



## **TXSER News Brief**

Reprinted from TXSER Newsletter

TNB No. 3

November 2017

### **TXSER 2017 Annual Conference: Resilience & Connectivity at Our Roots Conference Wrap-Up**

Gwen Michele Thomas  
Executive Director  
Texas Society for Ecological Restoration

One of the great pleasures of the TXSER conference is that each year is different and special in its own way - different location, different population of attendees, different projects, and different discussions. This year, TXSER's 2017 Annual Conference: Resilience & Connectivity at Our Roots exemplified just that. We returned to our roots where TXSER was founded in 1995 at the University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton. Much of what took place over the November 10-12 weekend demonstrated the importance of organizational and ecological resilience, connectivity, and growth from roots. We have seen TXSER grow and flourish from its early days, making connections across the State with like-minded academics and practitioners concerned about the restoration of the Texas landscape. We learned about, and discussed, ecosystem resilience and the importance of connectivity among, and between, natural systems that allow for the recovery of damaged systems and their continued ability to provide the ecological and social services to sustain our growing Texas population.

From start to finish, the conference was a success. It was TXSER's largest conference to date, with attendees coming from Alpine, Brownsville, Houston, Tyler, Norman (Oklahoma), and all places in-between. Representatives from NGOs, from public sector agencies, from the private sector including consulting firms and landowners, and from academia joined us. Students from twelve colleges and universities across the State attended. One professor from the Department of Biological Sciences at UNT wrote "I have a rule about scientific conferences. Only attend those in which something can come out of it. TXSER was the best I have ever been to..."



**Dixon Water Foundation Field Trip**

As we do every year, our conference began with our fabulous Friday Field Trips. This year we offered three. The first was to the [Dixon Water Foundation's](#) Leo and Heard Ranches in Cooke County to learn about DWF's management techniques that provide grass-finished meat while improving the health of the grasslands and watershed. As one participant said, "it really motivates us to continue practicing our rotational grazing to improve the land and water quality." Participants also had the opportunity to visit the [Josey Pavilion](#), the first certified living house in the State of Texas.

The second field trip, to the [Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area \(LLELA\)](#), was divided into two parts. The morning "Talk & Tour" visited LLELA's native plant nursery and explored ongoing prairie and forest restoration activities. The afternoon offered an opportunity for participants to get their hands dirty with "Hands-On Restoration" activities. One participant mentioned "After lunch we were put to work! We planted a large number of forbs in a field (made easier with the use of soil augers!) and then added some shrubs and forbs to the Chinese privet area. It was a great day and Ken (Steigman) and Richard's (Freiheit) enthusiasm and passion for their work is inspiring!"



**LLELA Field Trip**



**Kayak Power Paddle Field Trip  
Who is that daring person standing up?**

The third trip was a [Kayak Power Paddle](#) on the Elm Fork of the Trinity River. According to one participant, "...in between several shoots and rapids we discussed river dynamics, invasive aquatic species and control methods, and riparian restoration efforts." Apparently a pair of bald eagles and a heron rookery tree were also spotted. You know the trip was fun and interesting when the team from the San Antonio River Authority, who spend a lot of time working on rivers, enthused about the trip.

Friday was topped-off with the TXSER opening dinner, a magical Picnic on the Prairie and bonfire at LLELA. One person said it was like a "fairyland in the middle of the metroplex." Another likened it to the Trilogy of the Rings, where one follows a path of fire rings which opened up onto a prairie with a sparkly, candle-lit tent in the distance. Everyone was enchanted.



**Picnic on the Prairie at Dusk**



**Picnic on the Prairie**

We were treated to a BBQ meat lovers marvel and a vegetarian chili delight courtesy of Bob Monaghan, a competitive BBQ chef and retired Director of Lewisville Parks and Recreation Department and Mary Steigman who not only cooked the vegetarian dinner, but visualized and put together the tent with table cloths, candles, and flowers. Beer donated by Cobra Brewery and wine donated by the Friends of LLELA, as well as the input of many volunteers to set up, manage the multiple fire rings and bonfire, lead us down the dark roads and pathways of LLELA to get to the prairie setting and home again, were very much

appreciated by all in attendance. It was a truly magical evening.

In addition, TXSER held its Student and Young Professionals' Roundtable session, Friday evening on the prairie, under the stars. Participants had the opportunity to rotate among four discussion groups labeled .com, .gov, .org, and .edu to meet and speak with professionals from each of those sectors. A student standing at the bonfire later in the evening, was so enthusiastic about the people he had met and contacts he had made, exclaimed "it was like speed dating for professionals."

Friday was the perfect kick-off to a super two days of presentations and discussions at [UNT's Environmental Education, Science & Technology \(EESAT\) Building](#) on Saturday and Sunday. Highlights from the two days include:



**Student & Young Professionals' Roundtable**

**A Call to Action** – Ken Steigman’s keynote address on Saturday morning set the stage for intense discussions about where we are, what works, what mistakes we have made, and where we are going in the future. He also conveyed the urgency with which we need to act. “When Steigman raised the issue of the 6<sup>th</sup> extinction, I knew he was calling us all to action,” exclaimed one enthusiastic student. Steigman’s keynote address encouraged us to be open to new partnerships that will foster collaboration across diverse groups allowing for creative ways to protect our biodiversity. The time is now for the restoration community to consolidate our resources, reach out to others, and to dig in to protect these natural resources that we all treasure.



**Richard Freiheit & Ken Steigman**

**A Tearful Presentation** – It seems that there was a first-ever at a TXSER conference. Rumor has it that LLELA’s Richard Freiheit offered a passionate and heart-felt presentation “Legacies: Are We Missing the Mark,” that left half the room in tears. His conclusion about the importance of engaging the community in restoration and environmental education completely hit the mark. Next time Richard speaks we promise to provide hankies.

**It’s All About the.... Connectivity** – Amy Concilio of St. Edward’s University in Austin gave TXSER a huge shout-out during her talk “Vegetation Response to Prairie Restoration Treatments at an Urban Park in Travis County, TX.” In 2016, TXSER learned of grant money available for prairie research and restoration studies on the Commons Ford Prairie in Austin. We circulated the RFP to key TXSER members in the area. Amy Concilio at St.



**Bethanie Walder, SERI, loves her EARTHx gardening stool from the raffle.**

Edward’s applied and received the grant money. Facilitating these kinds of connections is what TXSER is all about. We are proud of all the great work Amy and her students are carrying out at Commons Ford Prairie and thrilled to have had a small hand in it.

**The Price Is Right** – Our \$1 a ticket raffle was a huge success bringing in approximately \$350 to be put towards future student awards. Raffle items ran the gamut from coffee table books and vintage TXSER posters to gardening stools and a watercolor painting of a piping plover. Many thanks to all those who donated items to the raffle.

**A Social & Poster Session** – We had a record number of student and professional posters this year, 21 in total. UNT’s

EESAT Gallery provided the perfect venue to bring us together in an intimate space, but with enough room to move. Conversations could be heard in all corners on topics ranging from painted buntings to harvester ants, and from leaving slash in place to a visit with SER Nepal. Conversations were fueled by drinks and appetizers, the most popular of which was Roy Leslie’s white-tail/axis/sika deer sausage, hunted and home-processed at Hillingdon Ranch in Kendall County.



**Studying UT Tyler, Rachel Romo’s, poster.**



**Kevin Thuesen provides balance and counter-balance to the conversation.**

**A Notorious Ecological Restoration Discussion (NERD)**

– Sunday, we held our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual NERD – Restoration & Climate Change: How Resilient is Your Ecosystem? This article discussion group is a spin-off of a monthly Austin-based NERD meeting. Participants were asked to read a journal article in advance “Rapid Recovery of Damaged Ecosystems,” by Holly P. Jones and Oswald J. Schmitz at Yale University’s School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. We began with a discussion as a full group. We then

broke into smaller discussion groups to focus on resilience to climate change at the ecosystem level, and finally, we regrouped to brief everyone present on our ecosystem-based discussions. The NERD was lively, and as always, Kevin Thuesen with the City of Austin, skillfully facilitated the session, providing balance and counter-balance to the conversation. Rumor has it that UNT is discussing the possibility of starting a NERD group, and Bethanie Walder, Executive Director of SER, expressed interest in developing a way to offer a national-level NERD. Stay tuned. You will be hearing more on NERDs down the road.

Next year’s conference location is still to be determined. As always, it is sure to be unique in its own way and equally fun and interesting.

This is barely a glimpse of our conference photos from this year. For those of you wishing to see more, you can find them on the [TXSER Facebook](#) page or on Twitter at [#TXSER2017](#).

**The Texas Society for Ecological Restoration, connects scientists, practitioners, and policy-makers to restore Texas ecosystems and the vital services they provide.**

**For more information on TXSER visit: [www.txser.org](http://www.txser.org)**