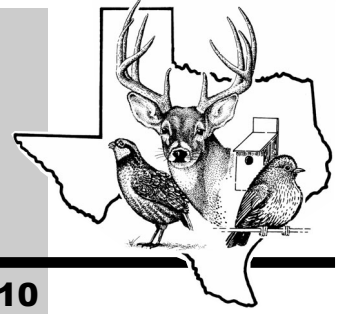


OAK-PRAIRIE WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATIONS

WILDLIFE NEWS



July 2010

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES

By David Forrester, District leader, La Grange

As this is being written (June 8, 2010), habitat conditions in the majority of the Oak Prairie District couldn't be much better. We have experienced generous rainfall throughout the winter and into the early spring. We did experience some dry weather the latter part of April and into May, but we have received rain events at just the right time—right as things were fixing to get critical. Currently, as this is being composed, it is raining again. Even if you are reading this sometime in July, habitat conditions should be optimal and by far better than this time last year.

Some cattle herds in the area were reduced due to the drought conditions we experienced over the last couple of years, and with the timely rains, range conditions are predominantly good. There are fewer instances of overgrazing currently, so there is plenty of cover for wildlife. The forecast for wildlife populations looks very good going into the fall. Both quail and turkey should have plenty of nesting cover and brood cover. We are already getting reports of turkey poults in several areas. Also fawn survival should be very high this year. Plenty of grass cover for those fawns after birth and for the first couple of weeks is a key to survival. Additionally, antler production should be optimal this year. Good groceries were available when antler production began. Nutritional levels have remained good throughout the growing season and it appears this will continue through the summer. All of these are good signs for antler development.

Many of the biologists in the district (and here at the La Grange district office) have been receiving more and more inquiries concerning deer numbers and deer over population. Based on wildlife management association density estimates and local landowner density estimates, the majority of the district has experienced increasing deer numbers for the past decade plus. Most of the inquiries received are landowners concerned about the number of deer they are seeing in groups and/or depredation to crops, fruit trees, etc. Some neighborhoods and homeowners also called with complaints of deer eating their ornamentals and shrubs. Due to last years drought conditions, the deer did move into areas they normally might avoid, and encroached in increasing numbers. When there is nothing else out there to eat, a nice lush irrigated flower bed is too good to pass up. Additionally, the lack of food availability causes deer to do more traveling to find food, which potentially puts them on roadways at a higher rate. Although some of these problems should be alleviated this year due to our rainfall, the trend is clear, and our deer herds are on the rise.

The majority of the Oak Prairie District does not have a means of doe harvest outside the Managed Lands Deer Program. Other than during archery season (doe can be harvested using a license tag in all counties), or in the southern portion of the district (South of Hwy 59 doe may be taken from opening day until the Sunday after Thanksgiving “doe” days with a firearm using a license tag), most doe must be harvested using a MLD permit which is issued via the local wildlife biologist. Most of those receiving this newsletter are familiar with this program and the protocols associated with getting MLD (doe) permits. If you are not familiar and are interested, please contact the district office in La Grange at 979-968-6591.

The MLD program has generally been accepted as a much better harvest management method than allowing “doe” days because permits are issued based on population data collected locally on the landscape. Therefore harvest can be restricted in areas with lower deer densities while harvest can be increased in high density areas by issuing permits at a higher rate. However, part of the success of this harvest management strategy is incumbent on those receiving the permits actually using the permits. Over the past 10 years or so, the issuance rate by our biologists has been increasing (makes sense due to the increasing deer populations across the district) while the number of deer harvested has not kept pace. Basically, the permit utilization rate runs about 40% to 50% across the district.

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TALLGRASS PRAIRIE IN TEXAS

By Bobby Eichler, Technical Guidance Biologist, La Grange

Tallgrass prairies once encompassed millions of acres in Texas. If you own or lease property within the Texas Parks and Wildlife Oak Prairie District, chances are high that at one time the property had tallgrass prairie on at least a portion of it. In case you are wondering what area the TPWD Oak Prairie District covers, it runs northward from Refugio county towards Guadalupe county, then eastward through Bastrop and Lee counties, then southeasterly towards Chambers and Jefferson counties. This area encompasses approximately 25 counties. Historically speaking, this 'triangle' was once covered by either the Post Oak Savannah or the Gulf Coast Prairie Ecosystems. Additionally, two 'belts' of the Blackland Prairie Ecosystem also fell within this area. The two 'belts' are the Fayette and San Antonio Prairies.

All of the above mentioned ecosystems (Post Oak Savannah, Gulf Coast Prairie, and Blackland Prairie) contained large expanses of native tall grasses. When discussing native tall grasses, the climax species often included little bluestem, big bluestem, yellow Indian grass, switchgrass, and Eastern gamagrass. Many other species of grasses and forbes (weeds) were also present in lesser quantities. Please do not relate these native bluestems with the invasive exotic species of bluestems such as KR and Gordo Bluestem that many folks have planted in the past.

As the name implies, the Post Oak Savannah also had some tree species. Most notably Post Oak as the dominate tree. The Post Oak Savannah had a mosaic of tallgrass prairies interspersed with areas which varied from sparse to thick Post Oak woodlands. The Gulf Coast Prairie and Blackland Prairies were prairies with virtually no tree or brush species. The tallgrass prairie ecosystems were maintained by two important forces; 1) fire, and 2) grazing animals, dominated by bison. Both of these forces maintained the prairie and prevented brush from taking hold. Wildfires often started by lightning strikes, as well as Native Americans. Roaming bison once numbered in the millions in the prairie ecosystems, while individual bison herds often numbered in the thousands. As you picture this in your mind, you are probably thinking severe overgrazing? Well, you are correct, the bison did severely overgraze. However, once the bison showed up in massive numbers and overgrazed, they then moved on and the area was rested for months, maybe even years, before the next herd of bison grazed the area again. Rest was a very important aspect of this natural grazing system. This overgrazing should not be confused with many of today's pastures which are grazed on a continuous, unrested basis which leads to detrimental overgrazing.

Hopefully, you are starting to understand why the native grass ecosystems are rare today. Not only are fire and bison absent, and have been for probably 150 years or more, but land practices have also changed drastically. As immigrants settled this area of Texas, farming and ranching changed the landscape forever. As farming and ranching morphed from a family farm model into a more corporate, profit driven model, agricultural practices became more integrated and efficient, which led to more native habitat being converted to agriculture.

This author is not anti-agriculture. Both farming and ranching are obviously essential for human survival and quality of life. Modern day wildlife management often coexists in agricultural

dominated landscapes, and the practices can be mutually beneficial in some instances. What I do want you to realize is how far removed we are from these native grass prairie ecosystems and how these ecosystems will likely never dominate the landscape again.

As land managers and landowners we can work towards restoring native grasslands one small piece at a time realizing we will never see large expanses of prairie in this part of Texas again. We just have to maintain this in perspective and understand that there are many species of wildlife that will benefit from restored native grasslands even on a small scale. Many bird species such as meadowlark, scissortails, various sparrows, wild turkey, and Northern bobwhites may benefit. More common species such as white-tailed deer and eastern cottontails will also benefit from increased cover.

Today's land ownership and land uses have changed quite a bit in just the past 10 – 15 years. Many folks are buying land today with little or no desire to generate income, but are buying land strictly for wildlife and recreation uses. Additionally, even the more traditional land use managers in the ranching business are seeing the benefits of native grasses. Native grasses may not withstand the grazing pressures that 'improved' grasses can, but the input cost for established native grasses is virtually nothing. Native grasses do best with no fertilizers and no herbicides to kill weeds. So with native grasses, stocking rates will likely need to be lowered, but you will not be spending \$200 – 400 an acre for maintenance. Additionally, native grasses can have root systems over 10 feet into the soil, it does not take a rocket scientist to figure which one does best during drought years, which are more common than wet years in South-central Texas.

If you are interested in native grass management, our district staff would be glad to assist you. If you are willing to convert to native grasses, Texas Parks and Wildlife along with several partners has the Pastures for Upland Birds (PUB) program. For projects over 25 acres, the program will furnish 100% of the herbicide needed to kill existing improved grasses. Additionally the program will help offset seed cost and pay for the rental of a seed drill specific for planting native grasses. Generally this program will help pay about \$50-65 an acre. Native grass mixes from various seed companies currently run about \$40 and higher and drill rentals are in the \$8-10 an acre range. So, for the most part, PUB will pay for a large portion of the expenses. The program does not pay for actual labor cost so this is left to the landowner to cover. Landowners must agree to a 10 year period in which they are required to manage the grassland and not abuse or destroy it. The PUB program has a relatively small budget and can only restore about 800 acres per year. Due to this restraint, there may be some lag time between submitting the application and being approved for the project.

If you are wanting to restore even larger acreage, you may check with your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and see if they have a program to help you out. In the past such programs as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) have helped restore native grasses. As with the PUB program, the EQIP and WHIP program are dependent upon annual funds and may or may not be readily available.

If you are interested in restoring native grasses, give TPWD biologist Bobby Eichler a call at the LaGrange district office (979-968-9942).

DON'T BE A TURKEY!

State wildlife biologists deal with a whole slew of different questions and requests. One inquiry that is relatively common is a question about releasing pen raised turkeys. A landowner sees an advertisement from a commercial hatchery about the availability of "wild" turkey and he/she would like to purchase the chicks and then release them on their property. Below is the law regarding the release of turkeys. Basically, the only turkey that can be released into the wild are those that the department releases or contracts to release. Additionally, the violation is a Parks and Wildlife code class C misdemeanor and fines can range from \$25 to \$500. Each turkey that is released could be a separate offense.

Sec. 64.006. RELEASE OF TURKEYS. (a) Except as provided by this section, no turkeys may be propagated, purchased, sold, transported, or released for the purpose of establishing a free-ranging wild turkey population.

(b) The department may release turkeys in certain areas of the state for the purpose of maintaining a wild turkey population.

(c) The department may adopt regulations regulating the release of turkeys by persons other than department employees.

(d) This section does not apply to any turkeys maintained for agricultural purposes.

(e) The department may contract with private sector sources to release wild turkeys in certain areas of the state for the purpose of maintaining or expanding a wild turkey population.

Added by Acts 1987, 70th Leg., ch. 771, Sec. 1, eff. Aug. 31, 1987.

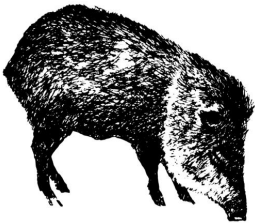
WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES

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Hopefully, folks that just went through the most recent drought and saw what happened to the native browse species, the domestic livestock herds, and the deer herds, have been reminded of the importance of things like "carrying capacity", "number of mouths on the range", and sustainability. The only way we can address overpopulation issues regarding deer is through harvest management. We can't trap deer and take them to some other location in the state because any location with decent deer habitat already has an adequate to surplus deer population. We need all of our MLD cooperators to not only participate in the program by collecting deer density data and herd composition numbers, but also participate by making sure they utilize the permits that are issued.

As was stated earlier, due to optimal habitat conditions, fawn survival should be very high this year. Fawn survival is what drives harvest recommendations. Basically, you have to make room for the babies entering the herd. Don't be surprised if the harvest recommendations you receive this year are higher than the last. Also, we want to be conservative in managing the numbers of deer in our herds. We don't want to manage for the largest number of deer we can sustain during the best habitat conditions. We would like to keep our deer numbers in check so we don't experience major problems during drought conditions—and we all know the next drought is just around the corner.

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS ANIMAL? TELL US ABOUT IT!



You can have a hand in helping us to better define the current distribution of javelina in Texas. If you have observed javelina (in person or on camera) on your property or your grazing or hunting lease, please fill out the information below and send to Meredith Longoria at the address at the bottom. All specific personal information will remain confidential. If you would like to read more about javelina, you can download a copy of "The Javelina in Texas" at www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_w7000_1669.pdf



JAVELINA SIGHTING REPORT (KINDLY PRINT CLEARLY)

First and Last Name: _____ Phone: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Email: _____

Date of observation: _____ Number of javelina observed: _____ County where sighting took place: _____

Address or closest intersection to observation location: _____

Do you have game camera pictures or other photo-documentation of javelina on your property/lease? Yes No

Have you harvested javelina from your property/lease? Yes No

**Please return form to: Meredith Longoria — 901 Pecan Street, Bastrop TX 78602
or email the information to meredith.longoria@tpwd.state.tx.us**

OAK PRAIRIE WILDLIFE DISTRICT
111 EAST TRAVIS, SUITE 200
LA GRANGE TX 78945-2614

*Do not send correspondence or change
of address notices to the address above.
They must be sent to your specific
Wildlife Management Association*

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATIONS IN THE OAK-PRAIRIE DISTRICT

AUSTIN COUNTY

Austin County West End WMA
Cat Spring WMA

BASTROP COUNTY

Alum Creek WMA
Bartons Creek WMA
Paint Creek WMA
Pin Oak Creek WMA
Red Rock WMA

CALDWELL COUNTY

Clear Fork Creek WMA
Tri-Community WMA

COLORADO COUNTY

Central Colorado County WMA
Colorado River WMA
Harvey Creek WMA
Northeast Colorado County WMA
Oakridge Ranch WMA
Sandy Creek WMA

DEWITT COUNTY

Central DeWitt County WMA
Meyersville WMA
Western DeWitt County WMA

FAYETTE COUNTY

Buckners Creek WMA
Colorado River WMA
Cummins Creek WMA
East Navidad WMA
North Central Fayette County WMA
Rabbs Creek WMA
West Navidad WMA

FORT BEND COUNTY

Thompsons Bottom WMA

GOLIAD COUNTY

Goliad County WMA

GONZALES COUNTY

Belmont WMA
Hamon River Bottom WMA
Northeast Gonzales County WMA
Salt Flat WMA
San Marcos River WMA
Sandies Creek WMA

GUADALUPE COUNTY

Guadalupe County WMA

JACKSON COUNTY

Lavaca River WMA
Sandy Creek WMA
Texana WMA
West Carancahua Creek WMA

LAVACA COUNTY

Honey Creek WMA
Rocky Creek WMA
South Central Lavaca County WMA
Sweet Home WMA
Vienna WMA
West Sandy Creek WMA

LEE COUNTY

Blue Branch WMA
East Yegua WMA
South Lee WMA
Two Creeks WMA
West Yegua WMA

REFUGIO COUNTY

Blackjack Peninsula WMA

VICTORIA COUNTY

Guadalupe River North WMA
Southwest Victoria County WMA
Victoria Prairie WMA

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Greenvine WMA
Mount Vernon WMA
New Years Creek WMA
Post Oak WMA
Rocky Creek WMA
Sand Town WMA
Sun Oil WMA

WHARTON COUNTY

Egypt WMA
Lost Prong WMA

