**History and Background**

265 acres north of Lockhart

Includes 1.5 miles of Plum creek and portions of Elm Creek

TXDOT mitigation property for wetland impacts along SH130 – discharge of dredged materials – 2001

Mitigation Plan approved and construction began – 2008

Mitigation construction complete - 2009

Project met all terms / conditions required of the permit. No more reporting needed. – December 2013

Property conveyed to GBRT – July, 2014

ANCA Report – March, 2016

Conservation easement executed with GBRA – December, 2016

GBRT Formed a PCWP Planning Committee – 2016

Who was on the committee? The Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve Planning Committee: Robert Trudeau (TPWD), Kirby Brown (Ducks Unlimited), Todd Votteler (GBRA/GBRT), Oscar Fogle (GBRT), John Schneider, Jr. (GBRT), Bobby Eichler (TPWD), David Eichler (TPWD), Jon Geiseltbrecht (TX DOT), Carrie Kasnicka (GBRT), Mike Urrutia (PC Watershed Steering Committee), John DeFillipo (Bunker Sands Wetlands Center), Emily Dikemper Hansen (Austin Science Center), Rob Tobias (City of Lockhart), Johnie Haliburton (Plum Creek Conservation District), Tim Dusek (GBRA), Wilfred Korth (GBRT)

Who are listed partners? (ANCA, John Bunker Sands Wetland Center, City of Lockhart, Caldwell County, TPWD, Texas Master Naturalists, UTSA, Texas State, Ducks Unlimited, First Lockhart, TXDOT, Texas Master Gardeners, GBRA, PCWP, PC Conservation District)

What stakeholders in the ANCA report (Caldwell Co, PCWP, PC conservation district, Bobby Schmidt, GBRA, City of Lockhart)

What is mission? To conserve water quality with responsible management of wetlands, to protect wildlife habitat and to promote an appreciation of the natural world though meaningful educational, recreational, and research opportunities

Primary Management Goals:

1. **Protect, maintain and enhance the wetland, riparian and additional wildlife habitat on the property**
2. **Provide appropriate outdoor recreational opportunities while protecting the conservation values of the property**
3. **Provide scientific and educational opportunities related to wetlands, wildlife and conservation**

**Prohibited Activities in the Conservation Easement:**

Destruction of Plants and disturbance of natural habitat, other than invasive species – *does that include mowing the fields? I would think so.*

No soil dumping

No change in topography

No structures unless approved – *this includes hunting blinds and agriculture*

Roads are not to be impervious. No new roads on property. No construction of roads, trails or walkways.

No altering or manipulating water course. – *can we pump from the creek to a pond?*

No off road vehicles unless for maintenance or monitoring.

No signage except those whose placement, number, and design do not significantly diminish the scenic character.

The goal for Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve (PCWP) is foremost to manage the property for the benefit of the native wildlife (flora and fauna). A lot of money and earth moving was pumped into the property for mitigation, and then the drought killed most of the plants planted. Since then, it mostly sits fallow and gets mowed once or twice a year.

The second goal of the property should be for education and outreach of citizens.

The third goal should be for environmental recreation.

Basically we want plum creek to be a respite for wildlife while allowing human access for the community to enjoy nature, relax, learn and observe.

In order to fulfill this task, we would like to have and office and nature center on site, but building it comes with a few speedbumps. PCWP is 99% in the floodplain. The 1% out of the floodplain is as far back on the property as possible, limiting access to buildable land. We originally had a possible land donation of a neighboring 1 acre out of the floodplain, including an access easement to the back side of the preserve. That deal is still not dead, but it isn’t looking as likely as we had hoped. If we cannot get that donation, we will need to get a little more creative about our nature center. Is there other adjacent land out of the floodplain that we could negotiate an acquisition for? If not, can we build a nature center in the floodplain?

The site has great bones. There are many miles of gravel trails that have been overgrown with grass but are still very passable. There are 21 constructed ponds and wetlands and a nice portion of Plum and Elm Creeks. Plenty of opportunity. It is mostly fenced, but flooding has been an issue. There is a bathroom structure on site as well. However, the water has been shut off for almost 10 years. There was a major break in the line, so they just shut it off and now we can’t find the meter. The site has all the plumbing, electricity and needs of a public accessible bathroom, but we don’t have water, and who knows the condition of the septic system. Another concern with the bathrooms is it being on septic when in the floodplain. There is still a lot of thinking, planning and work involved with figuring out the bathroom.

We do currently have a livestock grazing lease, but it has not been grazed since the lease started 4 years ago. That lease allows only for a small amount of time per year grazing.

We currently have an approved Recreational Trails Grant with TPWD for $200,000. It is not funded yet, but is in final stages of approval. It would likely need some amendment to the agreement because our proposed trail would not fit our mission. Hopefully, TPWD would work with us to alter the trail path, tread surface, etc.

We also currently have one event on site. Last year kicked off a first-annual Plum Creek ReLeaf reforestation program. We are applying for more grants now to fund future events, including a spring prairie restoration and planting project. The goal is for this to last several years and restore over 50 acres of PCWP to its originally intended habitat.

Now, it is time to start planning.

We started the process by acquiring a grant from the Land Trust Alliance to help pay for a master plan. We also received an assistance grant from the National Park Service, River Trails and Conservation Assistance Program to help with master plan development. A Texas State University MBA program assisted in creating a MBA student-led market research and marketing report for PCWP. A UTSA Architecture class did 6 total group projects creating concept designs and building designs for their vision of a site map, layout and structures.

**Some of the main questions we need to answer are:**

Who are we trying to serve?

Will it be open to the public at all?

Will we have offices on site? Location for that?

Nature center on site? Location for that?

What are the major goals for the nature center?

What programs and projects are feasible to meet our goals?

What is currently available in Caldwell County? And how can this project provide a positive impact?

**Our goal with the ReLeaf project:** (*this was written before we planned on adding a prairie restoration component)*

Our Plum Creek Wetland Preserve was originally set aside as a wetland mitigation site for destruction to wetlands in the construction of the SH 130 toll road, and was donated to GBRT in 2014. Part of the site mitigation involved planting almost 50,000 tree seedlings throughout the 265-acre property, including wetland, streamside, and upland tree species. Unfortunately, the year the seedlings were planted, the region went into extreme drought and approximately 90% of the seedlings perished. Eventually, the mitigation site met all terms and conditions the US Army Corps of Engineers required, but GBRT would like to do our part to restore the property to its intended state.

Our intention with the reforestation project is to use the species list from the original mitigation plan and begin reestablishing those trees. GBRT’s vision for this project is to become an annual and bi-annual event, starting with the reforestation 1-2 acres and 1-2,000 trees at a time. Eventually, our 20-acre goal will be met. We will then shift focus to a prairie restoration planting on an additional 10-20 acres. If we can reach that goal and grow this event, becoming a successful and anticipated event among our community, we may be able to expand the reforestation throughout public lands in the Plum Creek watershed.

The PCWP property has a mission of conserving water quality with responsible management of wetlands, to protect wildlife habitat and to promote an appreciation of the natural world though meaningful educational, recreational, and research opportunities. Our vision is to build a nature center and use the property as an environmental education and recreation space for our community.

This event would be the kickstart of that development, improving the habitat and initiating the community involvement. We will enlist volunteers, expose them to the beauty and history of the property, educate them on the importance of natural areas, habitat, riparian areas and more. Volunteers will help plant trees in exchange for lunch, a t-shirt (or other giveaway), a free plant, and workshop opportunities.