



Texas Organization of Wildlife Management Associations

“Enhancing Land & Wildlife Stewardship in Texas by Supporting & Coordinating the State’s Wildlife Management Associations”

www.towma.org

Fall 2007 Newsletter

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Notice of Proposed By-Law Changes

The membership will vote on several by-law changes at the Spring Meeting February 1 & 2. The proposed changes are posted on the TOWMA website or you can receive a written copy by contacting TOWMA Secretary Jimmie Eschberger at jeschberger@peoplepc.com or 512-304-0676

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PRESIDENT’S REMARKS by Clinton McPhaul, TOWMA President

TOWMA's 2007 Fall Meeting was held Saturday, August 11, at Aquarena Nature Center in San Marcos. Seventy people attended which was a much lower turnout than expected but in spite of that it was a very good meeting. We received a lot of positive feedback on the meeting and the quality of our speakers and topics. Excellent information was shared by our speakers, and the need for (and the power of) cooperatives for successful wildlife and water management were once again made very clear by several of them.

We held a small live auction and added a few badly needed dollars to our operating budget. Our thanks to all the bidders who bought items, and we extend our special thanks to the merchants who donated them.

Plan on attending the Spring 2008 Conference which will be held February 1st and 2nd at Texas Old Town in Kyle. Refer to the article about the event in this newsletter. Please note that our board meeting will also be held during the conference and we need representation from all WMA's to be present. Each WMA has one voting member on the board; this is typically the WMA president or a designated alternate appointed by the president.

TOWMA regularly holds Advisory Committee meetings and all board members are always welcome. You can check the TOWMA website for Advisory Committee meeting dates and locations.

The Advisory Committee values the input from our members to ensure we are on target with the programs and services we provide to member WMA's. I encourage you to contact any of the TOWMA officers or Advisory Committee members with any input or questions you may have. Contact information can be found on the TOWMA website and in this newsletter.

SPRING MEETING SET FOR FEBRUARY 1 & 2 AT TEXAS OLD TOWN

TOWMA's **Spring Stewardship Conference** is something you and your family do NOT want to miss. Great things are planned for what should be our best family-oriented event yet. Spouses and family can choose from a menu of interesting things to explore, discover and enjoy before, during, and after the 2-day event.

Our program, **Cooperative Stewardship: What's in it for YOU, What's in it for Texas?** has something for everyone, including interesting side trips for family members like a trip to the Cabela's store in Buda, 5 minutes away from Texas Old Town (www.texasoldtown.com). You're just 10 minutes away from San Marcos and the unforgettable Glass bottom boat rides and numerous other fun things to see and do. Austin is about 20 miles north. For lodging or information on area attractions visit www.sanmarcoscharms.com or www.austintexas.org.

The meeting includes presentations on management practices and tools to use to become better stewards of the natural resources we share. Newcomers will learn the advantages of managing resources cooperatively and what can be accomplished by working together. A diverse group of respected professionals involved in taking care of Texas' natural resources have been invited to speak.

We are pleased to announce that Carter Smith, TPWD's new Executive Director, will speak on Saturday. His views and perspective regarding the future direction of TPWD should be of vital interest to everyone who cares about Texas wildlife.

Keynote speaker Senator Glenn Hegar, District 18, Senate Committee on Natural Resources, will discuss legislation impacting management of water and wildlife resources on private lands. Other speakers include Matt Wagner, TPWD Wildlife Diversity Program Director, Doug Mason, Oakridge Ranch WMA predator control manager and co-founder of TEAM HOGS hunger relief

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The President of every TOWMA member WMA, or their designated alternate, is a voting Director of TOWMA

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Donations of auction items are needed for our Spring Meeting – Contact a Board Member if you can help.

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program, and Jenny Sanders, TWA Conservation Programs Coordinator. Linda McMurry, TPWD, will moderate a panel of experts discussing cooperative management tools and success stories. TDA Commissioner Todd Staples has also been invited.

Friday evening Texas Old Town will cook up a real Texas-style Cowboy BBQ dinner followed by live traditional country and western music at their rustic indoor-outdoor lodge. Come early and browse items that will be auctioned after dinner. Guest speakers will begin at 8:30 a.m. Saturday morning. Cost is \$60 per adult with one child, 12 or under, free with a paid admission. More information and tickets are available on the TOWMA website at www.towma.org.

NEWSLETTER MAILING LIST ADDITIONS

TOWMA mails this newsletter three times a year to the members of *all TOWMA member associations that request it and for which we are supplied addresses*. If you want your WMA membership included contact the TOWMA secretary at eschberger@peoplepc.com.

TOWMA HISTORY - PART 2 - THE EARLY YEARS by Gary Homerstad

Aldo Leopold is recognized as the father of wildlife management in this country. He did not believe that government, in and of itself, could manage wildlife. Today, that premise should be readily apparent. Wildlife Management Associations (WMAs), on the other hand, are critical weapons in offsetting the devastating effects of land fragmentation in Texas. More than 94% of Texas is privately owned, and fragmentation of that land is the number one threat facing wildlife today. Large ranches and farms are being sold and subdivided at an alarming rate resulting in a huge loss and degradation of wildlife habitat. In addition, it is estimated that a million acres of rural Texas land is lost annually to parking lots, shopping centers and highways.

Fragmentation usually results in new landowners making "improvements" to the property they purchased. This means more access roads, land clearing for home sites, out buildings, pens, fences, utility right of ways, and landscaping, all of which reduce the amount of habitat available to wildlife. This is usually compounded by more frequent use of the land by people, motor vehicles and domestic animals. Hunting pressure generally increases because family members and friends suddenly have access to the property. Herbicide, pesticide and other chemical uses increase. Habitat quantity is reduced, its quality declines, and wildlife is forced out or suffers from increased pressure.

Early on TPW recognized the value of WMAs in offsetting the effects of habitat fragmentation and encouraged its biologists to assist these associations in every way possible. TPW also tried to encourage growth of existing WMAs and formation of new ones.

One project TPW came up with for WMA members was the publication *Making Tracts for Texas Wildlife*. The publication was originally for WMA members, although it was provided free of charge to any landowner that had contact with TPW biologists. Each issue featured a WMA and contained articles on timely wildlife management activities. Over time the publication has become more generic and no longer focuses on WMAs. TPW District 7 produces a newsletter that is distributed to WMA members that fills some of the void left by the new *Making Tracts*. That newsletter will be integrated with the TOWMA newsletter for District 7 member WMAs. If you would like to insert your newsletter in TOWMA's, contact J. Eschberger (see side bar).

Yet another TPW benefit is the WMA hunting lease license that can be obtained for a fraction of the cost of an individual license that collectively saves co-op members thousands of dollars each year.

WMAs have existed in one form or another for years. Aldo Leopold had a hand in organizing the first WMA in 1931 in his home state of Wisconsin. The first WMA in Texas was a Tri-County organization in 1955 that covered parts of Bee, Goliad, and Karnes counties. Other WMAs organized in 1973 in Gonzales County and 1983 in Gillespie County. A few more WMAs soon organized elsewhere. Many of these did not last. It was not until 1990 in the south central part of Texas that WMAs began to flourish. It was out of the realization by landowners that they had to cooperate with each other to properly manage deer populations and other wildlife in the face of ever-increasing fragmentation. TPW could only do so much.

TOWMA evolved from the explosion of WMAs in south central Texas. Today, as in 1996, TOWMA is run entirely by hard working volunteer landowners that care deeply about the future of wildlife and their habitats in Texas. The parent organization's strength is its voice of thousands of landowners that are WMA members. And it is powerful.

TOWMA was organized to support and facilitate communication between WMAs across Texas. Its volunteers have helped organize and sustain new WMAs. These same volunteers have stood before the TPW Commission and other entities to voice concern and provide support for issues benefiting rural landowners and wildlife. Educational programs, seminars, conferences,

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and workshops are conducted at least twice a year. Wildlife and habitat initiative opportunities are pursued to aid landowner members. TOWMA has done all these things over the years financed with token WMA membership dues, program registration fees, donations, and several timely and generous grants.

TOWMA deserves everyone's support as it expands its services to WMA members. And don't forget to thank the hardworking volunteers that make TOWMA what it is.

Part Three – TOWMA TODAY, will follow in the Spring Newsletter

SEEING ANY BUCKS THIS YEAR? by Mike McMurry

Hunters I talk to all over "Co-op" country are pleased and amazed at the bucks coming out of counties like Bastrop, Fayette, and Lavaca. Hunter attitudes are changing and even younger "legal" bucks over the 13-inch are being allowed to walk in the hope they will be something even better next year. This is a far cry from several years ago when the standard procedure was to take anything with horns before someone else got him.

Besides landowner and hunter attitudes changing, fawn survival seems to be better due to shorter fawning periods that allow for large numbers of fawns to avoid the level of predation that was common when they were dropped over an extended period of time. Deer are being seen in places that continue to surprise and delight WMA members

What many landowners and hunters don't know is the history of this relatively new regulation and TOWMA and the WMA's role in getting it established. Without delving into every nuance of the happening, here it goes...at least my version of this tale.

Over many years TPWD employees in the Oak Prairie had struggled to find a way to manage a deer population whose buck segment was being hammered every year, not only age wise but genetically. Most of the bucks harvested were 1.5 year old long yearlings of the previous year's fawn crop. If that wasn't bad enough, the bucks with the best antler development in that group were getting harvested because...well frankly, that's all there was. Many years back, a one buck limit was implemented, but as the number of hunter's grew the buck harvest was still maxed out with two hunters behind every bush.

Somewhere in the 90's TPWD figured out that most bucks in the Oak Prairie that lived to be three years old, what few that did, usually had an antler spread of 13 inches or better. An idea was spawned. What would happen if a regulation was put in place to limit the buck harvest to only bucks with 13 inches of inside spread? As the idea grew, more and more co-op landowner's responded positively and the idea of an experimental season in co-op country was born to test the hypothesis.

Since this change was subject to TPW Commission approval, the idea needed champions. The WMA's favored it strongly and TOWMA, as the WMA umbrella, spoke with a strong voice at the commission meetings in favor of the experimental season in the six strongly coop contiguous counties of Lee, Fayette, Lavaca, Washington, Colorado, and Austin. This was an idea that had strong grassroots support and TOWMA helped transfer the message of that landowner support to the Commission at critical points in the process as did individual coops and their members. In Austin, the world belongs to those who show up.

The request for an experimental season of three years duration was granted. When the data looked promising after three years an extension was granted. Now more and more counties (now **sixty-one!!**) adjoining the original six wanted in. The rest is history. The new rule is one of the most popular that this old wore out deer checker can remember. And it works. The only complaint I hear is too many flat tires from running over shed antlers. We should all be so lucky.

So when you drop the hammer this year on a 130 class buck in counties as diverse as Bell, Bosque, Brazoria and Burleson, think fondly of the TPWD local biologists who figured out a solution. And be sure your WMA joins and supports TOWMA. TOWMA is YOU. And with your support TOWMA will continue to make sure that the united voice of the local WMA's will be heard when and where it counts. Because the world belongs to those who show up.

PRESCRIBED BURN EQUIPMENT IS AVAILABLE FOR RENT

The winter burn season is almost here. TOWMA's burn trailer is available for rent and has the equipment needed to conduct a prescribed burn. It is stationed in Victoria. To reserve it contact Scott Mitchell at 361-576-0022 Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00PM. Rent is \$50 for 24 hours or \$75 for 36 hours. This nominal fee (for \$12,000 worth of equipment) is for maintenance. It can be paid with a credit card, cash or check on pickup.

TOWMA
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Membership Application

Please print carefully so we can read your information

WMA name: _____ County: _____

President/Contact Person: _____

(This Person will be the voting TOWMA Board Member representing your WMA unless changed in writing)

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone #: _____ FAX #: _____ EMAIL Address: _____

WMA ANNUAL DUES are \$25

Join or renew your membership online at <http://www.towma.org>

You may also make checks payable to TOWMA and mail to P. O. Box 701, LaGrange, Texas, 78945