

A Word from Our President

There are significant milestones in the creation of a new organization, and one of the most significant is the second newsletter. With the first newsletter, we had an occasion for celebration, but, with the arrival of the second newsletter, we have begun a tradition – that is, we have created an expectation that the TRA newsletter will arrive with the regularity of Christmas or Halloween. This can only happen if you help to make it happen. Cultural geographers like myself point out that traditions are only maintained through active participation of a cultural group. By reading this newsletter, you belong to the Texan cultural group interested in riparian issues, and through that affiliation you are obliged to participate in the maintenance of our cultural traditions. So once more I call on you to join the TRA and then participate in one of our committees in order to help us fulfill our organizational goals.

The TRA has four goals – education, riparian management, research and demonstration, and building a sustainable organization. Our education goal is to promote statewide education on the health of riparian systems – giving an account of their current status, detailing their importance for supporting biodiversity, and promoting the critical ecosystem services that they provide. The Outreach Committee is one way that we address this goal – the newsletter, brochure, and display – are all the results of this committee led by Nancy Charbneau and Emily Schieffer. Soon we will also launch the TRA website as another education tool.

Our riparian management goal is to promote actions statewide that conserve, restore, and maintain healthy riparian systems. We will be pursuing this goal by advocating policy that promotes good riparian management, supporting selected riparian restoration projects, and awarding quality conservation, restoration, and maintenance efforts. Additionally, we intend to establish a grant program to encourage positive riparian management and restoration projects. Because of our limited financial resources, we currently address this goal through our Program Committee. Although we eventually will hold our own riparian conference, we have begun by sponsoring the conferences of other organizations as a way of spreading the word that the TRA exists. Last year we partnered with the Texas

Society for Ecological Restoration, the Society for Rangeland Management, and the Flood Plain Managers Association supporting their conferences by providing speakers on riparian topics as well as funding. This year we are partnering with Texas Native Prairies Association, Holistic Resource Management of Texas, and the International Society for Ecological Restoration (see the Riparian Calendar for the dates of these conferences).



TRA Prez, Kevin Anderson, hard at work.

Our research and demonstration goal is to promote projects that foster improved riparian systems through supporting communication about riparian issues, developing a database of riparian projects in Texas, developing a resource library, and supporting riparian funding initiatives. Since 2000, the Texas Riparian listserv has been providing a forum for the exchange of ideas and information to foster improved management of riparian systems, and it has grown to have 200 subscribers. This year we are beginning to build riparian information resources through the Research and Demonstration Committee, led by William Asquith and Ken Mayben.

Our fourth goal is to build a sustainable organization – that is where I return to you. If you are interested in supporting riparian protection and restoration in Texas, we need you to join the TRA and sign up for a committee to help build the organization. Our Membership Committee manages services for our members and communicates directly to you. Heather Venhaus would appreciate having additional help on that committee. Our treasurer, Sari Moyer, and I would welcome others interested in joining the Administration Committee. Although one part of sustaining the TRA is building a strong financial base, the most important resource is your direct involvement in the activities of the organization. In a few short years we have accomplished much and I am honored to

work with such a committed, active Board. Looking to the future, though, I know we need to share the glory of participating on the TRA Board with others – come help us further the TRA tradition!

A Listserv Primer

The Riparian Listserv is a service of the University of Texas, created to encourage the exchange of information on riparian issues among the citizens of Texas. You do not need to be a member of TRA to subscribe. Notices about recent riparian research, conferences, training, and activities are posted daily, along with discussions on riparian related information and issues. TRA member business is generally conducted through a membership list.

To subscribe to the Riparian Listserv, send an email to: listproc@lists.cc.utexas.edu. Leave the subject line blank. In the body of the email, type: SUBSCRIBE RIPARIAN your first name your last name (for example: SUBSCRIBE RIPARIAN JOHN DOE). Soon afterwards, you should receive an email response confirming your request and providing general listserv information.

To receive listserv postings in a daily digest instead of receiving individual emails for each posting, send an email to the address above, leaving the subject line blank. In the body of the email, type: set RIPARIAN mail digest. After you receive confirmation of the request, you will receive only one daily email from the listserv with the sender and subject of each posting listed and the body of each email as an attachment.

To remove yourself from the Riparian listserv, follow the instructions for subscribing, except in the body of the email, type: UNSUBSCRIBE RIPARIAN. Again, a confirmation email will be sent when your request has been processed.

To post messages to the listserv, direct your email to riparian@lists.cc.utexas.edu.

Please remember: When using the listserv, please be courteous to other users by not pushing the “Reply” button after viewing a message unless you want your reply sent to everyone that subscribes to the service.

Riparian Legislation Spotlight: Off-Road Vehicles in Streambeds

During 2001-2002, the TRA participated as a member of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department’s (TPWD) “Recreational Vehicle in State-Owned Streambeds Taskforce” (or 4X4 Taskforce for short). This taskforce was convened to address the growing problem of off-road vehicles using Texas streambeds as public roadways. Although not a new issue, the rising number of off-road vehicles utilizing state-owned streambeds for organized events and recreational purposes had led to a call for legislation to ban motorized vehicle use in streambeds.

In the 77th Texas Legislature, a bill was introduced that would have banned motorized vehicle use in the Nueces River. Though the bill was not enacted, a result of the proposed legislation was the formation of the 4X4 Taskforce, which first met in December 2001. The Taskforce was composed of representatives from state agencies, river authorities, recreational vehicle groups, environmental groups, landowners and other concerned citizens. By its final meeting in July 2002, the Taskforce had agreed on a number of options for the 78th Texas Legislature to consider, with the majority of the Taskforce recommending some form of statewide legislation. Members representing recreational vehicle groups and “traditional” river users strongly objected to restricting access. There were many contentious exchanges. There was substantial agreement that TPWD should help recreational vehicle groups find alternative non-riparian sites for use. The final results are still to be determined as we go to press, but the current 78th Texas Legislature has pending bills (SB 155/ HB 305) that would enact a statewide ban on recreational vehicles in streambeds. The measures have strong backing from the Agricultural Commissioner and others. *(Editor’s Note: The 78th Legislature did pass SB 155 during its regular session. The measure went into effect September 1, 2003.)*

As a Taskforce member representing the TRA, I supported the need for protecting riparian areas in all state streams and, therefore, the need for statewide legislation. Most of the arguments within the Taskforce arose over the lack of scientific information about vehicle impacts on streambeds in Texas. The Taskforce relied on testimony from TPWD biologists and game wardens, stating that they had seen negative impacts (though never measured them), and on information from other states, to infer impacts on Texas streambeds.

From my perspective, the focus on streambeds rather than riparian ecosystems made all of our discussions more difficult, and it allowed the recreational vehicle representatives to argue that vehicles could not harm gravel sections of river streambeds, like stretches of the Nueces River. From the perspective of proposing legislation, I understood the focus. However, I was struck by the lack of understanding by some Taskforce members about riparian ecosystems as natural resources. The TRA is in a unique position to educate all Texans about the ecological services (and appropriate recreational opportunities) supported by healthy riparian ecosystems. Moreover, the experience highlighted the need for leadership in gathering and disseminating information about Texas riparian ecosystems. The TRA has a responsibility to take this leading role in partnership with agencies like TPWD, in order to protect Texas riparian ecosystems. Let us accept that role for Texas and get to work!

Contributed by Kevin Anderson.



Off-road vehicles are no longer allowed to drive in Texas streambeds, due to the damage such use causes to these natural systems.

Behind the Scenes at the TRA

The Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) Program of the National Park Service assists local communities in planning and implementing locally-initiated conservation efforts. Planners and Landscape Architects based in field offices around the nation, offer technical and planning assistance to municipalities, counties, state agencies and non-profit organizations in developing plans and action strategies for conserving those special places that communities hold dear. The RTCA program offers access to a nationwide network of conservation professionals and serves as a clearinghouse for information on greenways, trails, river management, and watershed protection.

The RTCA program has been assisting the TRA since its infancy, helping the organization to develop its mission, goals and objectives, and to establish a founding board of directors. RTCA staff are currently assisting the TRA with education and outreach.

For more information about the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, look it up on the web at www.nps.gov/programs/rtca or call the Austin Field Office of the RTCA program at 512-916-5164.



For more information, contact Kevin Anderson at 512-972-1960 or kevin.anderson@ci.austin.tx.us
Or check us out on the web at our soon-to-come website.

Membership Update. The Texas Riparian Association is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization dedicated to encouraging healthy riparian systems in Texas. The TRA's efforts in education, research and healthy watershed management are possible largely through the funds provided by members like you. Please consider joining us or renewing your membership today. Thank you for your support!

Yes, I want to become a member of the Texas Riparian Association and help to encourage healthy riparian systems within Texas!

Name _____ Affiliation (if any) _____

Address _____

Phone (work/home) _____ Phone (cell/pager) _____

Email _____

Please check one of the following annual membership categories:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Member \$20 | <input type="checkbox"/> Business Member \$50 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student Member \$10 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsoring Member \$150 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Government or Non-profit Member \$35 | <input type="checkbox"/> Life Member \$300 |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member \$20 |
- (add to cost of any other membership category)

I would like to serve on a committee! My first choice is:

- Administration (finances, incorporation, by-laws, membership)
- Program (agendas and logistics for conferences, workshops, seminars, meeting planning)
- Outreach (educational materials- except programs- including newsletter, website, brochures)
- Research & Demonstration (library, database, demonstration projects)

Please make checks payable to the Texas Riparian Association and mail with this form to: TRA c/o Center for Environmental Research
2210 S. FM 973
Austin, Texas 78725-7103

For more information on membership, contact Heather Venhaus at www.wildflower.org

Riparian Projects across the State

Wetlands park connects El Pasoans with their water

Twenty years ago, if you asked about local riparian habitat in the El Paso area, you'd likely get a blank stare. Ten years ago, maybe a cynical laugh from someone aware of its almost total disappearance. Today, you might hear, "Visit Rio Bosque Wetlands Park."

Rio Bosque is a 372-acre City of El Paso park located next to the Rio Grande. It includes an old meander of the river that was cut off when the Rio Grande was channelized in the El Paso area in the mid-1930s. At the Park, a diverse partnership is now working to establish an approximation of the mosaic of habitats characteristic of the Rio Grande and its floodplain in pre-settlement days.

In 1997, the Park landscape was transformed dramatically when the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission, as mitigation for a canal project in El Paso, constructed a series of wetland cells and a water-delivery system at the Park, based on designs developed by Ducks Unlimited. The work involved building a channel that follows the old river alignment, creating wetland cells, installing control gates for diverting water from the channel to the cells, and removing several large stands of saltcedar (*Tamarix ramosissima*).



Mitigation site at Rio Bosque Wetlands Park, directly after construction of the site was completed.

Over much of the Park, this work set vegetation back to early successional stages. As the vegetation recovers, the project partners are steering that recovery in the direction of native river-valley plant communities. The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) manages the project under a license agreement with the City. Students and volunteers carry out most of the restoration work. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency have provided key funding.

"Wetlands" Continued on page 4...

Gravel pit meetings spawn river corridor restoration partnership

In February, a group of six people met at Hornsby Bend in the City of Austin Water and Wastewater Utility's Center for Environmental Research to talk about beginning an effort to address the increasing impact of gravel and sand extraction along Texas rivers. The number of gravel pits along the Colorado River below Austin has rapidly increased over the last five years, affecting riparian areas from Austin to Bastrop. In coming years, the new loop highway, SH 130, will cross through this stretch of river and further accelerate gravel and sand extraction.

The bright side of this story is that, once abandoned, many of these pits naturally develop into wetlands, which have the potential to enhance riparian areas. At Hornsby Bend, we have documented an increase in aquatic bird species in our monitoring data over the last ten years that corresponds to increased acreage of abandoned pits containing water along the Colorado River. Most pits are abandoned without any earth-shaping to lower the steep walls of the pit; however, if this last step were taken to shape the pit and create both shallow and deep areas, then wetlands could develop more rapidly. The low cost restoration potential of this process has attracted the attention of the Lower Colorado River Authority, Army Corps of Engineers and Texas Parks and Wildlife – all of which are now involved in the gravel pit meetings. Other partners include representatives from federal, state, and local government agencies and environmental organizations.

After the initial gravel pit meeting in February, we began holding monthly stakeholder meetings for anyone interested in joining or learning about the effort. Attendance has grown steadily and has expanded into a partnership that will examine gravel pit and river corridor restoration opportunities for the stretch of river between Austin and Bastrop. The TRA sees the work being accomplished by this partnership on the Colorado River as a model that can be applied to other Texas rivers. We encourage you to attend the International SER conference to learn more about it.

To learn more, come to the International SER conference this Fall, where the partnership has been selected as the focus of a design workshop. This article was contributed to **TRA Stream Lines** by Kevin Anderson.

“Wetlands” Continued from page 1...

Where does the water for this project come from? Not the Rio Grande. In the El Paso region, securing water for ecosystems is unusually challenging. The Rio Grande's flows are completely allocated to agricultural, municipal and industrial use. During irrigation season, the river itself is often dry through El Paso. The source of Rio Bosque's water is an adjacent wastewater-treatment plant. El Paso Water Utilities and the local irrigation district, El Paso County Water Improvement District No. 1, cooperate to deliver treated effluent from the plant to the Park. Currently, even that water is only reliably available outside the irrigation season. In many years, it is used for irrigation in spring and summer, and the Park is completely dry.

Riparian restoration at the Park began in earnest in 1999 and 2000 with the planting of several clusters of Rio Grande cottonwood (*Populus deltoides* ssp. *wislizenii*), Goodding willow (*Salix gooddingii*), coyote willow (*S. exigua*) and seepwillow (*Baccharis salicifolia*) along the old river channel. In both years, the Park received no treated wastewater in spring and summer. By trucking water to the site, we kept the plantings alive, but most of the newly rebuilt channel remained essentially a barren ditch.



Vegetation has now established itself at the mitigation area.

system into the irrigation-water delivery system so some irrigation water can flow through the Park or integrating the Park's wetlands into the treatment processes of the adjacent wastewater-treatment plant.

Over the past 20-25 years, there has been growing awareness in El Paso of the importance of native river-valley ecosystems. The Rio Bosque project is both a product of that growing awareness and, now, an important contributor to it. In the long term, the Park's biggest contribution may be the connection it is forging between El Pasoans and their river.

In some cases, this connection is actually a re-connection, as older Park visitors see our riparian-restoration efforts and recall a time when cottonwoods were still prominent in the river valley. For younger visitors, the Park brings a sharp new awareness of the valley's rich natural heritage, of how it has been almost completely lost, and of how it might be regained. The City of El Paso, recognizing Rio Bosque's value in connecting citizens with the river, has made the Park one of the main trailheads for the planned Rio Grande Riverpark Trail.

Rio Bosque Wetlands Park is a long-term project, with many hurdles to overcome before it can be considered a success. Its prospects are bright, though, given the broad support and enthusiasm it enjoys within the El Paso community. UTEP, with its many partners, is committed to realizing the remarkable potential this unique parcel of open space along the Rio Grande has to offer.

To learn more about all aspects of Rio Bosque Wetlands Park and to view the *Biological Management Plan* that guides ecosystem restoration at the Park, visit the park's website at www.cerm.utep.edu/riobosque/. This article was contributed to *TRA Stream Lines* by J. Sproul.

Newsletter Basics

Welcome to the TRA's second newsletter! It is our hope that this newsletter will become a means of orienting new members and updating existing members to the developments and activities within our organization. I am sure that *TRA Stream Lines* will evolve with the TRA, and I welcome your comments and suggestions for improvement, topics, and features (as long as you're nice). I also hope that you will contribute ideas, articles, and calendar entries for future issues. We plan to publish this newsletter biannually, in January and July; the deadlines for submittals will be November 1st and May 1st, respectively. I will always edit articles for clarity and space constraints. Please send submittals (text as .doc files and images as .jpg files) and comments to Emily Schieffer at 214-741-7777 or eschieffer@lopezgarciagroup.com. Thank you for contributing to the TRA tradition!

Spotlight on Texas Riparian Organizations: North Texas

The 1990's were a difficult time for Texas streams. In five years (from 1992 to 1997), Texas lost 894,000 acres of agricultural land to development (American Farmland Trust). This is a rate more than double the rate seen during the preceding ten years. In just one year (1995), the Metropolitan Planning Area lost more than 10,000 acres of undeveloped land to expanding urban development. North Central Texas Council of Governments projections indicate that an additional four million people will have moved to the Metroplex by 2030, leading to the loss of an additional 1.2-1.7 million acres of undeveloped land (assuming current population densities remain). It was in this setting, and in response to the deterioration of stream systems, riparian areas and property conditions caused by rapid, sprawling growth, that the North Texas Stream Team was formed in 1999.



This public service outreach was established to educate municipalities and government agencies, as well as developers, home owners associations and schools, about stream corridor restoration and management. Stream Team members hail from a variety of interrelated federal, state and local agencies, which have a common interest in maintaining healthy and functional riparian buffers and streams, including US Fish & Wildlife Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Federal Emergency Management Agency, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Environmental Protection Agency Region 6, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, and the North Central Texas Council of Governments. These members volunteer their time to provide technical resource assistance to municipalities and private developers. This assistance comes in many forms, including field visits, project reviews, guidance for meeting local, state and federal permit requirements, construction and design alternatives for stream restoration and erosion control, and review of subdivision plats and comprehensive plans.

Stream Team members also encourage developers to include stream buffers, native vegetation, natural restoration, bioengineering and riparian corridor management in their plans. Such features often meet the goal and intent of the Clean Water Act better than traditional, "hard" engineering structures do.

In the past two years, the Stream Team has hosted a series of field and classroom workshops focusing on stream corridor restoration and management, in cooperation with the University of North Texas. A wide range of participants generally attends, including state, federal and local governments, non-profit organizations, quasi-governmental agencies, private citizens, consultants and developers. The most recent Stream Team seminar, held in May, focused on stream geomorphology, bioengineering, riparian vegetation, pond management and potential funding sources for stream projects.

Stream Team members also conduct individual training assistance for public works and city planning departments and have made presentations before city councils, city departments and public symposiums in more than 18 cities, to further the concept of natural and bioengineered streams and riparian corridor management.



As the population in the region expands dramatically, so does the possibility that hundreds of miles of streams and riparian areas will be lost, replaced with conveyance canals. In the process, the ability of these systems to improve water quality and provide habitat will also be lost, making the efforts of the Stream Team and similar organizations all the more important.

For more information on the Stream Team, contact Norm Sears or Ginger Melms at sears.norman@epamail.epa.gov or gmelms@nctcog.org. Contributed by Kenneth Mayben and Bobby Hernandez.



All pictures in this article show Stream Team members with city officials conducting field visits to review and discuss the erosion and potential restoration of degraded streams throughout North Texas.

Calendar of Riparian Events

◆ September 26-28, Rendezvous 2003, A Celebration of Holistic Management, Holistic Resource Management of Texas, held at Clint Josey's L O Ranch, Grand Prairie, Texas. <http://www.hrm-tex.org/>

October 15-17, Texas Section Society for Range Management Annual Meeting, held in Wichita Falls, Texas. <http://www.tssrm.org/>

November 3-6, American Water Resources Association Annual Conference, held in San Diego, California. www.awra.org

November 8-12, ASAE Watershed Management Conference, held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. For more information, contact Barbara Sowden at (269)428-6327.

◆ November 19-22, International Society for Ecological Restoration Annual Conference, Assembling the Pieces: Restoration, Design and Landscape Ecology, held at the Omni South, Austin, Texas. <http://www.ser.org>

November 21, TRA Annual Membership Meeting, in conjunction with the International SER Conference cited above. Contact Kevin Anderson for more information at kevin.anderson@ci.austin.tx.us.

◆ = Conferences co-sponsored by the TRA.