

## Guadalupe Blanco River Trust Newsletter | Spring 2021

**ATTENTION**

The 2021 Texas Land Conservation Conference will be held virtually from April 14-16th. Hosted by our proud partner, the Texas Land Trust Council, the conference will offer a variety of programs and learning experiences for all lovers of land and water. Join us to celebrate the 25th anniversary of this premiere event.



In addition to hosting the conference, TLTC has been busy, as always, supporting conservation efforts in Texas. As the 2021 legislative session kicks off, TLTC provides advocacy information and organizes efforts to help us spread the good word to our representatives.

More info at: [texaslandtrustcouncil.org](http://texaslandtrustcouncil.org)



### TALES FROM THE TRUSTEES

#### Ronnie Luster



I got myself and the Texas Coastal Conservation Association (CCA) involved in trying to get a program started to remove abandoned crab traps in year 2000. CCA promoted and emphasized to our members the damage to our coastal resources these abandoned traps created. Without CCA support and their long-term working relationship with Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) it would not have moved forward. This is before TPWD administered the annual season closure. Traps were considered private property.

You had to have a Game Warden on your vessel to declare the trap was not constructed properly. We put together about 50 volunteers, twenty boats, including eight airboats with wardens. In two separate Saturdays we picked up about 1,600 traps in Shoalwater Bay. Shortly after this, the closed season was established and the rest is history. After this year's Texas numbers are added almost 40,000 traps have been removed. The best and most efficient vessel for picking up traps is an airboat. You can motor right up to a trap in water or maneuver a lot closer to one on land. When the program started most traps picked up were in water and now most are on land. This tells me the program is working; leaving fewer traps in the water to kill. Allan Berger, Board Chair of the San Antonio Bay Partnership, has done a wonderful job of elevating the program to a new level, especially identifying where the traps are located and assigning volunteers to a specific area. My son, Preston, and I were assigned Shoalwater Bay this year, a long skinny and very shallow bay. We ran our airboat to pick up traps. In two trips we picked up 30 traps. Half of them either had live or dead crabs, or a combination of both. It was a great feeling when we left Shoalwater Bay because there was not one single visible trap remaining. On a bad side we also saw evidence of a really bad fish kill due to the freeze. From a positive standpoint we observed 10 whooping cranes in four different locations which included two young ones.



"The greatest feeling that all volunteers get out of doing this project, pulling out the traps, and seeing open water without any traps left, is a sense of great accomplishment." -Ronnie Luster

2020 GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER TRUST  
**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

Bios available at [www.GBRTX.org](http://www.GBRTX.org)

- ◆ W.A. “Bill” Blackwell—President
- ◆ Oscar H. Fogle—Vice President
- ◆ Denis R. Mueller—Treasurer
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- ◆ Ronnie Luster
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- ◆ John P. Schneider
- ◆ Dr. Stephen Wilson

**GBRT STAFF MEMBERS**

- ◆ Tyler Sanderson - Executive Director
- ◆ Stephen Risinger - Conservation & Stewardship Manager



We want to give special thanks to our friends at CITGO and Restore America’s Estuaries for their continued support with our

Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program efforts. Their financial contributions in 2020 and 2021 have allowed us to increase our effectiveness on



the Texas Mid-Coast.  
**THANK YOU!**

**GBRT’s Newest Staff Member**

**Stephen Risinger**

*Conservation and Stewardship Manager*

We would like to introduce **Stephen Risinger** who has recently started at GBRT as our new Conservation and Stewardship Manager. Stephen is responsible for managing the stewardship of GBRT’s portfolio of conservation easement and fee title interests in property. He will work with land owners and community partners regarding all aspects of developing sound conservation outcomes on all of GBRT’s property interests.



Stephen has an environmental stewardship background with previous experience as the Watershed Coordinator for the Plum Creek Watershed. While there, he assisted stakeholders with developing successful watershed protection plans by coordinating educational programs and events and increasing the implementation of agricultural and urban best management practices with the goal of restoring and protecting water quality in creeks.

Stephen’s degree is from Texas State University where he majored in Environmental Resource Management and minored in Geology. He is also a nearly 10-year veteran of the United States Air Force, working as an Intelligence Mission Supervisor.

Join us in welcoming Stephen! You can reach him on cell phone at 830.632.2292 and email at [Stephen@gbrtx.org](mailto:Stephen@gbrtx.org).



The Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program, administered by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, helps fund the purchase of voluntary agricultural con-

servation easements on private working lands throughout Texas. Created in 2005, the Program protects working lands from fragmentation and development. The Program shifted to TPWD oversight in 2015, and has since invested \$3.7M in State funds and protected a total land value of \$98.8M. Since 2016, the Program has conserved approximately 25,000 acres for the benefit of farmers and ranchers, wildlife, water resources, and recreational opportunities.

<https://nri.tamu.edu/media/3025/tfrrcp2020evaluationreport.pdf>



## TYLER SANDERSON



While spring opens new life across Texas, new opportunities have opened up for GBRT. The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) has selected a collaborative project between GBRT and Ducks Unlimited (DU) for the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Partnership (WREP). Ten projects were selected this year, and we were lucky enough to be selected for our Texas Mid-Coast Initiative. This project seeks to restore and enhance shorebird and waterfowl habitat, primarily coastal wetlands and prairie, and place under perpetual conservation. Land protection through wetland conservation easements and subsequent restoration activities will ensure that habitat needs are met for critical wildlife species and that these systems will function as intended to improve water quality and quantity, including freshwater flows into the bays and estuaries in the Texas mid-coast. As GBRT and DU look to involve more partnerships and diverse funding sources, this initiative will grow. We are thankful for our partners at DU and the NRCS for helping make this project a reality. The initiative will enhance our efforts on the Texas coast, and build off our current conservation portfolio.

With the addition of new staff, we look to increase our reach throughout the Guadalupe watershed. Stephen has already jumped head-first into his position, taking part in crab trap removal, invasive Chinaberry management at our Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve, and getting a jump start on our conservation easement monitoring season. Thank you, Stephen, for joining our team and already setting the pace for great success.



### CONSERVATION CONVERSATION

## STEPHEN RISINGER

As I'm sure every Texan is aware, Winter Storm Uri ushered in a new era in the Lone Star State, setting record low temperatures, and identifying the state's power grid vulnerability. Rolling black outs, water shortages, and a population unaccustomed to such temperatures, combined to create dire conditions for citizens across the state. Not only did the winter storm leave many Texans without resources, it also made a devastating impact on local wildlife.

One of the most severely effected areas occurred below the surface. Along the Texas coast many aquatic species perished during the storm, recreational and non-recreational species both suffered a loss. Areas most affected include Galveston Bay, San Antonio Bay, and Corpus Christi Bay. During our efforts at the Crab Trap Removal Program, GBRT crews personally observed numerous wildlife fatalities including but not limited to, Sea Turtles, Blue Heron, Red Snapper, and the endangered Whooping Crane along San Antonio, and Guadalupe Bays.

Unfortunately, one species that was largely unaffected by the sub-freezing temperatures are feral hogs, the invasive generalist that has invaded almost every county in Texas. Feral hogs being the clever opportunists that they are, have been observed emerging during and after winter storm Uri to feed on the carrion of species that are less adaptable to prolonged sub-freezing temps. Feral hog populations are projected to surge following Uri, due to the fact that the few predators that prey on feral hogs have been adversely affected by the storm and may allow them to expand to areas that have generally been free of the invasive nuisance. This surge may spell disaster for areas across the state already hit hard by wild pig populations. Conservation activities will become more and more crucial in the coming years as our environment recovers.

Texas may see a decrease in native wildlife populations as weather characteristic of Uri becomes more frequent, paving the way for more adaptable, invasive species to take over. Only as Texas moves forward from Uri's wake, will we begin to see the detriment to our wildlife inflicted by the storm. The true extent of the adverse affects that Uri had on Texas wildlife may not be fully understood for years to come.



# Crab Trap Recap



In late February, GBRT joined in the annual effort to remove abandoned crab traps from the San Antonio Bay. Every year, typically starting on the third Friday in February, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, with the authority granted from Senate Bill 1410, administers a 10-day crab trap closure. Crab traps left in the water during this time are considered abandoned or derelict and can be removed. This closure is important because it gives volunteers like us the ability to remove traps that



might otherwise stay in the waters forever. Abandoned or lost traps are a problem for many reasons. Among the reasons are visual pollution, damage to boat motors, user conflicts, and negative impacts on habitats. Of major importance, when left in the water, creatures find themselves trapped inside and basically become bait, attracting more creatures to the trap to become more bait. The process is called “ghost fishing” and can go on and on until the trap is removed or damaged. Some estimate that the average abandoned trap kills between two and four dozen crabs a year.

The movement was initiated by Ronnie Luster, one of our very own board members, who took a short airboat ride in 2000 and counted 1,800 abandoned traps. He started this movement as a member of the Coastal Conservation Association and it has grown to a Gulf-coast-wide effort. Its that kind of care for the environment and determination to make it better that makes GBRT proud to have him on Board. He even took to the water this year.



GBRT is also proud to partner with the San Antonio Bay Partnership (SABP) who is now the main coordinator of the effort in the Texas Mid-Coast region. “Allan Berger [SABP Board Chair] has created a wonderful program” says Ronnie Luster. He has streamlined volunteer involvement and added technology to help collect data and learn more about effectiveness in the future. Our executive director, Tyler Sanderson, was lucky enough to hop on his boat for a day. Captained by Allan, accompanied by TPWD, and crewed by Tyler, the boat was able to haul 44 total traps that day. In a 4-day effort, Team GBRT removed 191 total traps. Allan and his wife, Brigid, are a conservation power couple, creating positive change from their home base in Port O’Connor. They are even hospitable enough to host volunteers and guests for dinner and drinks after a hard day’s work.

The 2021 effort was a little different than most years. The February Winter Storm created unreliable gasoline sources for crabbers to power their boats and remove their traps. TPWD pushed the closure period back from Friday to the following Monday. Also, due to the storm, volunteers observed a massive fish and sea turtle kill within the bays.



Despite the weather, traps removed in the Mid-Coast Bays totaled **1,203**. GBRT focused our 48 man hours on removing from the marshes in the Guadalupe Delta.



# GUADALUPE RIVER LEAST WANTED

## INVASIVE SPECIES OF THE GUADALUPE RIVER WATERSHED



# CHINABERRY

(*Melia azedarach*)



**Crime:** Prolific seeder and root sprouter, growing quickly in dense patches. Seeds are spread by birds and carried by flowing water. Outcompetes native vegetation by growing rapidly with minimal diseases, insect pests or pathogens. Fallen leaves can alter soil conditions, making it difficult for common natives to grow. Berries are poisonous to humans and wildlife while not providing much nutrition.

**Evidence:** Deciduous tree growing up to 50 ft. Reaches reproductive maturity quickly and has rapid growth up to 20 ft. in 4 years. Leaves are complexly compound forming an umbrella shape. Lance-shaped leaflets have serrated edges, dark green upper surface and pale underside. When crushed, the leaves have an unpleasant aroma.

Lavender flowers form in clusters in the spring. Yellow, berry-like fruit grows in clusters in the summer, remaining on branches past leaf fall.

Bark is dark brown, purple and reddish. Young bark is smooth. Scaly, deeply furrowed older bark has a striped appearance. Found in colonies across the landscape, but prefers forest edges and stream sides with moist, well-drained soil



(Left: Site before cutting; Right: During cutting)

**Expungement:** The best method of removal is cut stump and basal spray with herbicide. Untreated cuts will re-sprout with many branches. When pulling saplings, the entire root must be removed or it will re-grow. Early spring is the best time to cut; when the tree is actively growing but fruit has not been produced. However, it is easiest to spot when all other trees are dormant with no leaves, when the fruit is most obvious (as seen in photos). When cutting a tree with fruit present, it is advised to carefully keep track of falling fruit. If fruit is left on site, more trees will sprout.



**Native alternative:** Western soapberry (*Sapindus saponaria var. drummondii*) Similar in growth pattern and leaf structure to Chinaberry, soapberry is a good native replacement. Fruits are reddish gold.

When mashed and added to water, the fruit creates a foam that was used as a detergent by native people and settlers.

**For more information:**

Contact your local AgriLife Extension office (<https://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/>)  
Visit [www.texasinvasives.org](http://www.texasinvasives.org)





**HOW CAN YOU SUPPORT GBRT?**

A gracious donation can be made to one of our multiple campaigns either by visiting our website, sending a check to our mailing address, or by clicking [here](#): To donate to a specific purpose, make a note of that with your donation.

Our targeted project areas include:

**General Operating**— contribution to our general funds can make a difference in supporting GBRT’s mission by helping cover costs that grants and restricted donations can’t.

**Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve**— This restricted account is designated specifically for the maintenance and improvements of the preserve. As we develop the preserve into a nature center, your contribution will help us build the dream.

**Texas Mid Coast Initiative**— The purpose of this initiative is to work collaboratively with project partners to target and conserve critical coastal habitats in an 8-County range around the San Antonio Bay. Partners include: NRCS, Ducks Unlimited, USFWS, San Antonio Bay Partnership, International Crane Foundation, Texas Audubon, and many others with this regional interest.

**Other ways to support our mission:**

 Perhaps the coolest way to support natural resources across Texas is to support [EarthShare](#). They raise and distribute unrestricted funds for dozens of conservation organizations in Texas. Visit [earthshare-texas.org](http://earthshare-texas.org) to contribute.

 Shopping at [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) is a simple and automatic way for you to support GBRT every time you shop. By choosing GBRT as your charity of choice, Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price at no cost to you.

Look for GBRT on  Facebook  
[@GuadalupeBlancoRiverTrust](#)

We want to extend a big THANK YOU! To our partners at H-E-B for funding GBRT’s conservation efforts. A generous grant funded gift cards given out to boat captains for their gas and time during the crab trap removal effort. Addition funding from H-E-B will help GBRT acquire better accessibility equipment for our conservation lands.



**Helping Here.**



*To be added to this electronic newsletter, please email [Inquiry@GBRTX.org](mailto:Inquiry@GBRTX.org) or call 830-560-3981. Thank you.*