conservation Award, the highest honor awarded in the program, was also presented by the Sand County Foundation.

Just a couple of the winners:

**Rolling Plains** – *Wild Wings Ranch, Scurry County*. When Rod and Mary Hench acquired the Wild Wings Ranch it had been severely overgrazed and was covered with prickly pear, mesquite, and red berry juniper. The Henches developed an innovative block management approach across the entire ranch where 25% of each acreage block is treated each year according to a color-coded grid. Nearly every acre of the ranch has been treated to control invasive plants and optimize wildlife habitat.

They also protect valuable spring systems on the ranch with strategic mechanical brush control. They catch runoff water and prevent erosion by developing small spreader dams seeded with native grasses after construction.

Rod and Mary regularly work with natural resource agencies to host landowner field days on the ranch. They also open their gates to universities for student field training and wildlife research.

They provide for future turkey roost sites by controlling brush in riparian (creek) areas and planting cottonwood trees to improve riparian habitat.

**Pineywoods** – *Arcadia, Shelby County*. Greg Grant lives on his great-grandparent's longtime farm in Arcadia, Texas, where he continues to persistently restore parcels of native habitat for the benefit of wildlife and the education of fellow landowners.

From 1953–1993, Grant's grandfather farmed, produced hay, and raised cattle and horses. When Greg took ownership, he began to reforest portions of the property and plant some parts in native prairie. He also restored his great-grandparent's 1890s dogtrot style farmhouse.

Greg's primary wildlife goal is to create habitat for native cavity-nesting birds, pine savanna birds, and a number of pollinator species. His fire-maintained, snag-filled pine forest has attracted seven of the eight species of East Texas woodpeckers plus eastern bluebirds, pine warblers, brown-headed nuthatches, and numerous other songbirds.

Perhaps closest to his heart is a remnant population of prairie trillium that he discovered growing in his hardwood forest. This rare species was previously unknown in Texas and is now found in only two other locations in East Texas.

Over the last 20 years, Greg has hosted hundreds of visitors for educational and recreational tours of the property. He is a shining example of what true land stewardship and rural family heritage looks like on an averaged sized East Texas tract of land.

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## LEOPOLD CONSERVATION AWARD

*From Texas Parks and Wildlife Department news release, May 19, 2017*

*For more information:*

- <http://tpwd.texas.gov/newsmedia/releases/?req=20170519a>
- [http://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/private/lone\\_star\\_land\\_steward](http://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/land/private/lone_star_land_steward)

The **Leopold Conservation Award** is given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, and conferred each year by Sand County Foundation, a nonprofit organization devoted to private land conservation, in partnership with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. In Texas, the Leopold Conservation Award program is sponsored by the Lee and Ramona Bass Foundation.

The state's top land conservation award typically goes to a private ranch, but this year the honoree is a North Texas-based nonprofit which manages not one, but six different ranches, all of them devoted to demonstrating how good land management using cattle grazing can lead to more and better water for people and wildlife.

Founded in 1994 by the late Roger Dixon, the **Dixon Water Foundation** promotes healthy watersheds and sequestration of carbon through regenerative land management to ensure that present and future generations of Texans have the water resources they need. In 2005, the foundation acquired the Bear Creek Ranch in Parker County west of Fort Worth. In 2008, they went west to try their approach in drier soils, acquiring the Mimms Ranch near Marfa.

Today the foundation operates six ranches totaling 21,960 acres. Each one utilizes a high intensity/low duration holistic grazing system which mimics the natural effect of large herds of bison which used to migrate through Texas.

“Even though they’re a nonprofit, the Dixon Water Foundation always makes management decisions with the bottom line in mind,” said Justin Dreibelbis, who leads TPWD’s private lands conservation efforts. “If their ranches don’t pay for themselves, the demonstration won’t apply to other landowners.”

Alongside its cattle enterprise, the foundation is committed to education, outreach, and community service. For example, Mimms Ranch serves as an outdoor classroom for K-8 students at Marfa International School. Students study sustainable land management, water quality, soil health, desert plants and animals, and other topics through hands-on activities.

Ultimately, it all comes back to water, which the foundation views as the single most important resource for Texas’ future. “Lots of people worry about how much rain falls,” Potts said, “but what really matters is how much rain gets in the ground. That’s the rain you can use. The rain that runs off, that creates flash floods, that erodes creek banks, that silts up reservoirs — that doesn’t do you any good.”

“What’s easy to happen in these drier environments is that you lose the ground cover, and when that happens you end up with bare ground, and when you have bare ground it’s like not having skin on the earth,” Potts explained. Potts said they are pleased with being able to bring back a lot of the native cover which includes low grasses interspersed with bunch grasses.

*from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department website*

*For more information:*

- [http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife\\_diversity/texas\\_nature\\_trackers/app.phtml](http://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/texas_nature_trackers/app.phtml)

## THERE’S AN APP FOR THAT - NATURE TRACKERS

The Texas Parks Wildlife Department Wildlife Diversity Program offers a mobile app that allows Texans to contribute to science while they enjoy nature. Downloading this app enables the public and trained citizen scientists to report sightings of rare wildlife and plant life.

The Texas Nature Trackers Program works with volunteers to increase TPWD’s understanding of more than

1,000 of Texas’ most sensitive species of plants and animals.

Once the app is downloaded and installed, you’ll have a choice of several different Texas Nature Tracker Projects. Once you finish your observation, and click “Sync,” your data will be shared with TPWD and a community of online naturalists, who may verify your identification, or add one to it if you don’t know what it is.

## OPERATION PONDEROSA

The Davis Mountains of West Texas contain some of the largest populations of Rocky Mountain Ponderosa Pine, *Pinus ponderosa* var. *scopulorum*, in Texas. The Davis Mountains Preserve in Fort Davis contains a majority of these endemic stands.

Environmental stresses - a lack of soil moisture from drought, coupled with secondary bark beetle infestations - have killed the majority of trees. In addition, wildfires in 2011 burned through some of the most productive stands. Up to 75 percent of the Ponderosas in the Davis Mountains Preserve have been lost over the past decade, and it is predicted that losses will continue if nothing is done.

In 2014, Texas A&M Forest Service (TFS) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) staff assessed 18 Ponderosa Pine stands in the TNC Preserve – leading to recommendations to help maintain and improve existing stands. Recommended tactics were:

- collect native seed
- thin overpopulated stands
- remove competing vegetation
- collect baseline data to monitor the recovery of forest stands over time

TFS marked stands and gathered baseline data in 2015 in preparation for thinning

operations scheduled for 350 acres of forestlands on the TNC Preserve. TFS received a grant from USDA Forest Service for forest stand assessments and management prescriptions. TNC received grant to thin competing trees. TFS gathered cones from trees in yards in Ft Davis and grew out 2,800 ponderosa seedlings at the TFS West Texas Nursery in Idalou.

In 2016, over 2,000 of the grown-out seedlings were planted. Herbivory, mainly from gophers, took its toll on the plantings, and less than 25% survived. Data shows that survival rates below 25 percent is on par with average numbers from other Ponderosa plantings in New Mexico and Arizona.

The second round of cone collection yielded only 180 seedlings for the 2017 planting, but the third round yielded a large cache of seeds for 2018. TFS gave away seedlings to landowners in the surrounding communities of Ft Davis, Alpine, and Marfa.

TFS will be creating a handbook of Best Management Practices. These and other educational resources will serve as technical information and assistance to landowners and the public in restoring and recovering Ponderosa Pines in Texas and the American Southwest.

*from Texas A&M Forest Service website*

*For more information:*

- <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/OperationPonderosa>

## PONDEROSA PINE RESTORATION CONFERENCE

Over 40 land managers, researchers, and landowners gathered at the Livermore Summit hosted by Texas A&M Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, and Sul Ross State University in Alpine. The conference, held June 13-15, was conducted to discuss Ponderosa Pine management and share restoration efforts and ideas at the southern extent of its range.

Expert speakers from several state and federal agencies, universities, and The Nature Conservancy covered topics such as:

- Restoring Composition and Structure in SW Frequent-Fire Forests

- Challenges of Ponderosa Restoration
- Experiences with Field Collection and Nursery Grow Out in Arizona
- Ponderosa Status in southern NM
- Avian Responses to Wildfires at the Davis Mountain Preserve

“TFS is involved with these conferences in an effort to better manage Texas resources by widening our vision to the Western states,” said Regional Forest Health Coordinator Jim Houser. “Sharing our experiences and lessons learned moves us all ahead in understanding how to manage Ponderosa stands in the future.

*from Jim Rooni, TFS, Central Texas Operations; and Jim Houser, TFS, Forest Health*

*For more information:*

- <https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/OperationPonderosa>

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- Rusty Wood, TPWD, Nacogdoches, Texas
- Joe Pase, TFS-Retired, Lufkin, Texas

## LONGLEAF 201 COURSE

### **Longleaf Academy: Fire & Longleaf**

*Sponsored by the Texas Longleaf Implementation Team*

**November 14-16, 2017**      *Location TBD; near Lufkin in East Texas*

This course is designed for landowners and natural resource professionals of all experience levels interested in the use of prescribed fire in longleaf pine systems.

Topics will include:

- Fire ecology
- Ignition patterns
- Smoke management
- Returning fire to long-unburned stands
- Burn Planning
- Live fire demonstration (weather permitting)
- Fire in young longleaf
- Fireline tools
- Fire weather parameters

Included in this course are excellent training materials from the Longleaf Alliance staff and a helpful dose of Texas-centric input from the Texas longleaf team. Certain CFTs and CEUs will be available upon approval. **LIMITED SPOTS AVAILABLE.**

Contact: [Karen@longleafalliance.org](mailto:Karen@longleafalliance.org) or (334) 427-1029 for more information and registration.



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