

# Society for Ecological Restoration Texas Chapter



## Restoration Field Notes

September, 2015

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## TXSER Newsflash

### Call for Abstracts - Abstracts Due September 25th

[Click here for information on presenting papers and/or posters.](#)

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### Conference Registration Early registration ends September 30th

To register, click on the Eventbrite button below and you will be directed to our conference page.

[Register Now](#)

### [TXSER Conference Details](#)

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## Conference Update November 13-15, 2015 - Trinity University, San Antonio

### Friday Field Trips & Dinner on the Riverwalk:

#### Field Trips:

We have a super selection of field trips set up for Friday, November 13th. Sign up for field trips on the Eventbrite registration page.

**Grassland Restoration Techniques**, Hixon Ranch, Cotulla, 9am - 4pm. Leaders: Eric Grahmann, CKWRI & Mike Heyman, Hixon

Colin Shackelford

North Texas Rep.  
Michelle Villafranca

East Texas Rep.  
William Forbes

South Texas Rep.  
Eric Grahmann

West Texas Rep.  
Katherine Crosthwaite

Central Texas Rep.  
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### Employment Opportunities & More

For up-to-date  
announcements of positions  
open in ecological restoration  
and environmental science,  
visit our website at:  
[Job Postings](#)

We also post a wide range of  
articles on ecological  
restoration issues as well as  
job and volunteer  
opportunities on our  
Facebook page at:  
[TXSER Facebook Page](#)

**Join Us...**

Ranch. Brown bag lunch provided.

**Restoring Riparian Habitat**, San Antonio River Authority, 9am - 4pm. Leader: Lee Marlowe, San Antonio River Authority. Brown bag lunch provided.

**Native Seed for the South Texas Region**, Douglass King Seed Co. 9am - 2pm. Leaders: Dean Williams, Douglass King Seed Co. & Keith Pawelek, CKWRI. Participants treated to lunch in Castroville by Douglass King Seed Co.

**Urban Restoration**, Phil Hardberger Park, 1pm - 4pm. Leader: Gail Gallegos, Phil Hardberger Park, San Antonio Parks & Recreation

For more information on Friday Field Trips, click here:  
[Friday Field Trip Details](#)

### Dinner on the Riverwalk:

*Join us for a taste of New Orleans on the Riverwalk!*

We have organized an informal kick-off dinner on the Riverwalk patio of the Wyndham Garden Riverwalk Hotel at 103 9th Street in San Antonio. Dinner will be catered by the newly opened and highly recommended Bourbon Street Seafood Kitchen.

Friday dinner is included in your registration fee. Street parking is available as is \$5 valet event parking at the hotel.

### [TXSER Conference Details](#)

## Remembrance

### Dr. Mark Simmons (1960-2015) Colleague, Mentor & Friend

On August 31 of this year, Mark Simmons of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center died of complications from leukemia. He was born in Falmouth, England, earned a bachelor's in environmental science from the University of Lancaster, bachelor's and master's degrees in botany from the University of Cape Town, and a doctorate in rangeland ecology and management from Texas A&M University in 2003. Mark came to the Wildflower Center in 2000 to lead the research component of the Landscape Restoration Program and since 2010 served as Director of Research and Consulting as well as chief of the Wildflower Center's Ecosystem Design Group.

**Celebrate TXSER's  
20th Anniversary**

**at our**

**2015 Annual Conference**

**Scheduled for:  
November 13-15, 2015**

**On the campus of:  
Trinity University  
in  
San Antonio, Texas**

**[TXSER Conference Info.](#)**



**Dr. Mark Simmons**

**Photo, courtesy of the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center**

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Mark's research on fire ecology, grassland dynamics, vegetated roofs, native turf grasses, and ecosystem services was significant in shaping our approach to urban nature. Mark also led more than a dozen high-profile environmental design projects such as the South West Greenway at Austin's Mueller Park and the 8-mile Mission Reach San Antonio River restoration. A more complete summary of Mark's venerable professional accomplishments can be accessed [here](#).

And if Mark T. Simmons had just been a great ecologist, then this is where this remembrance would end. But Mark wasn't just a great ecologist, he was a great communicator. People gathered around him in kitchens and in conference halls just to watch and hear him perform that ancient art of the spoken word. He taught us that a hill of data isn't worth a hill of beans until you make it a story. Until you make sense of it and make it come alive for people right before their eyes in words they can understand and take home with them.

He was visionary. Many researchers see the way the world is and ask, Why? Mark saw the way the world could be and, in the sentiments of Robert Kennedy, asked, Why not? He painted for us his vision of a better ecology. This vision evolved over time, first involving fire as a natural, restorative process compatible with the built environment and ultimately taking shape as nature and the built environment seamlessly intertwined. In 2013, he delivered a moving [TEDx talk](#) on the subject of an Eco-metropolis.

And he inspired. By the summer of 2001, I had graduated with a bachelor's degree in biology and been rejected by five graduate schools because I didn't know what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to work in conservation, but conservation is a broad field, so in my grad school applications I sent in these generalized and very idealistic essays about international exchange of ideas and indigenous knowledge and paradigms and such. The first thing Mark did was make me learn my plants. Then he began to teach me how to read landscapes, to see not just the present, but the past and the future all at once. Then he handed me a drip torch and it was all over. I applied to one respected grad program, was accepted with

funding, and now I do ecological restoration for living. In a very real sense, Mark determined the course of my career and the purpose of much of my life.



**The Wildflower Center's Landscape Restoration Program Team.  
Gathering at Steve Windhager's wedding in 2001.  
L-R - Matt McCaw, Mark Simmons, Steven Windhager,  
Heather Vanhaus, Daniel Dietz, & Dick Davis**

Last weekend, a group of Mark's protégés stood around in a backyard in east Austin with beer and fajitas and in between the dabbling of teary eyes and the sighs of disbelief we began to wonder about legacies. We weren't mourning the loss of a great data analyst or a great naturalist. We mourned the loss of a great mentor and friend. He affected us all profoundly and he reinforced our drive to do something meaningful with our lives. We. We are his legacy. A force multiplied, and a bit unmoored at the moment, but in time, confidently sailing in the right direction. We should all hope to have such a legacy.

*Matt McCaw, Senior Biologist, Water Quality Protection Lands,  
Wildland Conservation Division, Austin Water Utility*

## **Wimberley Flood: Compassionate Restoration**

**By: Katherine Crosthwaite, Ecologist, HDR Environmental, Operations & Construction, Inc., Spring Branch, Texas**



The Blanco River flood on May 23, 2015 was traumatic - for the people, animals, infrastructure, and the Blanco River Valley itself. There are many reports, interviews, photographs, videos, and facts that very clearly described the damage to anything within sight of the Blanco River Valley that night. Well before the flood waters receded, people were descending upon the area to help. Wimberley residents, businesses, organizations, and churches all jumped to contribute - and the result was a very impressively organized small town of recovery - and restoration.



**Centuries-old trees torn up by their roots & debris scattered across the riverbanks.  
Photo credit: Katherine Crosthwaite**

The Wimberley Ace Hardware was particularly organized which allowed for anyone to arrive, receive an address, and be outfitted with donated supplies within minutes of stepping out of their car. That is how I ended up at a home on the Blanco River in my town of Wimberley. The owner's family was shoveling everything from the house - the 'throw away' pile was enormous while the 'keep' pile was comprised of a small nest of items. The owner was clearly exhausted, traumatized, and overwhelmed. Who could blame her? She was worried about her neighbors. Her belongings and memories were strewn 20 miles down river, her few remaining belongings were ruined, the house needed to be taken down to the studs after the inches of muck were shoveled off of the floors; then, long discussions with FEMA or the insurance agent.

By the time the first volunteer with a skid steer arrived, we were all exhausted and covered with sweat and pollution-contaminated river muck. The presence of this skid steer meant that we did not have to manually haul the tons of water logged furniture, household items, and dry wall several hundred meters to the main road. So, when a second skid steer showed up, we were happy to see it. However, with approval from the landowner, this operator drove past the house and into the backyard that sloped down to the river and began piling the woody



flood debris into neat piles. In addition to removing coarse woody debris from this yard, the skid steer was significantly compacting and rutting the water-soaked soil along the river banks. It was also removing trees that may have had an opportunity to re-sprout, if not provide protection to the banks from future floods and protection to seedlings from inevitable browsing.



**Compaction and rutting of the water-soaked soil.**

**Photo credit: Katherine Crosthwaite**

Amidst the trauma of an event such as this, when do you begin talking about ecological restoration?

The resounding answer to that is before the event happens. The same week this flood scoured centuries-old trees from their roots and removed many miles of riverbank, a [Texas Riparian and Stream Ecosystem Workshop](#) was held in this very community. During this free workshop, attendees learned about the role of riparian vegetation in properly functioning riparian systems. Days later these citizens began to apply what they had learned at this workshop to the events they were experiencing first hand in their own community. They began to compassionately and delicately communicate to their friends and neighbors about the importance of leaving some of the debris in place in order to allow for the riverbanks a chance to naturally recover - and in many cases, it worked.

Within two days of the flood, a group called the [Blanco River Valley Restoration Project](#) was developed by a Wimberley resident and the first meeting was held within a week of the flood. This organization has served as a valuable resource with which to share the many efforts of communication, education, and restoration that have been developed in order to begin the long restoration process of the Blanco River Valley. Trained professionals from many agencies have been consulted and have begun projects to restore the Valley. These projects will be very interesting for those of us who are connected to the theme of ecological restoration and

many lessons and valuable research will result. However, the most important and lasting lesson I will take from this experience is how far compassionately communicated restoration from informed friends and neighbors can reach - from one home to the next.

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## A Hidden Gem: Warbler Woods

**By: Leslie Dietz, Masters Candidate, Population & Conservation Biology, Department of Biology, Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas**

Tucked away neatly away on the northwest side of San Antonio, Warbler Woods is a quiet oasis amidst an urban center. With identified bird species nearing 300, this gem of a property is privately owned, but open to the public with owner permission. Covering 124 acres of varied habitat with gentle rolling topography, Warbler Woods lies at the convergence of two EcoRegions: Blackland Prairie and Edwards Plateau with South Texas Plains nearby. Owners Don and Susan Schaezler have been engaged in various restoration projects since 1997 when they moved to the property permanently.



**Golden Cheeked Warbler (*Setophaga chrysoparia*)**  
**Photo credit: Environmental Defense Fund Blog**

In 2005, a wet area deemed "Warbler Pond" was constructed after experimenting with various other water systems. Warbler Pond is the hot spot for bird watching but there are also several trails and a small prairie to explore. The construction of this pond was the first active restoration effort on the property; and today is a very active birding area. It is not altogether unusual to see a rare species on your visit. Bird species including Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*), Connecticut warbler (*Oporornis agilis*) and MacGillivray's warbler (*Geothlypis tolmiei*) have been documented at this property, although they are rare visitors to this area. Other notable species include Cape May warbler (*Setophaga tigrina*), Townsend's warbler



(*Setophaga townsendi*), Palm warbler (*Setophaga palmarum*) and Blackpoll warbler (*Setophaga striata*).

In conjunction to the many warbler species found, there is a deluge of various other bird species, several mammals, more than a dozen reptile and amphibian species and over 60 butterfly species, including Zebra Heliconian (*Heliconius charithonia*). The flora that support these species numbers is well over 200. Exotic plant species are a major focus of the restoration effort at Warbler Woods, eliminating non-native species when possible. Several volunteer groups are routinely involved in vegetation control including scout groups and student groups from local universities.



**Summer Tanager ( *Piranga rebra* )**  
**Photo credit: New Jersey Audubon**

Warbler Woods was the recipient of the Lone Star Land Steward Award in 2011. This award, given by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, recognizes and honors private landowners in Texas for their contributions to natural resource conservation and management. Since this award, the Schaezlers have had a distinct focus on prairie restoration. Using traditional restoration techniques, many wildflower and grass species have been established. Additionally, there has been some juniper clearing (*Juniper ashei*) to promote the population of Golden Cheeked Warblers (*Setophaga chrysoparia*) that have been seen.



Ecological restoration is a fundamental unit of conservation. The Schaezlers have begun active restoration and are starting to experience success. Warbler Woods is a fantastic outdoor experience for an expert, a budding naturalist or a family looking to explore. For more information, go to [www.warblerwoods.org](http://www.warblerwoods.org).

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## Upcoming Events

### Jurisdictional Waters Delineation Training Course

Whitenton Group  
October 5-9, 2015  
Mercer Arboretum & Botanical Gardens  
22306 Aldine Westfield Road, Humble, TX 77338  
For details & registration: [Jurisdictional Waters Delineation Training](#)

### Capit-O-Lize on Natives: Contributions, Challenges, Conservation

Native Plant Society of Texas 2015 Annual Symposium  
Plans include plenary speakers, 20 break-out sessions and 37 field trips.  
October 15-18  
Airport Hilton Hotel, Austin, TX  
For details & registration: [NPSOT 2015 Symposium](#)

**A Heartfelt Thanks to the Following Organizations for their  
Generous Support of our 2014 Conference!!**





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The Society for Ecological Restoration, Texas Chapter promotes ecological restoration as a means of sustaining the diversity of life on Earth and re-establishing an ecologically healthy relationship between nature and culture.

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Join the Texas Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration. Chapter members receive valuable benefits including:

the opportunity to network with restoration practitioners and enthusiasts;  
discounts to our Annual Conference, an opportunity to share and learn;  
invitations to attend volunteer workdays around the state; and,  
monthly updates and quarterly newsletters with articles and notices about regional events that allow you to connect to the local restoration community.

Chapter membership fees of \$15 support chapter administration. The TXSER Board of Directors consists of volunteers who share a passion for furthering ecological restoration in Texas.

Joining SER links you with a global restoration network. SER member benefits include:

SERNews quarterly newsletter;  
discounts on journal publications;  
discounts to SER World Conferences;  
discounts on SER Career Center;  
access to a searchable, online member directory, and,  
promotional opportunities through the SER Calendar of Events and Restoration Project Showcase.

To become a member visit: **[www.ser.org/membership](http://www.ser.org/membership)**

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