



PINEYWOODS POST

*A publication of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
for landowners and outdoor enthusiasts of the Pineywoods.*

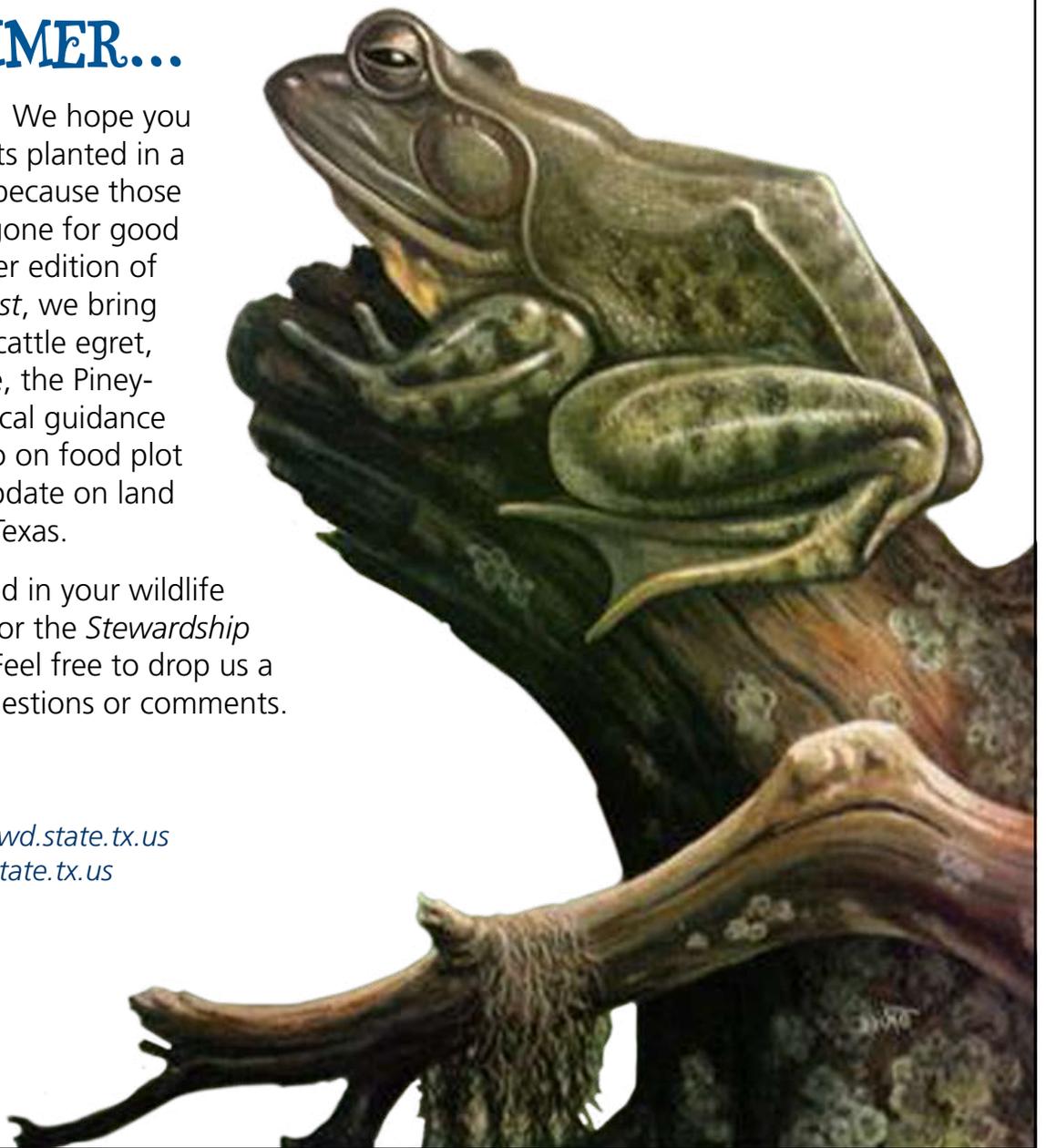
Summer 2010

IT'S SUMMER...

And boy is it hot!!! We hope you got those food plots planted in a wet spot this year because those April showers are gone for good now! In the summer edition of the *Pineywoods Post*, we bring you stories on the cattle egret, Chinese tallow tree, the Pineywood's own technical guidance biologist, more info on food plot nutrition and an update on land ownership in East Texas.

Don't forget to send in your wildlife or habitat photos for the *Stewardship Snapshot* section. Feel free to drop us a line with your suggestions or comments.

Thanks!
The editors,
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Forestland Ownership Changes: Sign of the Times

Micah Poteet, Pineywoods Technical Guidance Biologist

Millions of acres of East Texas forestlands changed ownership during the last decade as industrial timber companies sold the vast majority of their timberlands. Prior to 2000, four major industrial timber companies, including Champion International, International Paper, Louisiana Pacific, and Temple-Inland owned and managed approximately 4 million of an estimated 12 million acres of forestland in East Texas. By 2004, that number had declined to approximately 2 million acres. Since 2004, most of that remaining acreage has been sold and, relatively speaking, very few acres remain under ownership by traditional forest industry. After decades of owning and managing vast acreages of timberland as a means of producing fiber for their mills, companies divested their landholdings due to a combination of market forces and tax laws.

The vast majority of the acreage ended up in the hands of Timber Investment Management Organizations (TIMOs) and Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs). TIMOs buy, manage, and sell land and timber on behalf of investors seeking to diversify portfolios and increase profits. Investors include academic institutions, pension funds, and insurance companies, as well as other institutions. REITs buy, manage, and sell real estate on behalf of private investors. REITs are required to annually distribute 90 percent of their profits to their shareholders. This conversion of ownership to these new categories of landowners is of concern to many in the forestry, conservation, and environmental communities. Since the majority of the new ownership has fallen into the TIMO category, this article will specifically refer to TIMOs, although many of the same concerns would also relate to REITs.

Of specific concern is:

How will the TIMOs manage these forestlands?

Since these are relatively recent ownership changes, and forestry rotations can be 20 years or more, it is probably too early to say if management practices will change significantly, and it may depend on the specific TIMO. Just as management practices varied among the industrial timber companies, management philosophies may also differ among TIMOs, and one may be more “wildlife friendly” than another. TIMOs are subject to the same regulations and environmental restrictions (such as endangered species laws) that were applicable to the industrial timber companies. However, TIMOs may not have the same level of interest in complying with voluntary Best Management Practices, such as the establishment and management of streamside management zones. Some management practices that would be considered negative from a wildlife management perspective have been implemented due to the change in ownership.

Will the TIMOs hold on to their timberland for a long time?

As mentioned above, this land was historically owned by industrial timber companies for the production of fiber for their mills. Therefore, long-term management strategies were implemented. It is generally believed that ownership by a TIMO is a much shorter-term investment, most likely less than a full timber rotation. This investment window raises concerns that TIMOs may implement practices that maximize profits in the short term, which could possibly be detrimental to wildlife and habitat in the future.

Will East Texas habitats become increasingly more fragmented as these lands continue to change ownership?

Since TIMO ownership is considered short-term, these landholdings are expected to change ownership more frequently. In order to maximize profit at the time of sale, the holdings may be sold in smaller portions for what is known as “highest and best use,” which could be development. Tract sizes don’t increase at the time of sale, but the size often times decreases. Frequent ownership changes will undoubtedly result in more fragmentation, the extent of which remains to be seen.

The role of the traditional industrial timber company appears to have run its course. The future of East Texas forests and wildlife habitats currently rests in the hands of individual/family forest owners, TIMOs, and REITs, as these three groups control approximately 92 percent of East Texas’ forestland. In the short term, TIMOs are probably an effective way to keep large blocks of timberlands in forest management. However, the long-term sustainability of these large tracts is unknown. As these lands continue to change hands over the long term, it remains to be seen what challenges may arise.

IN MEMORIAM

Wes Littrell

1977 – 2010

Friend and TPWD colleague, a biologist’s biologist – you will be dearly missed!



CONSERVATION Closeup

Terrestrial and aquatic exotic invasive species are becoming more and more prevalent. Many exotic species are already threatening the delicate balance of plants and animals in several Texas ecosystems. Keep an eye out for invaders and take care when transplanting flora or fauna so that you don't unknowingly spread a noxious invader right into your front yard!



Two young Chinese tallow trees stand in a well-manicured Cass County, Texas yard. Photo courtesy of Penny Wilkerson

Backyard Invaders: Chinese tallow tree

by Penny Wilkerson, Pineywoods Regulatory Wildlife Biologist, TPWD

and fatal if consumed by cattle. This same substance, when it finds its way into the soil, can make it hard for native species to take hold in the contaminated earth. For these and many other reasons Texas trees don't stand a chance competing for space next to tallow.

Chinese tallow has already become a problem in waterways and wetlands of Northeast Texas. At Caddo Lake, it has invaded the shallow draws and bayous where it is difficult to combat. It lines the shores of the Sabine River and Toledo Bend Reservoir, changing beautiful hardwood bottoms into stands of the invasive pest, reducing dramatically the main food source for white-tailed deer and other wildlife species.

What can you do to combat these aliens? Look for this harmful flora in your town's front yards and next to local businesses. Tallow trees can grow up to 50 feet tall and have oval-shaped, dark green leaves with yellow veins as wide as or wider than they are long. Chinese tallow produces many small green globe-shaped fruits in June that stay on the tree until they ripen and turn black in September. Urge neighbors and business owners to cut them down and/or control them with herbicide. Point out the harmful effect these prolific aliens are having on our native Texas ecosystems.

Consider the damage they have caused already. What irreversible harm will these plants cause to our state if action is not taken now?

Keep a wary eye for these green aliens. If natural resource professionals and private citizens work together, we can stem the tide of the Chinese tallow invasion. Think twice before you plant a tree in your yard. Make sure the tree is not tallow; even better, make it a native oak, maple, sycamore or one of the many other fast-growing shade trees adapted to life in East Texas! Native plants are the safest bet and when carefully considered can provide beautiful foliage, shade, and serve as food and shelter for your neighborhood's furred and feathered friends.

Contact your local Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), county extension agent, or TPWD biologist to find out the best methods of controlling tallow and growing local flora in your county.



Chinese tallow trees colonize and thrive on the wet banks of Black Bayou in Cass County. Photo courtesy of Penny Wilkerson

East Texas is being invaded by dangerous aliens!! They are everywhere, their numbers are growing every day, and they're green!! Disguised as a fast-growing ornamental shade tree with beautiful fall foliage, the Chinese tallow tree (*Triadica sebifera* (L.) Small) is invading backyards, pastures and waterways of Northeast Texas and other southern states.

Also known as Florida aspen and Gray popcorn tree, the tallow tree, a native of East Asia, has invaded more and more land in the south since its introduction into North America. Tallow out-competes native trees by reproducing at an early age and producing thousands of seeds in one season. It also grows faster than natives in both sun and shade conditions. The leaves and fruit of the Chinese tallow contain a milky substance that is poisonous to animals and insects

BIOLOGIST BIO - Micah Poteet



Micah Poteet, Pineywoods Technical Guidance Biologist enjoys hunting Eastern Wild Turkey in the spring. Photo courtesy of Micah Poteet

Micah Poteet is probably one of the quietest and softest-spoken biologists in all of Texas, and definitely one of the most knowledgeable. Micah, technical guidance biologist for the Pineywoods District of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), granted the *Pineywoods Post* some insight into the man and the biologist.

Like many other wildlifery, Micah spent many weekends in the country hunting and fishing with his family. Even though he grew up in the sprawling Dallas suburb of Garland, Micah always had an interest in animals and knew the outdoors was where he wanted to spend his time pursuing interests in wildlife.

Micah received two degrees from Stephen F. Austin (SFA) State University in Nacogdoches. He graduated in 1987 with a Bachelor of Science in Forestry (BSF) with an emphasis in wildlife management, and again in 1990 with a Masters of Science in Forestry (MSF). Micah's thesis research (for his MSF) involved the use and analysis of radio telemetry data from white-tailed deer to determine use of streamside management zones and various age pine plantations.

In 1991, immediately following graduating from SFA, Micah started his career as a biologist when the Florida Game and Fish Commission hired him as a wildlife biologist. Although he had no real desire to leave Texas, he realized that the experience gained in a position as a professional wildlife biologist would aid him in his desire to return eventually to Texas as a wildlife biologist. The plan worked, and he was hired by TPWD in 1993. Thus, Micah's advice to young men and women pursuing a career in wildlife biology is about work experience: "Competition for entry-level positions can be tough at times. Relevant work experience from part-time jobs, internships, and or volunteer service can be critical in landing that first professional position, which is usually the toughest."

One of Micah's most interesting experiences as a biologist occurred while working in Florida. He saw a nine-foot alligator "floating" in about 18 inches of water. After concluding that the alligator was dead, he waded out to see if he could determine if it had been shot and got close enough to kick at the "carcass," when it suddenly came to life!

As a technical guidance biologist for TPWD, Micah's primary job responsibility is to provide technical assistance to private landowners to assist them with their wildlife management goals. When it comes to his job, Micah most enjoys the variety of job duties, working outdoors, and seeing dedicated landowners implementing sound management practices on the ground. Any landowner that knows or works with Micah probably knows his management philosophy: "Wildlife management, especially in Texas, is people management. Since Texas is 95 percent privately owned, in reality, wildlife and habitat management is ultimately practiced by the landowners and hunters. It is the responsibility of TPWD to provide the assistance, education, regulations and flexibility for these folks to be able to practice sound wildlife management."

Thus, the most challenging part of the profession is transmitting biological wisdom to regular folks. "Although we (TPWD biologists) can have the best data and/or science, it is useless if we cannot effectively impart this information to a willing public so that they can use this information to improve wildlife populations and habitats."

In his spare time, Micah enjoys hunting, especially for spring turkey, and fishing. He has owned several Labrador retrievers over the past 20 plus years and enjoys training them and then watching them utilize their skills in the field. For more information, contact Micah via email at micah.poteet@tpwd.state.tx.us, by phone at (936) 639-1879 or by mail at 1805 E. Lufkin Ave., Lufkin, TX 75901.

To find your local biologist, look us up on the Web at http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/technical_guidance/biologists/

HABITAT Helper

Food Plot Nutrition

by Rusty Wood, Forest Stewardship Biologist

In the last issue of the *Pineywoods Post* we started talking about food plots. We touched briefly on the subjects of pH and soil fertility but didn't get too far due to limited space. I will pick up here where we left off.

Soil pH is a measure of soil acidity based on a scale of 0 to 14, with "0" being the most acidic, "7" being neutral, and "14" being the most alkaline. We don't have to worry about alkaline here because throughout the Southeast most all of the soils are acidic. Now if you can think back to junior high science (it has been a while for me, too) the pH scale works on a 10 factor. What I mean by that is that a pH of "6" is 10 times more acidic than 7, and a pH of "5" is 100 times more acidic. So, what does this mean for you; and by the way, I thought we were talking about food plots?!!!

The problem here is that acidic soils can cause a whole host of problems for food plots that equal poor production and wasted money for you. Acidic soil below the mid to lower "6s" can inhibit the growth of rhizobium bacteria that are actually beneficial to your plot. Rhizobial bacteria are nitrogen fixers most commonly found on legumes that can actually pull "free" (and I mean loose particles and free \$\$\$) nitrogen out of the atmosphere and fix them into the soil of your food plots. That is a good thing. Acidic elements in the soil can also bond so tightly to nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium that they prevent their uptake and usage by the very plants you are trying to establish.

So, how do we find out what is going on with your soil? It is as simple as taking a soil test from your food plots and getting them tested. Some of your local extension services, local universities and many places on-line can provide the test for \$10 to \$15 per sample. To perform the test, scrape off the grass and leaves from a small area and take a thin slice of the soil profile four to six inches deep. Take several samples from your plot (more for bigger plots) and mix them together to create a uniform sample. Bag up about two cups and label the plot name. Do this for as many plots as needed. When you submit your samples to be tested, be sure to indicate that they are for food plots and indicate what you intend to plant in the plot.

Once you get the test result, you need to determine how big your food plot is. The easiest way is to use a GPS to determine the exact acreage. You can also walk the field

and multiply length by width to get the total square feet (an acre is 43,560 square feet). Another good frame of reference is a football field without the end zones (300' X 160') or (209' X 209'), roughly an acre.

Looking at your first soils report can be a bit confusing. I will give you a few of the basics here so you can figure out what you are looking at; however, you will want to talk the results over with your local fertilizer/lime distributor to work out the details.

Somewhere on the document, you will find the pH of your soil and the recommended amount of lime to put on your plots (the recommendation will likely be somewhere between one to three tons per acre). If it doesn't say, you need to ask if the recommendation is for a 6.5 or 7 pH.

Lime is most effective when it is incorporated into the plot for increased direct soil contact. By doing this in the summer, you will achieve the most benefit for your fall plots. Bulk Ag lime is the most cost-effective for large amounts, but if access is limited you should consider pelletized lime, which comes in 50-pound bags. Pelletized lime is more costly but may also have greater neutralizing ability, so less is needed. Deciding between Ag lime and pelletized lime is something you should discuss with your distributor. The texture of your soil will greatly affect how quickly changes can be made and how long they last. Sandy soils need more frequent liming/fertilization due to leaching, while clay soils need it less often but require more to effect change. This is one reason why it is important to locate food plots on the best soils available.

The next set of numbers to look at deals with the fertility of your soil. Soil amendments will differ depending on what you plant, and the recommendation listed will be specifically tailored to what crop you indicated when the sample was turned in. There will be three numbers listed on your report that represent (N) nitrogen, (P) phosphorus, and (K) potassium, the main components of fertilizer. When you buy fertilizer it will have three numbers indicating the percentages of NPK contained in the mix. The report will indicate how many pounds of each are needed per acre. For example: if the report indicates that you need 50 pounds per acre of nitrogen and you pick a bag labeled 13-13-13 at the store, you will need 385 pounds of bagged fertilizer per acre (50 divided by .13) to meet the recommendation. It is a good idea to group food plots with somewhat similar prescriptions for simplicity.

Hopefully this information will get you started on the path to more successful food plots and may just give you a reason to get out in the field a little earlier this year.

CRITTER Corner

Cattle Egret

The wading bird that prefers to “wade” in grass, rather than water.

by Laura Speight, Pineywoods Regulatory Wildlife Biologist



This adult cattle egret is in breeding plumage, noticeable by the “pale orange patches on the head, breast and back.”

Photo courtesy of TPWD

Native to Africa and Asia, they were first spotted in Guiana, South America in 1877. They were spotted in North America in 1941, breeding in Florida by 1953, and as far north as Canada in 1962.

Juveniles are white with black bills and legs. Non-breeding adults (August through February), also white, will have yellow bills and black legs. Adults in breeding plumage

(March through July) have an orange/yellowish bill and legs with pale orange patches on the head, breast and back. They are shorter necked and shorter billed than other white egrets. At rest, cattle egrets have a “hunched” posture. They are 20 inches long and have a 36-inch wing span.

The cattle egrets’ popularity with ranchers in the lower 48 as an insect “bio-control” method prompted their release in Hawaii by the Hawaiian Board of Agricul-

ture and Forestry. However, cattle egret popularity, especially with people not part of the livestock industry, is somewhat overshadowed because of their habit of nesting in colonies called “heronries.” Noise, odor from excrement, damage to vegetation, and health concerns can become problematic when heronries are located near residential areas. In addition, there is concern that large groups of cattle egrets pose a potential safety hazard when foraging along airport runways for insects stirred up by incoming and outgoing planes.

Known collectively as a “stampede” of egrets, these birds are still fun to watch “wading” in the grass and interacting with livestock. Watch for them at dusk, flying back to the heronries in a “V” formation, with the same slow, graceful wing beats that carried them across the Atlantic many years ago.

Cattle egrets, so named for their association with grazing cattle, forage on insects stirred up by cattle moving through the grass. In some cases, cattle egrets will actually “ride” along on the backs of cattle to peck parasites such as ticks and flies directly off the skin. Cattle egrets will also follow behind farm equipment and are attracted to smoke, catching insects trying to escape fire.

What may be the most interesting fact about this species of bird is that it is considered to have one of the most rapid and widespread **natural** expansions of any bird! Unlike European starlings and house finches, both introduced by humans, cattle egrets flew across the Atlantic Ocean on their own power.



A stampede of cattle egrets closely follow a tractor waiting for an easy meal. Photo courtesy of Laura Speight

STEWARDSHIP Snapshots



I snapped a few pictures of this friendly eastern hog-nosed snake in my yard.

Courtesy of Rusty Wood, taken in Nacogdoches County.



It has been so hot this lizard (green anole) couldn't resist stopping by for a cool drink at the hummingbird feeder. Courtesy of Bonnie Williams, taken in Panola County.



A group of white ibis enjoying the wetlands at Alazan Bayou WMA. Courtesy of Ron Randle, taken in Nacogdoches County



A robber fly waits in the shade for its next meal on a hot June day. Courtesy of Penny Wilkerson, taken in Cass County.

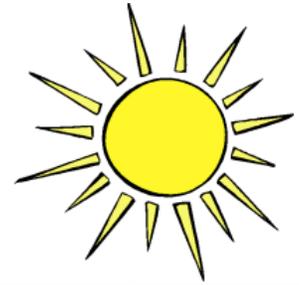
SUBMIT YOUR SNAPSHOT!!! We'll accept photos from your game camera, cell phone or regular camera, as long as you took it!! Just email it to Penny.Wilkerson@tpwd.state.tx.us or Rusty.Wood@tpwd.state.tx.us and tell us who took it, what it is, when, where, how and why!"

"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."

– John Muir, naturalist and founder of the Sierra Club



Summer 2010



July		August		September	
TPWD biologists @ work	MLDP cooperators & landowners	TPWD biologists @ work	MLDP cooperators & landowners	TPWD biologists @ work	MLDP cooperators & landowners
Trap & band mourning doves	MLDP cooperators conduct & submit deer spotlight surveys	Conduct regulatory deer spotlight surveys	Disc roadsides and rights of way to promote forb growth	Begin issuing MLDP permits	Plant fall/winter food plots
Conduct regulatory deer spotlight surveys	Select sites for fall/winter food plots – begin soil testing	Begin compiling MLDP deer survey data & calculating permit issuance	Continue hunting to control feral hogs	Conduct mast production surveys of oak trees	North & central dove season - TBD
	Provide supplemental water for wildlife, if necessary		Soil test/make soil amendments to food plots		Shred or disc goat weed for doves
			Start plowing food plots for weed control and moisture banking		Teal season - TBD

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