

FOREST STEWARDSHIP BRIEFINGS

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

WATER CONSERVATION BILL PASSES

from *kirkwatson.com*, website of Texas State Senator Kirk Watson

For more information:

- <http://www.kirkwatson.com/newsroom/in-the-news/bill-aids-landowners-protecting-texas-water-supply/>
- <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/BillLookup/Text.aspx?LegSess=82R&Bill=SB449>

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According to a legislative analysis, 90% of Texas water flows through or under private lands. Good stewardship by private landowners is vital to the protection and conservation of water in Texas.

A bipartisan group of legislators, representing both rural and urban parts of the state, supported a bill that would create an innovative incentive for landowners to protect water resources, preserve the state's cultural heritage by protecting natural resources on privately owned land, and advance Texas' long-range water plan - all without costing taxpayers money.

Senators Craig Estes and Kirk Watson jointly filed Senate Bill 449 in late January 2011, which would expand the state's definition of agricultural land to cover water stewardship. Representative Allan Ritter filed an identical bill in the House. The House and Senate passed the measure unanimously in May. The bill was signed by the governor in June.

This legislation would allow landowners to have their land valued for property tax purposes as agricultural (and receive what is sometimes referred to as the property tax agriculture exemption) by managing their land in a way that promotes and sustains water quality and conservation.

"This bill gives Texas another path to meeting the extensive demands on our water supply that we know we'll face in coming decades," said State Senator Kirk Watson, of Austin. "It would harness the power of the private sector - and the conscientious stewardship of Texas landown-

ers - to improve water quality and quantity for all of us."

The bill would work in tandem with Senate Joint Resolution 16 (SJR 16), a proposed constitutional amendment that would, with voter approval, add "water stewardship" to uses of land that qualify for the agricultural tax valuation. In order to qualify, landowners would need to take specific actions on their land - such as controlling erosion, restoring native aquatic species, or implementing efficient irrigation practices - that preserve and improve water supplies. Also, they could donate water rights to the Texas Water Trust or commit to using their water for environmental purposes.

The bill would create a new spinoff of existing agriculture property tax valuation provisions, which are already widely used to help landowners who are committed not only to farming and ranching, but also to things like wildlife management and open space preservation. The legislation avoids costing the state money, because landowners who would qualify under the water stewardship rules are probably already eligible for - and taking advantage of - another type of agricultural valuation.

In applying instead for the water stewardship valuation, landowners would adopt management practices that simultaneously maintain the rural nature of their land and fortify the state's water supply.

Effective date of the legislation is January 1, 2012, pending approval of the enabling legislation, SJR 16, by the voters.

WILDFIRE SALVAGE OPERATIONS

by Hughes Simpson, Program Coordinator, Texas Forest Service, Lufkin, TX

For more information:

- <http://texasforestsservice.tamu.edu/BMP>

The destruction caused by the 2011 Texas wildfire season has left many forest landowners searching for answers about what to do with all the burned timber. Salvaging this timber quickly and starting over may be the only option for many. While there is a sense of urgency to harvest the damaged timber, it is important to remember the long term benefits of using Best Management Practices (BMPs). Here are some things to keep in mind during these operations:

Seek assistance from professional foresters and certified Pro-Loggers. Data collected by Texas Forest Service shows that trained professionals are more likely to implement BMPs during forestry operations.

Special care should be taken when operating in the Streamside Management Zone (SMZ) to minimize ground disturbance. These zones act as the final filter before any sediment or debris reaches the stream. Haul roads, skid trails,

and landings should be located outside of these areas. Stream crossings should be avoided or minimized. Trees and tops should not be felled across or pushed into streams.

Every effort should be made to protect and leave trees not severely damaged in the SMZ. This is critical to prevent destroying the filtering and stream shading effects of SMZs. A residual density of 50 square feet of basal area should be left where possible.

Evaluate the regeneration potential of the SMZ. If artificial regeneration is necessary, site preparation and machine planting should be avoided within the SMZ.

Follow BMP protocols for the rest of the tract and use common sense. Despite the necessity to facilitate a quick harvest, BMPs should still be followed. Common sense will go a long way in keeping operators safe and preventing excessive damage to the site.

TREE TIPS - DROUGHT-STRICKEN TREES

With the Lone Star State deep in a record-breaking drought, the parched trees that dot the landscape can no longer depend solely on Mother Nature to quench their thirst. Just like people, trees need water to survive. Without it, they can't carry nutrients up into their leaves or push the sugar they create down into their roots.

During damper days, a mature tree - a mighty oak, flowering magnolia or even a stately pecan - likely could make-do with just the rain provided by Mother Nature. But as she gets stingier and stingier with her watering can, that's just not the case anymore.

Watering is the single most important thing you can do for your tree during a drought. Without water, trees stop growing and drop their leaves in an act of self-preservation. As the drought worsens, so

does the tree, making it more susceptible to a potentially-deadly insect infestation or disease.

"Trees are amazingly resilient, so things look a little better now than I expected, but they're still under serious stress," says Paul Johnson, TFS, San Antonio. "It's worth the investment in your water bill to avoid the very real cost of having a tree removed, never mind losing the shade and cooling effect and all the other things trees do for us."

The key is making sure you water the right amount, the right way, Johnson said, explaining that watering too much or too little can be just as detrimental.

For detailed tips on water during this drought, go to the webpage listed in the sidebar of this article.

from Texas Forest Service website

For more information:

- <http://texasforestsservice.tamu.edu/main/article.aspx?id=14196>

FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR LANDOWNERS

Funding is still available for Texas landowners interested in working with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to implement conservation efforts on their property through the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP).

Conservation projects such as prescribed burns, selective brush management, restoring native vegetation, protecting ecologically sensitive areas, and fencing livestock out of riparian areas are among the projects undertaken through the program.

For example, invasive species control and native species protection initiatives are funded through the program in targeted areas throughout the state. Projects on the Nueces and Sabinal Rivers by riparian landowners have focused on the *Arundo donax*, or river cane, an aggressive, non-native grass that spreads quickly in dense patches with shoots up to 20 feet high. The interconnected roots and dense stalks create an impenetrable wall of vegetation, clogging waterways and taking resources from native plants and animals.

The LIP program covers between 50 and 75 percent of the proposed project cost with the landowner contributing at least 25 percent for the project through in-kind labor, materials, monetary contribution, and other methods. Projects showing great benefit to targeted species receive priority as do projects offering long-term conservation and protection.

“There are no acreage restrictions to participate,” said Arlene Kalmbach, LIP Coordinator. “Interested landowners may contact their local TPWD office and speak with a staff biologist who will aid in an ecological assessment of the land and offer technical guidance on your conservation goals. Together you will decide if the LIP program is right for your project and apply for the applicable funding.”

Biologists say the best way to get your project accepted is to have measurable results and be willing to sign a project agreement or management plan. Proposals are received throughout the year and are ranked quarterly among other project proposals from that year.

by Mike Cox, Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., Austin, TX

For more information:

- <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/newsmedia/releases/?req=20110719a&nrtype=all&nrspace=2011&nrsearch=>
- <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/private/lip/>

PINEYWOODS PRESCRIBED FIRE COOP

A new prescribed fire cooperative is being formed. It will be made up of private landowners who wish to burn on their own property. The primary goal of this cooperative is to put fire back on the ground in East Texas. The benefit will be reduced fuel loads across the Pineywoods, resulting in wildfire protection and wildlife habitat creation or enhancement.

The Pineywoods cooperative will be based on several successful models that already exist in different parts of the state and will be run by its members. Members will benefit from this cooperative through on-the-ground training and networking with other landowners with common goals. This could result in possible collaborative burns, access to prescribed burning equip-

ment, and possible cost-share assistance for burning or creation of fire breaks.

The cooperative will be supported by several partner agencies and non-governmental organizations to achieve the mutual goal of putting fire back on the Pineywoods landscape in a responsible manner.

Cost shares are available through the National Wild Turkey Federation for members with land in the following counties: Shelby, San Augustine, Nacogdoches, Angelina, Sabine, and Jasper. Cost shares may be available in other cooperative counties through the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Texas Forest Service, or U. S. Forest Service.

by Rusty Wood, Forest Stewardship Biologist, Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., Nacogdoches, TX

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Editorial Board

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- Joe Pase, TFS, Lufkin, Texas

HUNTERS BEWARE THIS SEASON

With much of Texas still hot and dry and wildfires continuing to ignite across the state, hunters should be especially careful when heading out this season. Fire activity remains steady, and wildfires can easily ignite. All it takes is one spark from an unattended campfire, lit cigarette, or even the muzzle of a gun.

All outdoorsmen should keep fire safety in mind while dry vegetation remains, making conditions ripe for wildfires.

A few safety tips to keep in mind:

- Avoid burning feed bags and other materials that can create flying embers.
- Keep water handy when welding on stands or working around hunting camps.
- Drive only on designated trails. Don't park or idle vehicles in dry grass, which can be ignited by contact with a hot muffler.
- When shooting close to the ground, be sure there is no dry grass or tinder in front of your muzzle. Though rare, it's not impossible for a shot to ignite nearby tinder.
- Use caution with cigarettes and matches.
- Use spark arresters on all power equipment.



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