



# PINEYWOODS POST

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

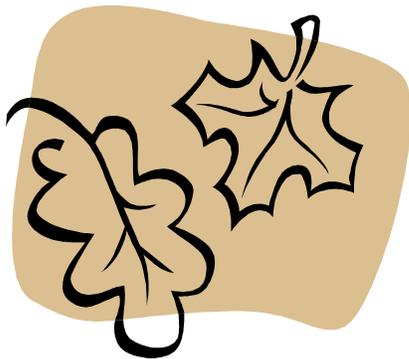
## Finally Fall!!

By Penny D. Wilkerson

It's finally fall in east Texas!! It's been a long hot summer and I am sure we are all looking forward to those chilly evenings and some time in the cool fall outdoors!

This summer has been a long, hot one for all of Texas. In fact by late August the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) considered 78% of the entire state in exceptional drought status. Exceptional drought means that our state is suffering from "widespread crop and pasture loss" and a "shortage of water in reservoirs and streams have created a water emergency." Portions of east Texas have seen more than 30 and sometimes even 40 days of over 100° F. Put that heat together with a rain deficit of more than 20 inches and we have experienced one of the worst droughts in recent history. The city of Houston has only received 5.9 inches of rain since February. Other cities in southeast Texas including Crockett, Huntsville, Livingston and Conroe had more than 8, 11, 12.5 and 13 inch rainfall deficits during spring months of February to May (NOAA, Drought Information Statement for Houston, TX 8/26/11).

Over the last few weeks of August some areas in east Texas have been fortunate to see some storms and even some soaking rains pass through. As I write this introduction a cool drizzle is soaking into the dry ground outside my office in Atlanta, TX. With the tropical storm season just cranking up and that nasty high pressure moving out of the way I am sure we will be in store for some refreshing rain and a cool, wet fall followed by a successful hunting season. Relief is in sight!! Happy fall and happy hunting to you all!!



### Quotable Quote

**"In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, we will understand only what we are taught."**

**Baba Dioum**

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# Habitat Helper



## TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE DROUGHT TO MANAGE YOUR WETLANDS

By Ron Mize

As a wildlife biologist for TPWD at Alazan Bayou Wildlife Management Area in southern Nacogdoches County, it has been a frustrating time since summer 2010 in wetlands management. Summer 2010 found me disking portions of wetland cells and attempting to establish barnyardgrass, an annual seed producing wild millet favored by waterfowl, especially puddle ducks (those mallard, teal, gadwall, and wigeon we like to shoot over decoys in shallow waters). The droughty summer left me with limited results; and a planting of donated Japanese millet did worse with a late summer planting. It's just hard to grow anything without consistent rains. For those of you with wetlands to manage on your property for waterfowl, shorebirds, reptiles, furbearers and other aquatic critters, it has been a tough year or more.

At Alazan we finally got some fall rains so we could do limited pumping and after many days we were able to flood about 40 acres of wetland cells to attract a few ducks throughout the late fall and winter months. January provided us about 7 inches of rain, which is half the rain received as of mid-June 2011 as I write this. As we have continued into 2011, our managed wetland cells are parched, annual plants for waterfowl are few and suffering from dehydration, the creek stopped flowing, and the swamps are dry. Not all the stars are aligning for us for a good year for food production and water resources for fall flooding and winter hunting opportunities.

But, don't despair, because we will break the drought eventually and likely in a few years we will be complaining about too much water as we had in winter 2009-10 when water was everywhere it seemed and the ducks were scattered far and wide for those of us who pursue them. (Wow, what a difference a year can make.) Meanwhile, take advantage of the drought and accomplish some needed tasks to improve your wetlands (moist soil units, beaver ponds, and swamps) or to create new ones.

Increase desirable and control unwanted vegetation – While it is dry, consider disking to improve conditions to favor future production of smartweeds or millets (barnyardgrass and Walter's millet). Disking is typically needed every 3-5 years to promote

and maintain these annual seed-producing plants for waterfowl and helps reduce the numbers of many undesirable perennial plants. Shredding is often needed on an annual basis to control wetland growth and nuisance vegetation like green ash, black willow, Chinese tallow, and cocklebur. You will need approved aquatic herbicides to control particularly hard to kill woody species like black willow and tallow. These woody species will sprout back from the roots so shredding or disking them does not eliminate them. You may need to consider herbicide treatment of undesirable perennial herbaceous plants (such as soft stem bulrush or maidencane) if they take up too much surface area in your wetlands. Cockleburs and some other undesirables can easily be killed with a glyphosate herbicide.

If you don't know what kind of plants you have in your wetland, don't do anything until you have identified them. There are several good sources to use to identify your plants listed at the end of this article. Your Ag Extension office, local NRCS or TPWD office will likely have someone to help you, too. You must use herbicides approved for the plants you want to control and try not to eliminate the desirable species.

During the summer and fall months clear swamps of invaded hardwoods (maple, ash, gum and tallow) and brush (buttonbush and water elm, often both called buckbrush in a swamp) while they are dry. An excellent way to do this would be with a mulching machine, then, follow up with herbicide treatment of woody sprouts to kill the roots. If you do this, I recommend hiring an operator with a large mulching machine. You will pay more per hour but your results will likely be a savings in the end. Your swamp must be sufficiently dried out however to support the heavier equipment.

Many landowners have a dozer, one they can borrow or rent and accomplish creating some openings within their swamps that are overgrown. The object should not be to clear all the brush and hardwoods, but to create some sizable openings leaving a mosaic of openings and brush (such as buttonbush favored by wood ducks for roosting habitat and overhead cover for young ducklings). I have seen great results from increased production of smartweeds from such clearing. The landowner also sowed barnyardgrass in the newly disturbed soil and summer rains were sufficient to create a good crop (well, what the hogs did not destroy). For the last two growing seasons the millet has increased in quantity in the areas sown. What I found from the bulldozing, however, is that after 2 years you are getting a lot of regrowth from the brush. Dozing did not remove all the roots and lower stems of some of the brush species and it has had enough growing time since to start to make a significant impact on the amount of open space. I recommend either shredding the brush or herbicide it to recapture the openings.

If you have some soil moisture or good rains are forecasted and there is time enough in your growing season, consider sowing some barnyardgrass seed in your disturbed areas of your swamp. Bulldozing trees and brush will leave you with plenty of disturbed soil ready for seed. If smartweeds or millets are present in the swamp already, forget the seeding and you will likely have a good crop of them next growing season where you cleared.

# Habitat Helper

Rehabilitate your water control structures, dams and levees – Inspect your boards and pipes and make any repairs to your water control structures. If needed, consider replacing leaking pipes and culverts. If your pipes have been plugged in the past by beavers, attempt to remove the dirt, debris or sticks and open them up so they will flow. Patch up your levees and dams where you have washouts or erosion, and look for burrows of nutria and beaver and try to fill those in. These pest species will likely move back in with winter water, so be prepared to control them with trapping and/or shooting. Also remove any woody growth from your dams or levees. Shredding alone will control them, but approved herbicides should eliminate them if used properly. Always follow label directions when using herbicides.

Planting – Desirable species are generally planted in the spring through late summer months. Before you go to the expense of planting next year, try disking now to see if the native millets and smartweeds might come up next growing season. If you have had them in the past, have disked your wetlands this year and they are wet this winter, look for these annuals next summer after you have dewatered your wetlands and growth is up. If not present, then consider planting. Personally, I have had a difficult time starting smartweeds from seed and find it very expensive. But, if you attempt it, try broadcasting the seed onto mud flats in the spring. I have had better luck with disking alone, or planting smartweeds I dug up from other locations and transplanted to my personal wetland. This is a labor intensive project and not for a large wetland project. You only need to get scattered plants started and they will spread over time. I recommend purchasing or collecting seed or plants of pink smartweed. There are several species of smartweeds native to Texas, so study up and know which one you are looking for.

Many hunters like to plant Japanese millet or brown-top millet for waterfowl. If you have a flooded beaver pond you can break the beaver dam and sow either species in the mud flats. You can do likewise with barnyardgrass. However, you must keep the beaver from rebuilding the dam and flooding your crop. There are several methods to do this, and you can consult your local biologist or Extension Service office on how to do this. Once established, you can reflood Japanese millet or barnyardgrass but do not let the water overtop all the green leaves and seed heads or you will lose your crop. Either species should mature and seed in 60- 90 days, so make sure and plant them so they can produce by mid-October or so. You can let the beaver reflood your pond once the seed is mature.

Don't forget however that it is against Federal law to hunt waterfowl over bait. If you manipulate your mature crop in any way – shredding, disking, dragging or running over it to knock down – then you are in violation of the baiting ruling. So, I suggest you leave unseeded holes where you want the ducks to land. Walking through your millet to set decoys, retrieve birds and just getting about some is not baiting. If you seed barnyardgrass it should come back up with a draw down the next summer. In this situation where it comes up naturally then you can manipulate the plants and it is not considered baiting.

If you plant brown-top or Japanese millet, then you should expect to have to do it again the next growing season. The seeds from these species will rot if not eaten over the winter. Thus, I recommend barnyardgrass over these. Your initial cost is less with brown-top and Japanese millet but barnyardgrass will come back for many years to come if you keep your sites well maintained. There is a cultivar of barnyardgrass called Golden Millet we will be trying on Alazan in summer of 2011. If we get the rain to make it grow I hope to give you a report on it next year. Golden millet is claimed to be a strong reseeder if you do an early draw-down; but, this may result in your seed decaying before flooding in the fall as it matures in 70-75 days.

I hope my experiences and these suggestions help you in your wetlands management for waterfowl. If you have questions or need assistance with waterfowl and wetlands management in East Texas, your TPWD specialist is Jared Laing in Tyler. He can be contacted at 903/566-1626 ext. 210 or [jared.laing@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:jared.laing@tpwd.state.tx.us).

*Ron Mize is a Wildlife Biologist with the Pineywoods Ecosystem Project headquartered at the Alazan Bayou Wildlife Management Area. One of his passions is waterfowl habitat management and he enjoys reaping the fruits of his labors. His contact information is: 936/569-8547 or [ron.mize@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:ron.mize@tpwd.state.tx.us).*

Plant reference sources:

<http://plants.ifas.ufl.edu/node/34>

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/>

<http://aquaplant.tamu.edu/>

[http://npdc.usda.gov/technical/plantid\\_wetland\\_mono.html](http://npdc.usda.gov/technical/plantid_wetland_mono.html)



The author Ron Mize checking late season growth and seed production of Barnyardgrass

# BIOLOGIST BIO

## Bobby Widner



In this edition of the Pineywoods Post, Bobby Widner, Fish and Wildlife Technician in the central Pineywoods counties, found some time to visit with us about his career and also gave us some thoughts on the field of wildlife biology.

**PW Post:** What is your job title and what are your main job duties?

**BW:** I've had several in the same position F&W Tech. IV, F&W Tech. V, and Environmental specialist. Currently I believe F&W Tech IV is correct. I write wildlife management plans for landowners and lessees. I gather and collate biological data. I conduct scientific surveys as part of my regulatory duties. Let's just stop at that or just say etc.

**PW Post:** Did you go to college? If so how long did you spend in college and what is (are) your degree(s) in?

**BW:** I did go to college while in the military but did not finish my degree. My real degree is in 23 years of experience performing my job. I have a master's certification in Law Enforcement.

**PW Post:** Can you tell our readers a little bit about your background and how you became interested in being a wildlife professional?

**BW:** I grew up in the country where dealing with wildlife was an everyday experience both good and bad. I've been a hunter and

fisherman longer than I care to remember. I felt at home in the woods with wildlife. To be honest due to a family with a history of Law Enforcement professionals I believed I would follow in their footsteps. I did initially follow their lead for about 8 years but was not satisfied. I then decided to pursue a career doing what I knew I would like and here I am today.

**PW Post:** How long have you been in your current position? When & how did you start with TPWD?

**BW:** I don't really know exactly how long in this position but I started with TPWD in Law Enforcement at Lake Livingston State Park in 1975. I started working with the Wildlife Division in 1987 when the public hunting lands program came into existence. I left for a while and went back to work for the department in 1992 and have been here ever since.

**PW Post:** What is your philosophy as a wildlife professional?

**BW:** Nobody has all the answers. If you think you do then you are in for some real surprises. Talking is good, listening is better you will learn a lot more.

Wildlife are not  $2+2 = 4$  they are living, breathing, changing and adapting critters.

**PW Post:** What do you enjoy the most about your job?

**BW:** Working with landowners, sportsmen and sportswomen.

**PW Post:** What do you find the most challenging?

**BW:** I know this sounds redundant but it is true working with landowners and sportsmen and sportswomen.

**PW Post:** What is the most amazing (or scary) experience you've had while working with wildlife?

**BW:** While conducting a deer breeding chronology study in the early nineties myself another employee and the landowner were on the property to collect deer. A group of trespassers came on the property. While I and the other employee were in a deer stand the landowner stayed in his vehicle. Short version the landowner confronted the trespassers and a brief gunfight ensued between the landowner and them. Thankfully no one was hurt and the trespassers fled. Wardens were summoned who investigated the incident.

**PW Post:** Do you have any advice for students who want to be professional wildlife biologists/technicians?

**BW:** Patience and perseverance. It is a competitive field, but if it is your passion don't get frustrated and give up.

**Personal Interests:**

My granddaughter, hunting, fishing, reloading and shooting. If it happens in the outdoors I'm interested.

*"The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, water, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land." -Aldo Leopold*

# Critter Corner



Photo by Greg Harber

## Mississippi Kite

(*Ictinia mississippiensis*)

**Penny Wilerson**

**Wildlife Biologist, Co-Editor PW Post**

It's a plane, it's a bird, it's a kite... well it's a bird and a kite, a Mississippi Kite (*Ictinia mississippiensis*). What is that small hawk-like bird you have seen this summer in your neighborhood soaring high around your oaks near your pasture or even over your backyard? If it's not the biggest, neighborhood hawk on the block, the red-tailed hawk. It's probably a smaller, summer visitor to East Texas, the Mississippi Kite. Migrants throughout the entire region and residents for breeding in the northern parts of the area, Mississippi Kites are easy to identify using size, coloration and behavior. Even from a distance during flight and while perching nearby identification is simple. They are rather small for a hawk, only a foot to 15 inches from beak to tail. Wingspan is usually about three feet and kites only weigh between 7 and 13 ounces. Kites usually soar with little wing flapping, slightly above mature oaks on the edges of open areas. They have narrow pointed wings that are dark when viewed from below while the bird is flying. In the air, Mississippi Kites appear to have a square tail that is also dark gray to black in coloration. They have a gray chest and underparts and a white head but dark wings and dark tail. If you ever get a glimpse of a Mississippi Kite's distinctive white head and gray eyestripe, take a closer look at their eyes that are actually red in color.

Mississippi Kites chiefly subsist on insects (including cicadas, grasshoppers, etc) that they catch in flight. Kites will occasionally eat small frogs and mammals but only rarely. Kites have recently expanded their breeding range northward into New England and have adapted nesting in savannah areas to also nesting in urban areas where fewer predators occur. Most commonly, the female will lay a clutch of two eggs that takes around a month or slightly longer to hatch. Both the male and female will incubate the eggs and care for fledglings, which should leave the nest in another month or slightly longer after hatching.

TPWD biologists in the Pineywoods from Texarkana to Longview to Lufkin and points further south have seen kites or received calls in reference to these gregarious and highly noticeable creatures. Many kite calls, especially in the northern Pineywoods, have to do with these protective parents guarding their nests. In the northeastern corner of the state, Bowie county had at least two of these such occurrences in both urban neighborhoods and rural settings. Mississippi kites can establish colonial nests. Kites often nest in backyards where frequent visitors could pose a threat to the nest or unfledged young. As a result

the birds swoop down from the nest in a mock attack on the unsuspecting neighborhood cat, your beloved Chihuahua or even your kids. But don't worry, according to Texas Parks & Wildlife Department non-game ornithologist, Cliff Shackelford, these birds are "just being good parents." Diving most often occurs when nests are in trees less than 30 feet tall, eggs are hatching or nestlings are present. Kites generally nest from mid-April to August. The birds are usually finished nesting and have fledged the young by fall and have moved on in their southern migration.

Although Mississippi Kites are not endangered they are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. So moving or tampering with the birds, eggs, or nests is illegal. Don't forget that these birds are simply being good parents and they are a part of nature that some rarely get to see. Once the new additions to their families are up and about these birds will move on soon. If you have Mississippi Kites in your neighborhood take a picture and enjoy the sight they are truly one of the Pineywood's most interesting creatures.



Photo by Penny Wilkerson

## Stewardship Snapshots



TPWD Wildlife Technician Ron Randle snapped this picture of a curious fawn who he was involved in a staring contest with. I never got to ask him who won! The picture was taken at Alazan Bayou WMA in Nacogdoches TX.

TPWD Wildlife Technician Ron Randle again showing off his photography prowess by capturing this Blue Grosbeak in flight. The picture was taken at Alazan Bayou WMA in Nacogdoches TX. Nice photo Ron!



Adding a splash of Spring to this already beautiful flower bed, a fawn takes a nap while mom is away feeding. Thanks to PWP reader Kristen Greer for sharing this photo and for leaving the fawn where she found it.

Proving that our native wildlife are resourceful during times of drought, this young Red Shouldered Hawk gets a much needed drink from a backyard bird bath. Thanks to PWP reader Kathy Krause from Katy TX. For submitting this photo.



Send us your photos! Send us your wildlife, nature, hunter harvest, or interesting trail cam pictures.

To submit your photo for consideration send an email to [Rusty.Wood@TPWD.State.TX.US](mailto:Rusty.Wood@TPWD.State.TX.US) and tell us who took it, where, and when.

## Conservation Close up

### Rusty Wood Forest Stewardship Biologist Co-Editor PW Post

This past July we held the initial meeting for the Pineywoods Prescribed Fire Cooperative in Lufkin Texas. With record breaking drought and severe wildfires ravaging every corner of the state the topic drew lots of interest.

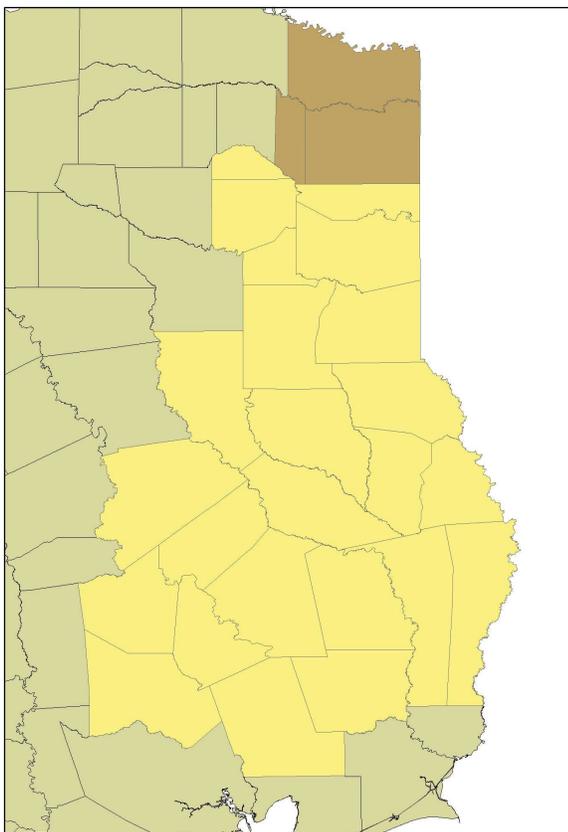
Nearly 100 people attended the meeting which covered topics such as need for prescribed fire to reduce fuels and mitigate wildfire risk, creation of wildlife habitat, restoration of threatened habitats, prescribed burning from

essary to carry out a prescribed fire. Additional tools or trailers will become available and strategically placed based on future needs of the coop.

We are currently seeking interested individuals for leadership positions within the cooperative. Interested persons need not be experts in prescribed fire but have a passion for land management and desire to work with others interested in prescribed fire for the reasons mentioned above.

We are currently developing a curriculum for an in depth classroom experience taught by the foremost experts that will cover the fundamentals of prescribed burning, weather parameters, smoke management, insurance and liability issues. Look for more details to come as we closer to the early January date.

Pineywoods Fire Cooperative 2011



Legend  
 Pineywoods Fire Cooperative  
 Red River Cooperative

various agency perspectives, liability, and insurance. The cooperative is based off of several successful models already existing in the state and will be administered by its members. The cooperative will cover the entire Pineywoods ecoregion except for three counties on the extreme north end that are already covered by another fire cooperative. There is currently one prescribed burn trailer available to cooperative members that is located centrally in Lufkin. The trailer is available for checkout for a period of two days for \$100.00 and is loaded with the tools nec-

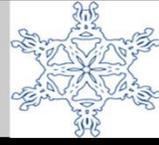


## Great News

The Pineywoods Post is now available online! If you missed one of the previous editions or just want to revisit some of the great information from a past article you can look them up online. From the Texas Parks and Wildlife home page scroll down the grey portion near the bottom of the page →click on publications→Newsletters→Pineywoods Post. From there you can access all of the previous editions.



# FALL/WINTER 2011



October		November		December	
TPWD Biologists @ Work	MLDP Cooperators & Landowners	TPWD Biologists @ Work	MLDP Cooperators & Landowners	TPWD Biologists @ Work	MLDP Cooperators & Landowners
Dove Season Ends (North and Central zones) 10/23	Provide Supplemental Water	Collect Age Weight Antler Data at Check Stations	White-tailed Deer Rifle Season Opens 11/5-1/1	Continue Collecting AWA/CWD Samples	Prepare Fire Lanes For Late Winter/ Spring Burns
Offer Outreach Programs To Schools and Groups	Defer Grazing to Ensure Adequate Nesting Cover Next Spring	Conduct White-tailed Deer and Feral Hog Hunts on State Parks and WMA	Collect Harvest Data/Record Keeping	Offer Outreach Programs To Schools and Groups	Dove Season Starts (North and Central zones) 12/23
White-tailed deer Archery Only Season Opens October 1	Special Youth Only Whitetail Deer Weekend 10/29-30 Squirrel Season Opens 10/1-2/5	Offer Outreach Programs To Schools and Groups	North Zone Duck Season Opens 11/5-11/27	Help Landowners Prepare for Spring Burns Through Pineywoods Burn Cooperative	North Zone Duck Second Split 12/10-1/29

Executive Director  
Carter P. Smith

Editors, *Pineywoods Post*  
Penny Wilkerson  
Rusty Wood



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