



COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION | DECEMBER 10, 2020 WEBINAR Q&A SUMMARY

In honor of Texan by Nature's 10-year anniversary in 2021, our Virtual Conservation Series held on November 10, 2020, December 10, 2020, February 10, 2021, and March 10, 2021 focuses on the future of conservation. For each webinar, past Conservation Wranglers share their projects, lessons learned, and progress as a starting point for discussion. [Learn more about the Virtual Series.](#)

Collaboration produces better results — more innovative solutions, deeply engaged team members, higher loyalty and morale. Research shows that teams working collaboratively stick to the task 64 percent longer than those in solitary endeavors, report higher engagement levels, cite lower fatigue levels, and have a higher success rate. Collaborative conservation spanning business, landowners, communities, and natural resource organizations yield similar positive results. Presenters for the first webinar included:

- [Grassland Restoration Incentive Program](#) – Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture
- [Friends of Lake Livingston](#)
- [Texas Prairie Wetlands Project](#) – Ducks Unlimited

The presentations were followed by Q&A, all of the questions and answers can be viewed below:

Q&A - All Presenters

Q: What are the greatest challenges in getting disparate entities to collaborate? How have you overcome these challenges?

A: Ducks Unlimited - When the Texas Prairie Wetlands Project (TPWP) began in 1991 its primary focus was to create, restore, and enhance wetland habitat on the landscape to increase foraging and roosting habitat for wintering waterfowl. In partnership with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Ducks Unlimited, the program included federal and state agencies and an NGO, as well as private landowners. That was quite the mix! Basically, one group has to lead the program with support from the others. In the case of TPWP, DU leads the program, with input and expertise from TPWD, USFWS, and the NRCS. As the program has grown over the past 30 years that has and will remain the focus of the program. The program has not historically showcased the additional benefits of these wetland habitats. With help and inspiration from TxN we have begun to look at different areas of these projects and how they provide benefits to people, natural resources, and wildlife. As we continue to dive into these metrics of the program, we believe it will open doors to additional entities and partners.



A: *Friends of Lake Livingston* - We have had no problems getting disparate entities to collaborate. The diversity of the volunteer participants is one of its strengths. Likely, the correct answer is support of the shared vision of the project mission.

A: *Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture* - Communication, communication, communication.

Q: **How do you approach building awareness and educating the public, and when educating the public, what is their call to action to help progress your mission?**

A: *Ducks Unlimited* - Building awareness of TPWP promotion is heavily dependent on landowner peer word-of-mouth, but we also promote the program through state, regional, and local Ducks Unlimited social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and website). In partnership with TxN we have developed a one pager on the program and its benefits on the landscape that can be found at <https://texanbynature.org/projects/texas-prairie-wetlands-project/>. With continued outreach from our partners and staff we look to continue to grow TPWP for years to come.

A: *Friends of Lake Livingston* - Communication, Communication, Communication. We try to publicize events, group plantings, high school education and progress. If the community isn't constantly aware of what's going on, then they lose interest. We are not always successful in this because we have all "volunteers" and sometimes they do what they want – not what they should. They have other life interests as well and get busy.

A: *Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture* - Our [Grassland Restoration Incentive](#) (GRIP) program is built to provide tools to our partner staff who maintain relationships with private landowners, private lands biologists e.g., Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Quail Forever, Native Prairies Association of Texas and many other. We help to train the trainers, then we can help the public to find and contact their local partner biologists who have a full set of tools in their toolbox, and they know the local area.

Q: **What is the one lesson that you've learned from the project you presented about today that attendees can take back and think about applying within their own space?**

A: *Ducks Unlimited* - One thing I have learned in delivering TPWP over the past 5 years is the commitment of participating landowners to the program and projects. Our objective is about 3,000 acres of habitat delivery annually which is working with 30 to 40 landowners to meet acre goals. Working with these landowners I am driven by their interest in conservation and willingness to learn proper management practices and invest their own money into these projects. As discussed in the presentation the program has delivered over 89,000 acres for a cost over 29 million dollars of this money 13 million has been contributed by the participating landowners for these enhancements.



A: *Friends of Lake Livingston* - That institutional knowledge is important. The project is bigger than any one person and remains all volunteer. People leave, get sick or change interest. If we can maintain core technical knowledge with a broad leadership team then if someone leaves, the project doesn't fall apart.

Q&A - Ducks Unlimited

Q: For small cities like Windcrest where their pond is used by wintering migratory waterfowl, American Wigeons, Northern Shovelers, Ring-necked, Gadwalls and others, can they get assistance with the low water issue for a small city pond?

A: TPWP has an identified project area along the Texas Gulf Coast that includes 28 counties. Projects outside of the program foot-print can reach out to partners including Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, USDA Natural Resource Conservation Services, and US Fish and Wildlife Partners Program. Each of the groups can provide site visits and technical assistance for managing wetland habitat.

Q: What separates basic acres from nesting habitat acres?

A: In the presentation we discussed Wetland and Nesting Acres for the accomplishment during 2020. Wetland acres are calculated by floodable acres within a wetland unit that has been created, restored or enhanced by the program. Nesting acres are based on suitable nesting habitat present in the surrounding area of the managed wetland unit. These nesting acres are counted when a landowner is willing to hold water through late summer which will provide both sites necessary for a hen to raise a brood. Nesting habitats are used by Mottled ducks, Fulvous and Black bellied whistling ducks.

Q: What are duck energy days?

A: The simple answer is that a duck energy day (DED) is how much energy 1 duck will need to consume to survive 1 day. Foraging values and energy demands by waterfowl have been created by the Gulf Coast Joint Venture and have been classified for various habitat types. These values are calculated at an acre basis for example one acre of moist soil can provide about 2,029 DED's per acre. Which means that you support 2,029 ducks on 1 acre or support 1 duck for 2,029 days in that one acre.

Q: What resources should a landowner interested in creating wetland habitat use to get started?



A: Landowners interested in the Texas Prairie Wetlands Project can reference the Ducks Unlimited or TxN website for details on the program. Landowners can also reach out to the Texas Field Office at 832-595-0663 to talk with a biologist about the program.

- <https://texanbynature.org/projects/texas-prairie-wetlands-project/>
- <https://www.ducks.org/texas/Texas-Conservation-Projects/Texas-Prairie-Wetlands-Project>

Q: What elements create good wetland habitat?

A: Elements that create a good wetland habitat are focused around the management of the site through drawdowns, and vegetation control. There are several ways to manage wetland sites. Manipulating water level will control vegetation produced within the wetland for the promotion of annual plants. Drying out the soils and allowing them to crack can have similar impacts as Discing by allowing oxygen deeper into the soil profile and germination of plants deeper in the seedbank. Drawing down these sites will promote quality seed bearing plants that are consumed by wintering waterfowl.

Q: What options exist for landowners with smaller acreages that could still benefit wildlife?

A: Although your property may be too small to provide wintering or breeding habitat for waterfowl, there are several ways to get involved in wildlife conservation. One way is working with a local wildlife group such as Texas Master Naturalist to build a wood duck box or set up hummingbird feeders or plant native flowering species for spring and fall migrations. Other ways to get involved would be to plant native plants like Milkweeds for migrating Monarch butterflies.

Q: What types of business or industry participation could positively affect your project efforts?

A: Business and industry could work with TPWP to develop wetlands on the perimeter of facility property. There are several ways to integrate wetlands with everyday business; from increased water storage, water quality benefits, and providing staff with a location for outdoor recreation during breaks.

Q: What is the easiest and most impactful conservation practice a landowner can do?

A: The easiest and most impactful conservation a landowner can do is support organizations that have proven track records for implementing conservation on the landscape. TxN has done a great job with the Conservation Wrangler Program and recognizing groups across this great state that are delivering quality habitat on the landscape. Whether that be restoring offshore reefs with Friends of Rio Grande Valley Reef, Oyster Recycling with Galveston Bay Foundation, Grassland Restoration with Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture, or wetland enhancement with Ducks Unlimited. Working together to conserve these important habitats and our great state is the best way landowners can support Conservation across Texas.

Q&A - Friends of Lake Livingston

Q: What size mesh necessary on cages to exclude nutria?

A: Standard 3' wire fencing with T-Posts. Should be about a 1" by 3" grid.

Q: How have you encouraged participation and support from the local community?

A: By staying active in the community. We have 2 master naturalist chapters engaged (Livingston and Conroe) which helps our core leadership team. We add master gardeners into this mix. It's a big lake and thus a large project encompassing 4 surrounding counties. Add to that our engagement of 8 high schools with ecology education, plant propagation and planting results in a strong community based volunteer effort.

Q: How do you see your project growing in the future?

A: We don't see it growing per se, but getting more sophisticated with better technical input, plant diversification, and maintenance of a good leadership team.

Q: How would someone go about recreating this project somewhere else?

A: We work with the national Friends of Reservoir group which is a US Fish & Wildlife offshoot operating as a 501c3 as the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat. As such, we attend annual FOR conferences and exchange of ideas. Our model so far seems to be one of their gold standards on how to engage the community in similar projects. FOR champions this exact project activity in numerous reservoirs around the country.

Q: How can people get involved with your efforts?

A: Simply let us know they would like to join in. We have a [website](#) and [Facebook page](#). We always welcome anyone willing to chip in however they want to join in.

Q&A - Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture

Q: What is minimum grassland acreage necessary for participation in this program?

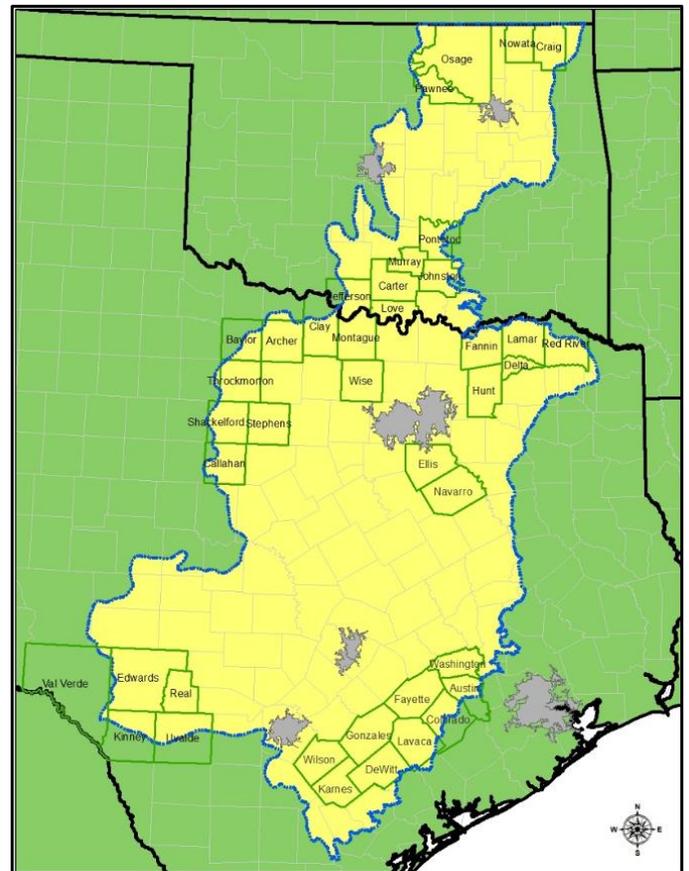
A: Our [Grassland Restoration Incentive Program](#) (GRIP) requires at least 25 acres of land in management for grassland habitat. The 25 acres is the minimum size of a Northern Bobwhite home range. Our partners decided, we want to try to provide at least one home for a Bobwhite pair in any project. Also, many of our grassland birds are area sensitive, or require large areas of continuous grassland habitat for breeding and wintering activities to avoid predators that like to work forest edges or perch in nearby trees. For landowners with less than 25 acres or who are not in our focal counties, we can help them find other available programs that help with private lands management.

Q: What do the purple areas on your county map represent?

A: The purple or gray blobs, depending upon your monitor settings, on our map represent the developed areas of the major cities.

Q: There is a big gap from the North Texas area to south of Austin. Is there no Blackland Prairie restoration going on down I-35?

A: Because many of the partners in our partnership are focused on Northern Bobwhite and other grassland birds, our selected counties are in areas where there are existing populations that are close to disappearing. Unfortunately, the Northern Bobwhite populations in the Blackland Prairie, where I live, are so low that they are only very locally detectable. We have areas in the Blackland Prairie targeted for our next phase, and we can direct landowners interested in other private land conservation programs that might be helpful.



Q: What are the most effective methods in encouraging landowner participation?

A: Each landowner has different things that motivate their land management choices and needs. We try to build the resources to support one-on-one relationship building. Our work is fundamentally about building trust and seeing places where landowner needs match wildlife needs and provide for the health of the land for all (Win-win-win).



Q: What can non-landowning Texans do to benefit grassland birds?

A: To help benefit grassland birds, you can support any one of our partner organizations. You can support legislation that protects bird populations, because by protecting bird populations, you are protecting the health of the land that we and our neighbors want for Texas. Finally, go birding with friends and family, and record your observations in [eBird](#) or [iNaturalist](#). Much of what we know about grassland bird populations at the state and national level comes from information collected by “amateur” birders or citizen scientists. This has been true since the beginnings of ornithology, because birds are so accessible to everyone.

Q: What types of business or industry participation could positively affect your project efforts?

A: Business and industry can provide monetary support that can be leveraged with government and private foundation money to build the economy of scale needed to address the conservation needs across the 60 million acres of the Oaks and Prairies Region. There are also opportunities for industry partners’ staff to participate in bird monitoring efforts. Finally, managing the lands managed by industry partners to maximize grassland habitat quality where possible can provide significant acres for grassland birds.