

## Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust Newsletter | Spring 2022

### INTERN SPOTLIGHT

#### Rachel Bell

Rachel has joined the GBRT team for the spring semester of her senior year at the University of Texas at Austin, where she is a double major in sustainability studies and geography. Her study focus is natural resource management, so she fits in perfectly around here.



Rachel started with us in January and quickly got her feet wet, so to speak. She joined our Director for a day on an airboat in February, working hard and showing her muscles removing abandoned crab traps. She has been able to get involved with several projects, including site management and preparation at one of our preserves, virtual training from our cache of webinars, and diligent work on our remote monitoring efforts for our conservation lands. We hope we have been able to give her a valuable and diverse experience as she closes out her senior year.

### TALES FROM THE TRUSTEES

#### Dr. Stephen Wilson, DVM.

I've always loved the water.

Born in Victoria Texas, a few miles from the Guadalupe River, I spent summers at the mouth of the River on the San Antonio bay. Dad was a naval officer, so Hawaii (twice), San Diego (twice), San Francisco, and Seattle were opportunities to develop a lifelong fascination with both fresh and salt water.



My first two years were in Hawaii, before it was a state, running around the beaches. In San Diego, there were the tidal pools, and in Seattle we had a creek running through our property. Salmon would swim upstream to spawn. Back in Hawaii for my last two years of high school, there was surfing, free diving, spear fishing, sailing, life guarding on the beach, and a scuba certification. What a new world! To be UNDER the water, not just ON it. The aquatic life was incredible and fascinating.

I spent college summers with grandparents who had a place on the San Antonio River, near the Guadalupe confluence above Tivoli. I earned a degree in veterinary medicine at Texas A&M and built a practice in Port Lavaca in 1982. Over the years, I got to introduce my sons to the rivers and bays, fishing and hunting with frequent trips to the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge, just thirty minutes away.

Over time, I got to work with TPWD on birds of prey, and with the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network as a regional veterinary resource. All these experiences lead me to appreciate the wonders of these ecosystems and the need to protect and preserve them. When I was asked to serve as a director of GBRA in 1999, it was a way to step up my service to the River. The years with GBRA built on my life experiences to educate me on the work necessary to truly protect these resources.

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I sold my clinic in 2016, and retired to New Braunfels. So I began my life near the end of the Guadalupe River, spent most of my life so far in or near aquatic environments, and have closed the circle by moving within a few miles of the springs that birth the Guadalupe River.

Water, the environments it creates, and the plant and animal life it supports are, and have always been, a love of mine. Serving GBRT and helping put habitat under permanent protection is a worthwhile effort.



If you have some memories like mine, I would hope you want to help also.



"Find your place on the planet, dig in, and take responsibility from there" ~ Gary Snyder

2021 GUADALUPE-BLANCO RIVER TRUST

# BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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## GBRT STAFF MEMBERS

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

## A WORD FROM THE GBRT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TYLER SANDERSON

Spring is in the air, and like the leaves and grasses, the projects we have are growing and maturing. Never have I been more excited about my work. With the addition of Stephen, who has been our conservation manager for a little over a year now, the organization's increased knowledge and capacity has the tractor wheels turning, quite literally.



Our coastal wetlands partnership project had a great first round of land-owner applicants willing to conserve and enhance the coastal wetland habitat found on their marvelous land. The program has now shifted gears



*Partners from DU and CBBEP join a field visit for WREP*

into project ranking and prioritizing and the partners (Ducks Unlimited, Coastal Bend Bays and Estuaries Program, and the NRCS) are anticipating a successful 2nd year.

With grants received from the Caterpillar Foundation and the Matagorda Bay Mitigation Trust, we are now shifting much focus over to land restoration on both our owned properties. The Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve is now in its 6th month of a 3-year Blackland prairie and riparian forest restoration, covering our front forty.

Now, we've begun pulling minds together for a coastal wetland habitat enhancement on our own Hog and Schwing Bayou Preserve. This will be Phase 1 (site access, assessments and vegetation management) of a 4-phased approach.



*Air Force JROTC helping plant at PCWP*

It is very clear that developing, or sometimes lucking into, strong partnerships has been incredibly beneficial to projects we have. We thank all our partners for Continued collaboration throughout the Guadalupe basin.

H-E-B has generously brought back the tear pad campaign to support all EarthShare Texas members. If you find yourself at the register between April 13th and May 24th, whether in-store or online purchasing, consider adding a donation to your grocery bill. The campaign supports environmental non-profits across our great State.

-OR-

Make a donation directly to EarthShare by clicking Donate Now below



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# EarthShare Texas Tear-pad is back!

Join H-E-B and EarthShare of Texas in supporting dozens of environmental and conservation projects across Texas.

\$1

\$3

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To Donate, Ask Your Cashier to add \$1, \$3 or \$5 to you to your grocery bill.

**April 13th - May 24th**

# Conservation Conversation

Stephen Risinger



The year of zoom meetings and isolation has come to an end! I finally attended my first Texas Land Trust Alliance Conference in Austin last month! Obviously, coming on board GBRT during the middle of a pandemic has had its drawbacks, but it was worth the wait. Granted, I was still sporting a knee scooter and a mobility boot from breaking a bone in my right foot in February. I'd like to take this opportunity to apologize for all of the toes I accidentally scooted over during my transit around the conference booths! Getting to meet my cohorts in conservation (seeing some familiar faces) and hearing about all the different projects that everyone has in the works was rejuvenating, to say the least. Restoration, landowner outreach, master planning, fundraising ideas, and emerging grant opportunities were top discussion points for conference-goers. Looking back on the previous two years and the pandemic, it was amazing to see everyone catching up so seamlessly as if we didn't spend the last 500+ days in some form of quarantine. The most exciting part of the conference for me was, of course, the happy hour, where conference attendees got to relax, and the real parley began. I must have made 3 rounds around the patio talking to everyone in sight, being careful not to scoot over anyone else! Everyone I met was more than willing to lend their knowledge and lessons learned to me when describing our active projects. Looking forward to many more of these new "in-person" events!

## Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve Prescribed Fire

On March 14th, 2022, GBRT conducted the first prescribed burn at the Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve. While preparing for our Blackland Prairie restoration, we brainstormed how we would remove 25 acres of giant ragweed, cocklebur, and Johnson grass to make way for our prairie seeds. In Texas, there is no better way to remove unwanted vegetation in grasses than prescribed fire.

Prescribed fire is very beneficial to native grasslands. Fire is a natural part of the grassland ecosystem and helps maintain its health and vigor. It warms up the soil and reduces the leaf litter that accumulates each year, allowing sunlight to penetrate. Warming the soil increases microbial activity, releasing nutrients from decaying plant material that new grasses and flowers need to grow.

Wildfires have been a part of the historic Texas landscape for thousands of years, only being abated by the arrival of colonists and their fear of fire. Being from urban areas of London and Spain that were primarily built of wood, early colonists were understandably apprehensive about using fire as a tool.

As of Friday, April 8th, our blackened fields have quickly rejuvenated with new, green grasses. We are hopeful for a colorful Spring 2023!



*Photo taken by the Caldwell County Office of Emergency Management*



# Crab Trap Recap

February was yet again time for the Texas coast-wide annual effort to remove abandoned crab traps. GBRT was able to contribute 3-days to assist with the traps in the San Antonio Bay. On the first day, GBRT intern Rachel Bell joined Tyler Sanderson on an airboat, captained by Charles Gremminger of Seadrift. Airboats are able to navigate through the extreme shallows, accessing areas that many of the other boats in the effort can't reach. Traps are left



Alejandro Velasquez and a rescued Blue crab

abandoned in these areas because the trappers' boats can't access the shallows at this time of year, when the tide is out.

They place traps during higher tides, and when the tide recedes, any traps not picked up are cut off. Our team focused on the marshes of the Guadalupe Delta, which is of special importance to GBRT since we are a "land" trust, focused on conserving land and water resources in the Guadalupe River watershed. The mid-coast team was fortunate to have Gremminger's boat and keen knowledge of the marshes to help make Day 1 an incredible success. The crew of two and a first-time captain removed 62 traps. The following day, Sanderson hopped on the boat of the



Photo taken by Charles Gremminger

Texas mid-coast coordinator and President of the Calhoun County Parks Board, Allan Berger of Port O'Connor. Joining them was Alejandro Velasquez, a PhD Researcher at Texas A&M University. The Day 2 team covered the open waters of Espiritu Santo Bay and Contee Lake, picking up 58 more traps along the way. Finally, Day 3 was back on Gremminger's airboat, working the marshes of the Delta again. This time, the third crew member was Brigid Berger of Port O'Connor. The day got off to a slow start, waiting for fog to clear, only to be met with choppy open waters in Hynes Bay and Mission Lake. The team finished out the final day of GBRT effort with 22 traps removed. During the 3-day period, GBRT assisted boat captains in removing a total of 142 traps and a few hundred bouys. Crab trap bouys are white, foam floats and often find themselves detaching from their trap and making their way to the shores, acting as decoys for actual abandoned traps.

It is estimated that the San Antonio Bay system saw 1,047 traps removed, while the entire Texas coast had an estimated total of 1,248. The general observation of volunteers was that there were far fewer traps abandoned in the open waters. It seems community education and more targeted outreach has helped inspire crabbers to do an excellent job picking up their traps in 2022. A majority of the traps removed were found along the shoreline, pushed by wind, Hurricane Nicholas and/or high tides.



As always, GBRT is proud to be a part of this effort, and thankful for all the support received from CITGO and Restore America's Estuaries, the boat captains who welcome our team as crew, as well as the Berger family for all the careful planning and hard work that goes into making the San Antonio Bay effort run so well.

# GUADALUPE RIVER LEAST WANTED

## INVASIVE SPECIES OF THE GUADALUPE RIVER WATERSHED

# JOHNSONGRASS

*(Sorghum halepense)*



**Crime:** Today's least wanted guest is Johnsongrass, which we have been working hard to remove from the Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve. This species is native to the Mediterranean region of Europe and Asia. In the early 1800s, it was brought to South Carolina from Turkey to be used as a foraging crop. The name comes from

Colonel William Johnson; in the 1840s, he used the grass in his fertile river bottom farm in Alabama. After spreading so rapidly, Johnsongrass was targeted by the first federal grant designated to weed control in 1900.

**Evidence:** This species is a quick growing perennial which can reach up to 7 feet in height. Leaf blades can grow to 2 feet long and measure about an inch wide. In the fall, many seeds develop ranging from yellow to purple. It can often be identified with purple blotches on the leaf blades. Johnsongrass is highly invasive and unfortunately common along roadsides across the state of Texas. This plant uses a system of horizontal underground roots, or rhizomes, to spread easily across areas as large as 200 feet. Large amounts of this species can restrict diversity in the area by creating a monoculture, which limits native grasses and alters the ecosystem. It can be used to feed livestock, but extreme temperatures can make the grass toxic to animals. Due to all of this, Johnsongrass is among the world's top 10 most noxious weeds.

**Expungement:** By spreading through seeds and rhizomes, using multiple methods will lead to best results when removing this invasive species. Herbicides alone may not be enough, but when used after tilling the soil, rhizomes and seeds are brought to the surface and then destroyed. Seeds can stay fertile for up to 20 years and new plants can reproduce from small pieces of rhizomes. This makes it important to remove the plant entirely and dispose of them where they cannot spread. It is possible for an infestation to occur from contaminated hay or farming equipment. Repeated, close mowing and tilling every few weeks in summer or winter can help agricultural fields control this invasive species.

**Native alternative:** For Texas, some native alternatives include Square-stem spikerush, Sugarcane plumegrass, and Powdery thalia.

### For more information:

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

Click the links below to learn more about each of our ways to contribute.

**[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.

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## Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve Master Plan



We are in the process of creating a master development plan for our Plum Creek Wetlands Preserve in Lockhart, TX. The plan will lay the groundwork for our development of the preserve as a nature center, environmental education center, and living laboratory. We expect the plan to be complete in fall 2022, so keep an eye out. We have already begun implementing parts of Phase 1 and are excited to share with you. Stay tuned for more updates.