

GPRC

Great Plains Restoration Council

Fort Worth Prairie Park

Updated July 2022

Plains Youth InterACTION™

Restoration Not Incarceration™



Monarch butterfly



Keeping the prairie healthy.



Mike and Cindi Holt hiking the prairie.



Springtime wildflower abundance.



Star watch party.

Note: Many of the upland open plains photos shown here were taken on our pristine 2,000 acre public land prairie that was sold for development by the Texas General Land Office. Since then, we have worked to reconstitute and grow the Fort Worth Prairie Park out of what native Fort Worth Prairie remains in the area, with 1,000 acres of the US Army Corps of Engineers/Benbrook Lake as the base.



Crested Caracaras are now nesting on the Fort Worth Prairie.



Ice Age wetland.





Bison reintroduction: first bison/"buffalo" on the Fort Worth Prairie in over 160 years. They lived out the rest of their lives on the wild prairie before this public land prairie was sold for development.



Dickcissel — a grassland nesting bird.



Jarid Manos, Founder of Great Plains Restoration Council, on Big Bluestem Hill, before it was sold to developers. Stands of big bluestem grass showcase strong, old-growth native prairie on deep soil biomes — in a good rain year this wild grass will reach 8 feet high on the Fort Worth Prairie.



Hosting reporters from the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.



Civic tours.



The Monarch Cathedral, a roosting place along Rocky Creek where the September Monarch butterfly migration from Canada rests for the night after refueling on the sweet nectar of late season wildflowers on the open Fort Worth Prairie, and two of our local Plains Apache/Comanche youth Candis and Jared.



Wild open prairie sunset.



Plains Youth InterACTION™ Summit between urban Fort Worth youth and Oglala Lakota youth from Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota.



Rocky Creek (sometimes called Rock Creek) bluffs toward the northwest... this riparian zone used to be wild and remote running south to north into Benbrook Lake/Clear Fork of the Trinity and was where the mountain lion was said to still roam in the mid-2000s.

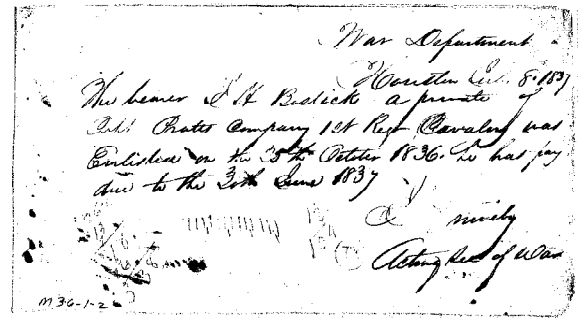
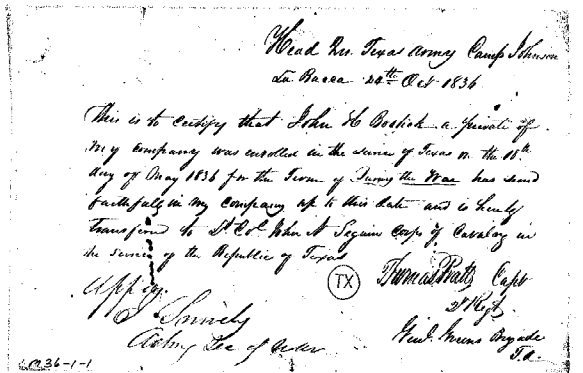
History – Fort Worth Prairie Park



Caddo and Wichita Indigenous people lived in well-built grass houses.



Southern Underground Railroad through the Texas prairie to Mexico. Scholars are unearthing new research, including travels from where Lake Grapevine now is southwestward. (Image from NPR.)



The FWPP includes part of a land grant given to a soldier John Bostick, for serving at the Battle of San Jacinto with Juan Seguin in 1836, who never settled here.



Hand-dug cistern/well.



Peter Daniel Muhlinghaus, frontier settler on the Fort Worth Prairie. Remnants of his 1850s stone homestead still exist on the Fort Worth Prairie Park.



Frontier rock wall.

Wildlife – Fort Worth Prairie



Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher battling a Red-Winged Blackbird.



Variegated Fritillary.



Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher.



Loggerhead Shrike.



Great Blue Heron on East Dutch Branch Creek.



Vegan Mourning Dove eerily eyeing a grasshopper impaled on a thorn by a Loggerhead Shrike.



Red-Bellied Woodpeckers.



Young white-tailed deer living her best life in wild Fort Worth Prairie grassland.



Scissor-Tailed Flycatcher.



American Kestrel aka Sparrow Hawk.



Northern Harrier Hawk among some brush-overgrown country. GPRC's Restoration Not Incarceration™ work helps restore open grassland. Northern Harriers are another grassland-dependent, ground-nesting bird.



Coyote hunting in the morning.

Plains Youth InterACTION — Fort Worth Prairie Park

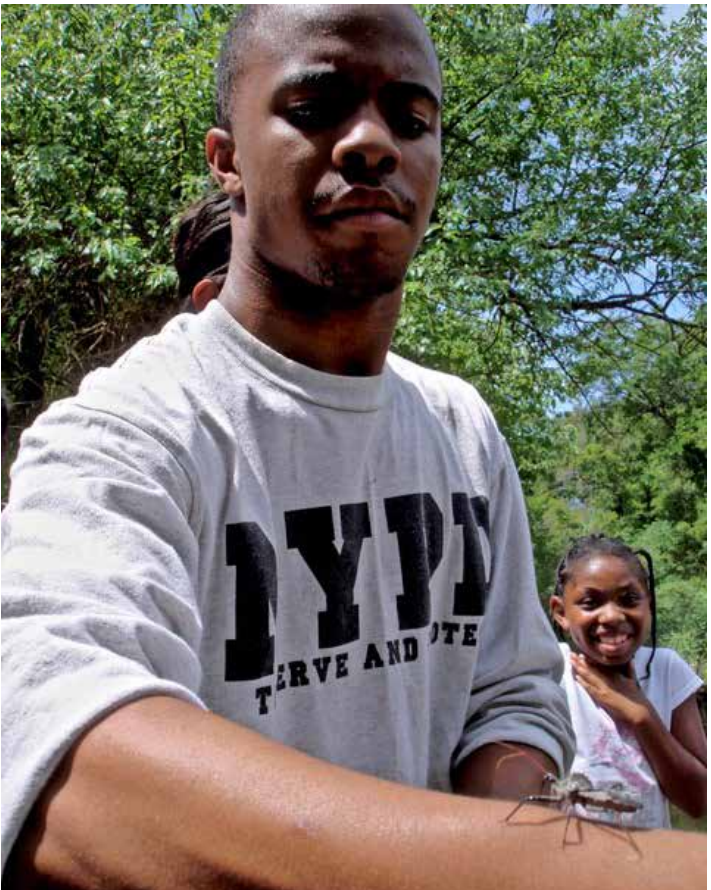


Dr. Tony Burgess from Texas Christian University (TCU) and one of our youth Kalule Kabuta gathering native seed for the Botanic Research Institute of Texas' (BRIT) green roof.

KB discovers an ammonite fossil.



Visiting Oglala Lakota youth from Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota singing a ceremonial song to honor the Fort Worth Prairie and Rock Creek, and local Indigenous people of times past, during a Plains Youth InterACTION™ summit.





Rocky Creek.



Carbon Cutbank, one of our education sites. Healthy native prairie absorbs and stores thousands of years of atmospheric carbon deep in the soil.



(Former) Houston Endowment foundation officer Ann Hamilton and Great Plains Restoration Council youth hiked to a lightning strike tree in the Ancient Buffalo Grove.



The last week of September/first of October, around the time of the Autumn Monarch butterfly return migration, the prairie twilight spikes sun rays into the clarifying air as the season prepares to change.

Restoration Not Incarceration™

Restoring native prairie at the trailhead entrance to the US Army Corps Unit of the Fort Worth Prairie Park



Before photo— Front entrance / Aug. 2019.



After photo: Ms. Marty Leonard visits some of our youth and the prairie. With Nicholas, Dylan, and Carlos at the project site after brush clearing / April 2021.



Removing overgrowth of woody increaser vegetation like cedar elms and hackberries on the prairie.



Starting the brush piles.



Youth lunch discussion with adult advocates Vincent and Jarid (not pictured—he's taking the pic.) From left, Dylan, Vincent, Brandon, Carlos, Nicholas, and Keandre.



U.S. Congressman Marc Veasey speaking with some of the youth on a hike at a site where swale prairie merges up onto a prairie barrens shortgrass prairie ecosystem component of the endangered Fort Worth Prairie.



Discovery of a Texas spiny lizard with his head stuck inside a shotgun shell. On land or at sea, plastic trash is a lethal danger to native wildlife and human health.



He survived! Rescue of Texas spiny lizard from being trapped in the shotgun shell, via surgical removal with a manicure clippers that Johnny Muhammad from Tarrant County Youth Advocate Program went and bought at Walmart.



Release of Texas spiny lizard back into the prairie.



Preparing to cut, separate and stack some more downed cedar elms and hackberries that had choked out the prairie.



Deciding on the 2nd pile location.



Allelopathy on the prairie is where the native plant communities are killed out by tree and brush overgrowth.

Between these two piles is the main front swath that was cleared of trees, brush and plastics, and raked and prepared for seeding with custom-curated Fort Worth Prairie seed mix, courtesy of Native American Seed, Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge, and Suzanne Tuttle and Michelle Villafranca.



Youth planned the consolidation and compression of stacked tree limbs and branches, with Carlos (in photo gesturing) serving as Pile Manager to continually collapse the large volume into much less space.



Alice Barrientez (Plains Apache/Comanche) from the American Indian Youth Council, who previously served as a “GPRC Mom” for participating youth in an earlier program years ago, came out to visit and re-engage.



Pausing for a photo before seeding. A total of 7 formerly incarcerated youth, from our partner Tarrant County Advocate Program, worked on the site. They were paid \$10 an hour, and taught the introductory lessons of Tier 1 of Ecological Health practices and principles, for which there is a certification.

Notice we are using non-plastic bags, even for trash cleanup near the road. If we think about it, there is always a healthier, greener option these days.



We purchased \$600 worth of custom-curated, Texas-sourced native Fort Worth Prairie seed mix, plus received a donation of local collected Fort Worth Prairie seeds from the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge.



Yoga & stretching on the Fort Worth Prairie: Stretching and releasing muscle tension at the end of a week of good, hard work.

Ecological Health practices and principles teach physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being as part of hands-on ecological restoration and preservation.



Becoming part of something bigger: Meditating on the prairie and learning tactical diaphragmatic breathing. Both meditation and diaphragmatic breathing can be used in any area of life, particularly during stress and/or consternation.



Bonus photo: East Dutch Branch Creek — Fort Worth Prairie blue sky, sun, wind, grass and clean water. (And fish who don't yet want their pics taken...)

Mission

Create the largest protected public Prairie Park of several thousand acres in North Texas that helps avert the extinction crisis and provides refuge, health, clean water and a healthy ecosystem for people and wildlife.

Background

Fort Worth and the larger DFW Metroplex were founded upon virgin prairie, yet is “park poor” when it comes to Western-scale conservation lands. The Fort Worth Prairie Park will not only be a grassland park for all of North Texas, but the country’s first major city wildland park protecting ancestral wild prairie as part of its identity.

Description

The native Fort Worth Prairie includes upland tallgrass prairies in deep soil and shallower limestone soil shortgrass prairies, Ice Age wetlands, tabletop plains that provide nourishment, breeding, and resting grounds for spring and fall Monarch butterfly breeding and grassland nesting birds, pristine creeks, gallery forest and more. The Fort Worth Prairie is unique in that it lies directly on America’s “Dry Line”, the 98th Meridian, where the East meets West.

Current size

Over 2,600 acres in the Upper Trinity River Watershed of Southwest Fort Worth around Benbrook Lake and along Rock Creek, East Dutch Branch Creek and other local creeks. The federal lands of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are the backbone, via an MOU. A federal public NEPA commenting process has also been completed, whereby the USACE updated their Master Plan for the first time in 45 years. Now all remaining high-quality native prairie on these federal holdings is officially designated as Environmentally Sensitive Areas.

New acquisition

In December 2021, the City of Fort Worth approved a 275 acre acquisition at a cost of \$6,750,000 that protects the southern end of the Fort Worth Prairie complex and connects directly north to federal USACE lands. This brings back into public ownership the western riparian and archaeological lands of the first Fort Worth Prairie Park tract before it was sold off by the Texas General Land Office.

Goal

Approximately 5,000 acres, working with willing landowners and the community, as an alternative to development.

Needed

Critical upland tabletop plains are needed to complete the Park. The current waterway and swale prairie lands already enrolled. serve as the ecological core.

Cost

\$60 million to \$100 million would permanently protect a Fort Worth Prairie Park of several thousand acres, though land prices continue to rise as development encroaches and open prairie gets scarcer. For context, the community spent \$80 million for the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. A permanent management endowment fund would cost additional.

Ecosystem Status

The Fort Worth Prairie ecosystem is endangered and disappearing fast. Once 1.3 million acres, it is now one of the rarest ecosystems in North America. Native prairie of all ecotypes is the most endangered and least protected in North America, and development is threatening the last of the remaining 10,000-year old prairie in North Texas.

Location

The area around Benbrook Lake in southwest Fort Worth is the last stronghold for the embattled Fort Worth Prairie ecosystem.

Watershed protection

Remaining wild prairie protects perennial creeks, Benbrook Lake, and the overall Upper Trinity River watershed that leads all down through Texas into Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. A TCU study from former Environmental Sciences professor Dr. Tony Burgess shows that development and destruction of these remaining wild prairies will cause runoff pollution to flow directly into our waterways, whereas native prairie and its deep roots provide extraordinary absorption and filtration.

Native Wildlife and Plant Biodiversity

Our last wild Fort Worth Prairie explodes with life. Scissor-tailed flycatchers, dickcissels, grasshopper sparrows, bobwhite quail, American woodcocks, yellow-billed cuckoos, painted buntings, northern harrier hawks, rare and amazing crested caracaras (an eagle-like bird), wild turkeys, bobcats, beaver, coyotes, Texas brown tarantulas, giant swallowtail butterflies, white and largemouth bass, slough darters, longnose gars, box turtles, narrowmouth toads, white-tailed deer, big bluestem, little bluestem, yellow Indian grass, prairie bishop, Missouri foxtail cactus, snow-on-the-prairie, Monarch butterflies and so much more are depending upon us.

Climate change resilience

Native prairie directly removes carbon from the atmosphere and stores it in the deep-rooted soil for thousands of years. When native prairies are destroyed, this carbon is not only released into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change, but also destroys all future carbon sequestration services provided by the native prairie. Native prairie grassland carbon sequestration is highly stable, as it is stored underground, unlike forests. Wild, healthy prairie provides important climate change services as Western forests burn more frequently.

Quality of life

Natural amenities in the form of landscape-level wild open space that protect native ecosystems, with all its outdoor recreation, biodiversity, clean air and clean water, and public health benefits, improve a city's civic attractiveness and daily well-being.

Opportunities

In conjunction with the City of Fort Worth Open Space Department, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Native Prairies Association of Texas and others, and foundation and community partners, we work to conserve remaining native Fort Worth Prairie. Additional new lands can be protected through fee acquisition and conservation easements.

Fort Worth Prairie Park Preservation Committee

The Fort Worth Prairie Park Preservation Committee is comprised of influential business leaders and conservationists.

Ecological Health

Great Plains Restoration Council is the founder of the Ecological Health initiative, defined as “the interdependent health of people, animals and ecosystems”. In Ecological Health education, people take care of their own full-dimensional health through taking care of the Earth. Ecological Health is taught nationally with the Fort Worth Prairie Park as the model.

Youth & Youth Adult Educational Programming and Employment for Prairie Ecological Restoration and Management

Great Plains Restoration Council (GPRC) does conservation through people. For example, in the historic absence of bison and fire, some tree and brush overgrowth has begun to choke out prairie biodiversity in places, especially on Corps swales leading up from waterways, and must be removed to protect endangered biodiversity. GPRC’s program Restoration Not Incarceration™, in partnership with Tarrant County Youth Advocate Program and others, employs formerly incarcerated young men and women on a re-entry track to restore the prairie back to 1800s conditions, while also providing life-valuable training, education and certification in Tier I, II, and III of Ecological Health practices and principles. Restoration Not Incarceration™ field crew teams cost approximately \$1,000 a day, delivering an increase in acreage of native prairie on land already protected. A couple years of work need to be scheduled now.

Benefits to Society

Nature-based work therapy has been shown in several studies to reduce recidivism and help participants build a lifeline to a healthier, more sustainable future for themselves. In some cases, young people realize they can be leaders themselves and go on to serve others and the living natural world. In Ecological Health, service recipients become service providers. On a broader scale, preserving wild open space dramatically improves public health and wellness physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually for everybody.

Honoring History

As we stride into the future, the Fort Worth Prairie Park can include interpretation of the first frontier Anglo settlers (there are frontier stone homestead archaeological ruins), local Caddo and Wichita tribes who lived in well-built grass houses, Kiowa and Comanche who visited from the west, and a trail memorializing the 1850s Southern Underground Railroad whereby escaped enslaved people of African descent traveled across the Texas prairie toward Mexico and freedom.

##