

TXSER News Brief

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So Long, but Not Farewell **A Final Word From TXSER's Executive Director, Gwen Thomas**

For those of you who haven't heard, I am leaving TXSER at the end of this month. This is the 60th newsletter I have published for TXSER and I want to take a moment and reflect on some of the changes I have seen over these past five years.

I started with TXSER in 2013 at what seemed a critical moment for both the field and for the organization. The TXSER Board of Directors had recognized an organizational shift was beginning to occur where TXSER was emerging from a small and dispersed, all volunteer organization, to one that was beginning to coalesce around a growing interest and concern for restoring Texas' damaged and degraded land and waterways. This coincided with a relative explosion of interest and work in ecological restoration at both the national and international levels. The Board saw the need to consolidate our dispersed resources in order to build the organization upwards and outwards.



In these five years, we have also seen a major shift in how we think about restoration. For many years scientists and practitioners have worked in relative silos with few built in opportunities for feedback. The shift, in these past few years, brings together these two groups of professionals, working for the same larger goals, but needing much greater input from one another. Add to that, the current and growing concern about how policy impacts restoration and how each of these groups can interact at the policy level to enhance restoration efforts, makes a very powerful triumvirate. In its wisdom, TXSER's Board of Directors recognized this shift and last spring revised its mission to account for these three critical areas in order to enhance communication and collaboration across science, practice, and policy. Early in the year, while the Texas legislature was in session, the TXSER Board dipped its big toe into the policy arena with three important efforts: (1) support for the continued classification of prescribed burning as a land management activity; (2) support for the continued use of the sporting goods sales tax to fund state and local parks, and; (3) support of the field evaluation of HOGGONE Sodium Nitrite for control of feral hogs. For each of these efforts, TXSER served as a conduit of science-based information and offered tools to better understand, and engage in, the policy process.

The growth in technology, and our use of technology, has allowed us to blossom and get the word out about our efforts. As a small organization, technology has allowed us to reach out with our newsletters and through social media to reach many who we might not otherwise engage in the restoration dialogue. It has allowed us to be connected with the student in El Paso, the large landowner in Brownsville, and individuals and organizations in all places in between. It has also allowed us to connect with other SER chapters, both nationally and internationally, providing us with a greater depth of restoration experience on which to draw and adapt to our local needs.

Reflecting this groundswell of interest and concern, our annual conference has grown every year, bringing together more diverse and ever larger numbers of individuals and organizations involved in restoration efforts throughout the state and beyond. This year we had a record number of attendees, particularly students. We had presentations and posters on everything from milkweed germination to dragonfly diversity and from prescribed fire to wetland restoration. Increased participation has allowed for greater sharing of experiences, tools, and techniques for improved restoration results and increased opportunities for collaboration.

Texas is unique in that so much of its land is privately owned. This provides us with a huge challenge, but also a unique opportunity to take public/private partnerships to a new level. We must bring private landowners into the dialogue and try to work across public/private lines if we are to have success in our field. TXSER has seen its members develop unique collaborative partnerships and we need to capitalize on the lessons learned from their experiences. One such example of a multi-site and multi-stakeholder effort was described by Kelly Lyons, President of TXSER's Board of Directors, at our November conference. The project tests native species and establishment methods on three different sites in Austin. It is a partnership between Trinity University, The Nature Conservancy, The City of Austin's Water Quality and Protection Lands Program and Shield Ranch linking public and private entities with academia creating important feedback loops for science and practice. Not only will the scientific contributions of this project be important to the restoration field, but we have much to learn from this complex public/private partnership.

In order for TXSER to continue to grow and flourish, we need your support. This is your organization and I encourage you to support TXSER so that it can reach the next level of growth, making it a truly member driven organization that listens to, is actively involved with, and meets the needs of, its membership. Only your involvement can make this happen. Take the reins and make it yours.

This is truly a bittersweet moment for me. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the TXSER Board of Directors, past and present, and have particularly enjoyed getting to know many of you and learning about your interests and efforts in the restoration field. This is not a goodbye, but rather a so long, see you later, as I will continue to be involved in the restoration field and with TXSER, but just in a different capacity.

Best wishes to all of you and your families for a happy, healthy holiday season.

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