



THE BOOMER



Quarterly Newsletter of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge

Volume 4 issue 2

Message From The (Past) President

This will be the last time that I will have the privilege of penning this article. A new board president has been elected and I will have assumed the position of past president. It has been my honor to have held the position of President for the past four plus years. In the early days we worked hard to get ourselves organized; drawing up bylaws, incorporating within the State, acquiring our 501(c)3 status and signing our Partnership Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Our board has

grown from the four founding members to 12 dedicated individuals. Our membership has grown from four to 135 supporters, literally from all over the state and country. Among other things, we have supported the Annual Prairie Chicken Festival, Booming and Blooming, established an annual Children's Art Contest, raised funds for suppressing red imported fire ants, and, hopefully, raised public awareness with this newsletter, The BOOMER.

I look forward to working with our new President and

helping this organization accomplish even more in the years ahead. There is a lot yet to do to save this iconic prairie species we call the Attwater's Prairie Chicken. I hope all of you will continue to support this organization and, maybe, even find a way to get more involved. There is much in the works and this organization can use your help in the months and years to come.

In the meantime, I hope to see you at the refuge.

Ron Jones, Past President



Calling northern bobwhite quail
Photo by John Magera

Board Election Held September 12

On September 12 a board election was held at the fall membership meeting. Founding board member, Gary Woods has assumed the position of President. Mr. Woods has been Board Vice President for the past four years. Founding board member, Jane Meldahl has assumed the position Vice President. Mrs. Meldahl has been board treasurer for the past four years. Board member Eliot Tucker has become the new Treasurer and board member Mark Sleeper will be the new Secretary. Both start their second terms on the board. Also elected was former president and founding board member, Ron Jones, who moves to the position of past president. Beginning her third term on the board is founding board member Sumita Prasad and beginning his second term on the board is Jim Hluchan. Sadly, long-time friend and board member, Dr. Brian Cain, chose not to seek reelection to the board. His candor, expertise and council will be missed.

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Did you know?

- The refuge system provides habitat for 700 bird species.
- The refuge system provides habitat for 220 mammal species.
- The refuge system provides habitat for 250 reptile and amphibian species
- The refuge system provides habitat for more than 1000 fish species.

Prescribed Fire

One of the tools in the Prairie Management Toolbox

Terry Rossignol, Refuge Manager

Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge

FIRE! Just the thought conjures up horrifying images. An uncontrolled wildfire running rampant through the forest, or a home engulfed in flames are very frightening scenarios. However, not all fire is bad, especially as it pertains to wildlife management. There are several “tools” that can be used to manage wildlife habitats including mechanical methods, chemical methods, water techniques, and fire. I’d like to focus on fire to give you an idea of how and why we use fire at the Attwater Prairie Chicken National Wildlife Refuge (APC NWR).

Fire is one of the most useful and cost effective (\$10-\$12/acre) “tools” for improving wildlife habitats, and, many times, is preferable to chemical or mechanical methods because it can naturally accomplish several beneficial changes at the same time. Historically, fire has played an important role in prairie ecosystems. Lightning strikes set prairies ablaze and kept prairies “pure” or “clean” by burning encroaching woody vegetation. Native Americans would often use fire to lure bison, deer, and other game to the succulent new growth that followed. Early settlers, however, brought with them the fear of fire and more proficient fire-fighting equipment. As a result, fires were more quickly extinguished, allowing pristine prairie to be overtaken by brush.

Modern wildlife managers have come to realize the historic value of fire, developing a new “type” of fire – the prescribed burn (also known as controlled burn). A prescribed burn is defined as the burning of a specific area under predetermined conditions to fulfill necessary environmental objectives. In essence, the resource manager sets a specific area ablaze only if predetermined conditions are met (i.e., direction and wind speed, percent relative humidity, temperature, etc.) to obtain specific objectives.

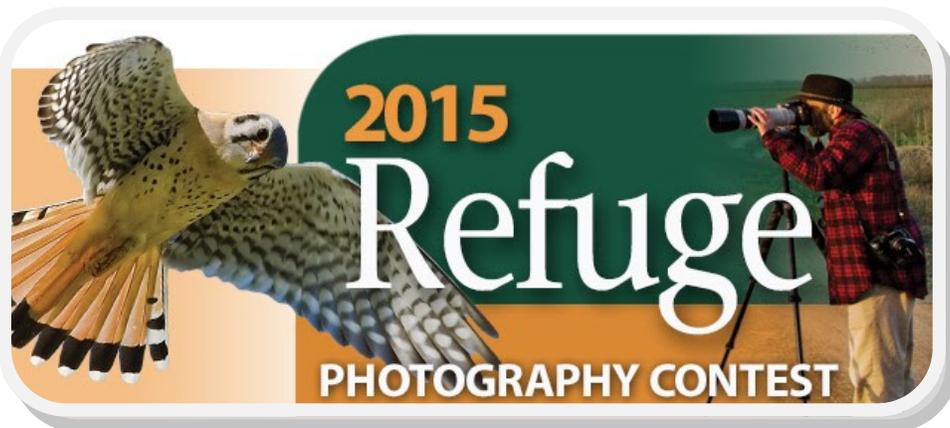


Some objectives for conducting a prescribed burn include the removal of rank or very thick, mature grass stands in order to provide wildlife with more succulent and nutritious food source or removing a certain percentage of encroaching brush in a particular area. Fire also stimulates seed production for many plant species. Furthermore, a prescribed burn may be used to safely reduce the density of highly volatile fuels in a particular area, thus reducing the threat of a future catastrophic wildfire. *Cont. on P.5*

Above: A prescribed fire underway on the Refuge

FWS Photo

No one should ever need an excuse to visit the refuge, but if you need one, how about visiting to take some great pictures. The National Wildlife Refuge Association has announced its **2015 Refuge Photo Contest**. If you can't make it to the refuge, maybe you can share some of the 1000s you have stored on your camera or phone.



The National Wildlife Refuge Association invites you to show them your photographs of the habitats, wildlife and people that make our National Wildlife Refuges such incredible places. Our nation is home to more than 560 NWRs which provide habitat for 700 bird species, 220 mammal species, 250 reptile and amphibian species, and over 1000 species of fish. Landscapes range from arctic tundra in Alaska to tropical coastlines along the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Enter our contest and share the sights you've photographed while visiting a wildlife refuge or get out now and capture that special image.

Photo submissions will be accepted from September 15 to November 15. Enter for your chance to win a \$1,000 cash prize or items donated by their generous sponsors.

- Grand Prize: \$1,000 cash prize
- Second Prize: Set of binoculars from Eagle optics
- Third prize: Backpack from Orvis and birdfeeder from Wild Bird Centers of America
- Fourth Prize: Birdfeeder from Wild Bird Centers of America
- Ten (10) Honorable Mentions: Field Guides from Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

All entrants will receive a complimentary one-year membership to the National Wildlife Refuge Association

For complete contest rules and to enter, visit their web site.

<http://refugeassociation.org/people/photo-contest-2015/>

Questions? Email Tracey Adams tadams@refugeassociation.org

Our Mission:

The mission of the Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge is to support the purpose and objectives of Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR and promote the recovery of the Attwater's prairie chicken and the Texas native coastal prairie ecosystem for this and future generations.



A Farewell to Ferris



We want to take the opportunity to recognize and bid farewell to Wildlife Refuge Specialist, Ferris Calderon, who has taken a promotion to Assistant Refuge Manager at the Duck River unit of the Tennessee National Wildlife Refuge. An avid camper, hunter and fisherman, hailing from Stonewall, Louisiana and educated at Louisiana State University-Shreveport, Ferris found his way to Attwater after serving as a resource management intern at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge, where he mapped and treated invasive plants.

When Ferris' first arrived at the Refuge he was a Student Conservation Association intern with the duties of feeding APC chicks, constructing predator deterrent fence, and assembling acclimation pens. He was then hired by the FWS and has worked at the refuge for the past 5 years. During those five years, Ferris has been a jack of all trades, working in all refuge program areas. His duties have included, visitor services, habitat management, administration, budgeting, planning and outreach. Ferris is proud to say he can operate every piece of equipment on the refuge and admits to having had each and every one stuck at one time or another.

Ferris memorable experiences at the refuge include conducting prescribe fire, working with staff and volunteers on habitat management projects, constructing acclimation pens and guiding visitors on Refuge tours. He is most proud of the prairie restoration efforts in which he was involved, knowing that wildlife will benefit from those efforts for years to come. He always found it satisfying to work with Refuge volunteers on various refuge projects.

Ferris' job at his new duty station will be quite different that at Attwater. The Duck River Unit is 26,000 acres of agricultural crops, wetlands and bottomland forest dedicated to provide food and sanctuary for waterfowl. He will be responsible for day to day operations and will assist with long term refuge management planning. He is looking forward to the new responsibilities and knows the position will challenge him with new wildlife and habitats to learn. The refuge also has an active Friends organization.

Ferris wants everyone to know that he cannot say enough about how wonderful his time and the staff were at Attwater and that he was very thankful for all he learned from staff and volunteers.

His time at Attwater was celebrated with a luncheon on July 20 attended by refuge staff, volunteers, Friends board members and family. We wish him the best of luck in his future endeavors and know he will always represent the FWS at its very best.

Right: As was so often the case, Ferris Calderon (on Right) working with Youth Conservation Corp. (YCC) enrollees to accomplish the work of the Refuge.



Cont. from p.2

Prescribed burns, however, could be very harmful and dangerous if not conducted properly. Several considerations need to be taken into account to insure its proper use. Timing (i.e., time of year) is a very critical consideration to ponder in order to avoid detriment to wildlife. For example, at APC NWR, prescribed burns are not conducted during the Attwater's prairie chicken's nesting/brood season (March – June) to avoid disastrous results to unhatched eggs and young birds.

The proper fire technique is also important to consider. A ring fire is detrimental to wildlife by not allowing an escape route for the animals. On the other hand, a line fire provides the animals with a way out. Attwater's prairie chickens are able to fly out of an area being burned without any problems.

More than 10 years ago, refuge personnel began employing the patch burn method. This approach involves burning smaller "patches" (30 -80 acres in size) of prairie as opposed to large areas (>300 acres). With this technique, about one fourth of the refuge is burned every year (about 2,000 -2,500 acres). This system, also known as grazing rotation without fences, incorporates cattle grazing as an important aspect of the system. Cattle preferentially graze the more succulent new burns and essentially ignore older burns. This creates additional variability in cover (or mosaic) on the landscape. This sort of variability is important in meeting the life requisites of the APC, as well as other grassland species. For example, APCs use new burns for booming, intermediate-aged burns for brooding and nesting, and older burns for nesting, roosting, and escape cover. Research has shown that the interaction of grazing and fire results in vegetation in intermediate burn ages that support high numbers of insects.

Although some refuge personnel are certified to carry out prescribed burns, we receive much help from the fire crew at Balcones Canyonlands NWR, conducting prescribed burns during the summer (August-September) and winter months (December-January).

So, as you can see, not all fire is bad. When used properly, prescribed fire is a very beneficial habitat management tool for, not only the Attwater's prairie chicken, but also for many other prairie-dependent wildlife species as well. In essence, prescribed fire gives the resource manager one more tool to use in providing an optimum place for wildlife to live.



Above left: The blackened prairie near the Refuge's Pipet Walking Trail after a prescribed fire. Above right: Within a couple weeks, new green sprout appear at the base of the fire adapted bunch grasses. These pictures easily show the spaces that exist between the separate grass bunches. It is this space under the vegetation, that provides a home to a diversity of prairie species. Photos by Ron Jones

“ No matter how long and rough the road is recovering the Attwater’s Prairie Chicken, just spending a day in a place as unique and special as APC NWR, makes it all worth it!”

Ferris Calderon

National Wildlife Refuge Week

October 13-19

This October, celebrate America’s wildlife heritage by visiting your favorite national wildlife refuge or visit one you have never experienced. Did you know there are more than 200,000 acres of NWR lands within a 100 miles of Houston. National Wildlife Refuge Week will be celebrated Oct. 13-19, with many refuges holding special events. While no special events are being held at Attwater, you can still celebrate by visiting the refuge and enjoying the fall prairie and saying thank you to the staff. Other ways of celebrating could include volunteering at the refuge, joining a Friends group, or purchasing a Federal Duck Stamp, of which 98% of every dollar generated goes directly to purchase or lease wetland habitat for protection in the National Wildlife Refuge System.



New York Times Article

“The Fight to Save a Prairie Chicken”

An article recently appeared in the New York Times newspaper regarding the efforts to recover the APC. It was well written and complimentary of the on-going, hard work to recover this species. A link is provided below if you would like to read it.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/08/science/the-fight-to-save-a-prairie-chicken.html? r=1>

You can help with vital RIFA suppression by supporting our “Fire Ant Control/Brood Survival Fund”

Membership

Interested in becoming a member or want to renew your annual membership? It is now easy to do ,on-line at

www.attwater.org

We are happy to remind everyone that we are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization.

Any donations you may make are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law and tax code.

Donors should consult with their tax advisor.

Please consider Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge in your charitable giving.



Membership Renewal Time

Its that time of year when membership renewals are due. Annual memberships are due at the end of our fiscal year which is September 30. If you joined our organization prior to January 01, 2015 annual dues are now due. If you joined after January 01, 2015 you are good until September 30, 2016. Thank you to everyone that is a member and to everyone that supports us and our mission. If you have joined in the past but dropped your membership, please consider renewing now. We welcome you back.



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