

ARLINGTON
CONSERVATION
COUNCIL

POSTOAK

WORKING TO CONSERVE ARLINGTON'S NATURAL RESOURCES

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 4

APRIL 2007

Note
meeting place:
Fielder Museum

April Meeting



The 2008 Parks Bond Program

Gordon Robertson, Manager,
Park Planning, Design, and Construction
Arlington Parks & Recreation Department

Wednesday, April 11, 7:00 pm.

Fielder Museum
1616 W. Abram St.
(corner of Fielder and Abram)

Bring your ideas to this important program.
How would you like to spend \$20,000,000?

WE NEED RAFFLE ITEMS!

Bits & Pieces

Thinking about Aldo Leopold

“Acts of creation are ordinarily reserved for gods and poets, but humbler folk may circumvent this restriction if they know how. To plant a pine, for example, one need be neither god nor poet; one need only own a good shovel. By virtue of this curious loophole in the rules, any clodhopper may say: Let there be a tree—and there will be one.”

Earth Day at the Wildscape

On Sunday, April 22, we're planning to observe Earth Day at the Wildscape with a variety of activities aimed at families and kids. Watch your email for more information, and save the date to help celebrate our planet

Turtles in Trouble

Need something else to worry about? Try this: On April 2 the Star-Telegram reported that tens of thousands of Texas turtles are caught and sold each year mostly to supply Asian food demands. It's legal now, but the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission has approved a ban proposal; the rule is subject to a 30-day public comment period that's expected to begin later this month.



Junk Mail Update

Thanks to a few of our members who want to stop the annoyance (and waste) of junk mail, ACC has already received over \$100 from 41pounds.org. Surely more of us are interested and we ought to go to their Web site and sign up. We'll benefit, and so will ACC. Trees will like it, too.

A Green Roof at UTA?

OK Carter's April 2 column focused on a UTA student's green roof initiative, and that was good. But his piece was injured by the idea that green roofs haven't caught on in this country. They're certainly not big here, but a quick Internet search shows that they're growing fast. For a Texas view on this, see page 4.

From the President John Darling



It was a dark and stormy night. No, really, it was, about a week ago, and I was old and beat up after a hard day at the office. But She Who Must Be Obeyed said we were

signed up to slog over to McKinney for a tour of the country's first LEED-certified (silver) automobile dealership. Five hours and 34 inches of rain later, we returned home after what turned out to be an absolute inspiration.

Imagine a good-looking sustainable building overrun with maybe 70 architects who paid actual



money to hear about all the wonderful features at Pat Lobb Toyota. (He's certainly worth a plug here; some environmentalist drove all the way from Colorado to buy a car from this guy.)

The oddest moment: Pat Lobb himself, with ice in his voice, said, "I'm no tree hugger, but..." And the rest was all about how much his green building made sense. Another horrified convert who figured it out on his way to the bank but can't come out of the environmental closet.

And there was something else we probably won't live to see here: a slick flier entitled "Green McKinney" that touts the city's openness to sustainability. Just rubbing our noses in it, I suppose, but that's okay. We've got bread and circuses. Especially circuses.

We could quit fretting, sit on our tailgates with a beer, and admire ACC's award from the Texas Recreation and Parks Society (TRAPS). Our friends at Arlington Parks & Rec put us up for this award, and Past President Wayne Halliburton accepted the regional award a while ago. In February we raced down to South Padre to receive the statewide award and do a little birdwatching. We learned that TRAPS is a huge, impressive group and getting their award says something good about our members. We already knew that our Parks & Rec people are the best around. Better even than McKinney's, I bet. We're lucky to have a city department that encourages us and provides us with opportunities to do some good. An award is icing on the cake.



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Thanks, A.C.C. for working to conserve Arlington's natural resources!

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New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Jan Miller

If anyone should ask you why that land on south New York Avenue is a city park, this is the time of year to take them out there and show them. It's pretty easy to see this time of year, with the spring wildflower show just starting: anemones have already bloomed, but golden groundsel is



generously sprinkled across the prairie. A closer look finds bluebonnets, prairie verbena, spiderwort in various jewel tones, blue-eyed grass, winecups, fluffy spikes of Texas bluegrass and those heavenly prairie celestials just beginning to bloom. There's the slender new growth of

grasses, sedges and rushes alongside robust clumps of Indian plantain. And tell those visitors to watch their step: they'll know a gilgai when they step into one! Recent rains have them almost filled and vegetation may hide a shoe-full of water. Tell them to bring their binoculars to watch for hawks and to keep an eye out for varieties of butterflies and dragonflies they probably don't see at home.

Or just invite them to join you at our wildflower walk at the prairie on Sunday, April 29. If they can't wait 'til then, invite them to our next workday or to come see our display at Fort Worth's Prairie Fest II:

2nd Annual Fort Worth Prairie Fest April 28, Saturday, 11 a.m. – 7 p.m.

Friends of Tandy Hills Nature Area present this outdoor festival to celebrate our connection to the natural world through Music, Art, Dance, Environmental Stewardship and Wildflower Tours. Check it out at www.fortworthprairiefest.org

Spring Wildflower Walk at New York Avenue Blackland Prairie Park,



Sunday, April 29, 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm. Jim Varnum will join us again as we walk and talk prairies. Spring wildflowers should be at their peak.

Refreshments will be served. For directions or more information, contact jgmiller5594@sbcglobal.net.

And since this is Earth month, go visit your 'mom'! Here's another big event: **Wonders on the Wing – International Migratory Bird Day** April 21, Saturday, 10:00 am – 5:00 pm. River Legacy Living Science Center. Guided bird hikes, children's activities, speakers and much more! Check out related national and world events at www.birdday.org.

2007 Litter Challenge: Another Win for ACC and Friends

On March 24 almost 500 volunteers throughout Arlington collected 868 bags of trash, not including a hot tub, silt fencing, and other assorted debris. Organizer Roni Crotty reports that they filled four 40-yard dumpsters.

Thanks to sponsors General Motors Corporation, TAS Environmental, Abitibi Consolidated Recycling Division, TTI Labs, and Big City Crushed Concrete, winners received cash prizes—for doing something we've done in the past just for the satisfaction.

ACC members were joined by volunteers from a nearby church and a new neighborhood group (Heart of Arlington Neighborhood Association)

in the flood control area around the Center/Mesquite bridges over Johnson Creek. We received credit for 77 trash bags. (Big ugly debris didn't count but we pulled out a lot anyway.) That total won us our category again.



It looked a lot better when we left: Wesley Miller took this shot of our area on the day before the challenge.

Thanks to Our Recent Speakers



We're indebted to our March speaker, Woody Frossard, Environmental Director for Tarrant Regional Water District, for his talk on wetlands water reuse. It wasn't just educational, it was fun, too.

Last month there just wasn't enough room to thank John Davis, Texas Parks & Wildlife Urban Biologist, for his presentation on urban stream protection—another fascinating talk by someone who really can't seem to give a bad one.



Wildscape Update John Dycus



The green, growing, living roof has come to Texas. In Austin, near the Wildflower Center, the Starbucks in a new shopping plaza boasts native grasses and other

plants where you might expect shingles or a hot, bare slab. The Wildflower Center collaborated. Water not needed by the grasses runs into two large storage tanks for landscape irrigation. Like this would happen in Arlington. Amazing.

Still in the state's most progressive city, the Wildflower Center is offering a series of six classes this spring to boost your proficiency in native landscaping and gardening. Ann Knudsen, Hester Schwartzer, and Molly Hollar are taking the classes. The first two classes, taught by a landscape architect, presented beautiful designs and how to implement them. Other sessions will cover native plant choices, plant maintenance, installation, and pests and diseases.

Let Molly fill you in on Tres Amigas en Austin: "We are enjoying time

outside class exploring new areas and new exhibits at the Wildflower Center. One very practical thing we learned is about torching large, ornamental native grasses, like Lindheimer's Muhly, to rid them of dead foliage while restoring them. Most everything at the Wildflower Center is blooming, and the drive down is a great wildflower viewing opportunity, with coreopsis, bluebonnets, and other gorgeous spring wildflowers at their prime. After drought, vandalism, and erosion damage at our wildscape back home, this spectacular spring show renews our enthusiasm."



Green Austin glimpses: Above left, Starbucks green roof from the inside. Above right, rainwater storage at Starbucks. Below left, The sign tells a story that we haven't heeded yet. Below right, big visual punch from native plants in a small space.

Green Roofs can...

- Reduce cooling bills** The cooling and shading properties of a green roof can decrease the amount of heat flowing into a building.
- Filter and retain storm water** Vegetation and other layers within the green roof act as a filter and can improve the quality of the rainwater runoff.
- Cool the city** Green roofs can play an important role in cooling and shading urban areas, reducing the "heat island" effect.

For more information visit www.greenroofresearch.org or www.wildflower.org



Green Building Danny Kocurek

If you ask me, one of the most important things any of us can do is reduce the electricity we waste through phantom loads, and we are working very hard on reducing this as we plan our house. A phantom load is the electricity that a device requires even when it is not being used. A good example is a television. Even though it's off, it still uses a small amount of electricity in order to be ready to be turned on by the remote. Usually this equals 20-40 watts an hour, the equivalent of leaving a light bulb on 24 hours a day.

Any device with a remote has a phantom load, as do all devices with LED clocks. You would think that an LED clock would not use much electricity, but unfortunately the DC power to the clock is created by converting AC power in a very inefficient process. Although not as bad as a TV, it still uses about the same power as a CFL (compact fluorescent lamp), left on 24 hours a day.

Any device with a wall cube has a phantom load. Wall cubes are those black boxes that you plug into the wall in order to operate your answering machine, cordless phone, phone charger, etc. The biggest problem with wall cubes is with devices with rechargeable batteries, like a cordless phone. The wall cube runs full blast whenever the phone is in the cradle. Even if the phone's battery is fully charged, the wall cube can't tell and runs at full power. For this reason, your cordless phones should never stay in the

cradle unless the battery needs to be recharged. Sadly, even when the phone is not in the charger, the wall cube still uses up to half the electricity it uses when actually charging. You cannot stop it from using electricity unless you unplug it and then the phone won't work.

If you think that is bad, consider chargers for cell phones, PDAs and mp3 players. Many people leave the wall cubes for them plugged in all the time so all they have to do is connect the device in order to charge it. Even when not being used to charge the devices, these wall cubes are still using electricity 24 hours a day.

When you start adding up all the stereos, TVs, VCRs, DVD players, microwaves, answering machines, ovens, printers, faxes, computers and various chargers in a house, you start to appreciate the electricity being wasted. Now for the scary numbers. It is estimated that 75% of the total electricity used to power home electronics is wasted in phantom loads. Your television uses more energy waiting for you to turn it on than it does while you are watching it. It is estimated that 43 billion kilowatt hours of energy a year is wasted in the US, enough to provide all the electricity needed for several medium sized nations.

So how can we reduce this wasted energy? Besides the obvious, like avoiding devices with clocks, the easiest method is to use power strips or surge protectors. Take the plugs from your VCR, DVD player, TV and stereo and

plug them all into one power strip. When you want to watch TV or listen to the stereo, turn on the power strip. When you finish, turn it off. Although it adds a small step before the remote will work, the energy savings are significant. Similarly, plug the printer, monitor, scanner and computer into one surge protector and turn it off when not using the computer. Those old warnings that you should leave the computer on all the time to limit the number of times your computer boots up are no longer valid, if they ever were.

Unplug cell phone and PDA chargers when not in use. If this is too much of a hassle, plug all of the chargers into a power strip and only switch it on when you need to charge a device. Similarly, don't leave rechargeable devices in the charging cradle. Cordless phones, cordless tools, plug-in flashlights and the like should only be placed in the cradle when needing to be recharged.

Although there has been talk about requiring manufacturers to label the phantom loads for appliances and devices, nothing has been done so far. It is actually very surprising how little publicity the problem has gotten.

While CFLs and Energy Star appliances are relatively mainstream, devices that limit phantom loads are unheard of. Energy Star ratings don't even consider phantom loads in their calculations. Hopefully this will change someday soon. I think I'll call Al Gore.

Clean Air Marianne Herrmann

At the Blue Skies meeting in March, Molly Rooke, a Dallas environmental activist, substituted for Wendy Hammond. Molly gave us an overview about the current legislative session in Austin. A slew of progressive bills has been proposed. They address reduction of global warming gases by promoting energy-efficiency in buildings and products, alternative energy sources, cleaner coal technology, low emission vehicles and fuels and more.

At coolclimatecampaign.org/ you will find

two links for State and Federal bills being introduced. To find out more of what is happening at the legislature, go to capitol.state.tx.us/. The latest bill of great interest to us is Kim Brimer's SB1177. The bill will require a pilot test of SRX technology to reduce toxic emissions of cement kilns at the plants in Midlothian.

We will receive action alerts on bills that are need our support. You can also go to the above websites and write to your legislators on any of the bills that you want them to support.

On the subject of TXU we learned that the suspension of the 8 coal burning power plants is contingent on the sale going through. When the 8 plants were taken off the table, it left 3 on the fast track, and 2 were the Oak Grove plants that Administrative judges ruled against. TECQ still has the last word. The hearings will be April 11 or 25. Please write to TCEQ and your legislators in opposition immediately. Stop The Coal Plant will sponsor a walk across Texas on April 21 and 22. Check their website Stopthecoalplant.org.

Arlington Conservation Council Membership Application

Memberships are good for one year, renewable each January. Your dues go directly to our public education efforts.

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Arlington Conservation Council
 PO Box 216
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Don't Forget!

Wednesday April 11,
 7:00 pm
 Gordon Robertson
 Arlington Parks & Rec
The 2008 Parks Bond Program

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arlingtonconservationcouncil.org