

NORTHEAST TEXAS Conservation Delivery Network

September 30, 2015

TPWD Nature Center, Tyler Texas

The Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network (NETX CDN) held its fall meeting on 30 September 2015 at the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department Nature Center in Tyler. Forty-two conservation delivery professionals attended the meeting. Agencies and organizations represented were the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Caddo Lake Institute, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, The Nature Conservancy, Hancock Forest Management, National Wild Turkey Federation, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture, Texas A&M AgriLife Research, Texas A&M Forest Service, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, Caddo Lake Bio Alliance, Northeast Texas Municipal Water District and the Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture.



The meeting agenda is included with this summary.

CDN Delivery Prioritization Tool Revision

Jason Estrella (TPWD), Chair of the CDN Delivery Prioritization Tool Working Group presented a recommendation approved by the CDN Steering Committee that the Shortleaf Pine Suitability model be removed from the Delivery Prioritization Tool and that the three remaining models receive equal weighting. Jason's recommendation was based on a recent determination that soils data utilized in the Shortleaf Pine Suitability model were not accurate. The three remaining Delivery Prioritization Tool inputs are the TPWD Wild Turkey model, the LMVJV WGCPD Open Pine Landbird model and the TEAM (Texas Ecosystem Analytical Mapper) riparian

vegetation model. The CDN Priority Area map associated with the revised Tool is included with this summary.

CDN Focal Area Priorities

Laura Speight, CDN Chair (TPWD) gave an overview of the Steering Committee's selection of the proposed five CDN Priorities based on the revised Delivery Prioritization Tool. The CDN Steering Committee recommended that the CDN select four geographic landscape level priority areas and one ecosystem priority for consideration by the full CDN membership. These priorities were based on project discussions, proximity of organizational projects and similar organizational conservation priorities. The Steering Committee believed these proposed priorities represented areas of consensus conservation priority and offered the best opportunities for collaborative partnerships among the CDN member organizations. Within the CDN Focal Areas the five priorities identified by the Steering Committee were:

Upper Neches River Basin

Caddo Lake-Big Cypress Bayou

Red River corridor

Sabine River corridor

Open pine/shortleaf/longleaf pine ecosystems within the CDN

Laura noted that this CDN meeting was devoted to hearing an overview and discussion for each proposed CDN Priority and an update on some ongoing partner projects associated with these priorities.

Upper Neches River Priority Area Overview

Jason Ellis (TFS) gave an overview of the Upper Neches River Priority Area. Noted in his presentation was ongoing work in the following areas and programs:

Neches River NWR Acquisition Area: The acquisition area encompasses ≈ 25,000 acres. Current ownership is ≈ 6,700 acres.

Bobcat Ridge: The project protects 11 miles of Neches River frontage and 7,017 acres of actively managed private forestland through a Conservation Easement held by the Texas A&M Forest Service. Prescribed fire management is done on 4,500 acres of uplands. In consultation with USFWS, Bobcat Ridge is being thinned and burned on 320 acres of suitable habitat to create RCW recruitment stands using cavity inserts.

Neches River Focal Area designated by USFWS Southwest Region as an area of conservation priority.

Campbell Global: ≈ 1,000 acres of prescribed burning annually for turkey management; Stream Management Zones and some protected shortleaf along Highway 84 and the Texas State Railroad.

East Texas Black Bear Task Force: North and south black bear recovery zones denoted for Northeast Texas. Black Bear Habitat Suitability Model developed for east Texas.

Private non-industrial landowner tree farms; e.g. Saunders Family Tree Farm: Private landowners with active forest management plans.

I.D. Fairchild State Forest: 2,793 acres in four tracts with mature shortleaf and loblolly stands. Primary purpose of the forest is to demonstrate good forest management practices. The forest has Red-cockaded Woodpeckers and also has received a grant for Shortleaf Pine restoration.

Community Protection Program: This US Forest Service Program provides prescribed fire grants for private property within 10 miles of a National Forest. In 2014-15 there were ≈ 63 grants awarded to private landowners within the Upper Neches River Priority Area.

Following the presentation and discussion of the Upper Neches River Priority Area a Working Group was formed with initial membership being composed of the following individuals:

Rusty Wood (TPWD), Jason Ellis (TFS), Jason Hardin (TPWD), Dan Johnson (NWTF), Jim Neal (Caddo Lake Institute), Jim Mueller (USFWS), Ron Deroche (USFWS), Daniel Price (TPWD) and Jeff Reid (USFWS).

Caddo Lake-Big Cypress Bayou Overview

Corey Mason and Tim Bister (TPWD) gave an overview of the Caddo Lake-Big Cypress Bayou Priority Area. Corey highlighted ongoing work associated with the following projects and programs:

The Nature Conservancy Blueprint Areas located within the Priority Area;

Caddo Lake Ramsar International Wetland;

Caddo Lake Wildlife Management Area \approx 8,000 acres;

Caddo Lake National Wildlife Refuge \approx 8,000 acres;

The Big Cypress basin is designated by the USFWS Southwest Region as an area of conservation priority.

Several significant Texas State Parks;

Habitat improvement projects by the National Wild Turkey Federation on both private and public lands;

USFWS Partners for Wildlife projects on private lands; and

TPWD Turkey Management Cooperative \approx 11,000 acres along Big Cypress Bayou.

Tim highlighted the significant amount of work being accomplished in the area combating invasive species, primarily aquatic. Tim also noted the ongoing Paddlefish River Flow Restoration project and associated gravel habitat restoration on the Big Cypress Bayou. There is also an annual Bio Blitz program held on Big Cypress which is accumulating a significant amount of information about this system.

Following the presentation and discussion of the Caddo Lake-Big Cypress Bayou Priority Area a Working Group was formed with initial membership being composed of the following individuals:

Vanessa Neace (TPWD), Wendy Ledbetter (TNC), Tim Bister (TPWD), Brad Dreyer (Hancock Forest Management), Jim Neal (Caddo Lake Institute), Ron Deroche

(USFWS), Jeff Reid (USFWS) and Robert Speight (NETMWD& Caddo Lake Bio Alliance).

Red River Corridor Overview

Steve Arey (USFWS PFW) gave an overview of the Red River Corridor Priority Area. Steve noted the following ongoing projects and programs within the Priority Area:

The Priority Area is noted as a Unique Vegetative region by the Botanical Research Institute of Texas with a new plant species or communities being discovered;

Several TNC holdings are located in the Priority Area;

Two TPWD designated ecological significant streams are in the area with freshwater mussel working being planned within these streams;

Pecan Bayou is the largest undammed watershed in Texas and is a TNC Conservation Priority Area along with being a major Black Bear corridor; additionally, Pecan Bayou has been recommended by the Texas Water Development Board to have a "Legislative Designation" of an Ecologically Unique Stream Segment.

Several Black Bear Habitat Restoration projects located within the Priority Area;

A number of wetlands enhancement projects are within the Area including more than 80 Wetland Reserve Program contracts encompassing \approx 18,000 acres;

A number of landowners within the Area are enrolled in TPWDs Upland Bird Program;

USFWS Partners for Wildlife projects on private lands; and,

There are several active landowner wildlife and burn cooperatives within the area.

Following the presentation and discussion of the Red River Corridor Priority Area a Working Group was formed with initial membership being composed of the following individuals:

Penny Wilkerson (TPWD), Wendy Ledbetter (TNC), Ragan White (TPWD), Kenneth Gee (Oaks & Prairies Joint Venture) and Steve Arey (USFWS PFW).

Sabine River Corridor Overview

Jim Neal (Caddo Lake Institute) gave an overview of the Sabine River Corridor Priority Area. Jim noted the natural flood storage and attenuation value of the Sabine riparian corridor and highlighted the following ongoing projects and programs within this Priority Area:

Little Sandy National Wildlife Refuge: The 3,800 acres refuge may have the oldest old growth bottomland hardwood forest in the West Gulf Coastal Plain;

Old Sabine Wildlife Management Area: \approx 5,727 acres

Mineola Nature Preserve: \approx 2,900 acres is one of the largest municipal parks in the country;

Burleson Wetlands: \approx 3,000 acres, in addition to being a Wetlands Mitigation Bank it is also a Forest Legacy site;

A number of additional properties, \approx 9,000 acres, designated as USCOE Wetland Mitigations Banks, such as Daisy, Keystone, West Mineola, Burleson, Hawkins & Anderson;

Following the presentation and discussion of the Sabine River Corridor Priority Area a Working Group was formed with initial membership being composed of the following individuals:

Larry Le Beau (TPWD), Chris Farrell (TPWD), Jim Neal (Caddo Lake Institute), Kevin Herriman (TPWD), Wendy Ledbetter (TNC), Lee Andersen (TFS) and Cliff Shackelford (TPWD).

Open Pine/Shortleaf/Longleaf Forest Ecosystem Overview

Wendy Ledbetter (TNC) discussed the significance of pine-mixed pine/hardwood forests across the Northeast Texas CDN service area and the potential opportunities for improving the management and ecological value of these forests. Wendy noted that open pine and mixed pine/hardwood forest with low basal area and an herbaceous understory provided high wildlife value, benefits to water quality and with consistent prescribed fire offered protection from wild fire. Wendy highlighted the fact that there has been a significant loss of shortleaf and longleaf across their historical range and that there are national efforts ongoing to help reverse this trend.



Wendy provided an overview of the very successful Longleaf Pine Initiative with emphasis on its impact in east Texas. Wendy has been very involved in the Initiative and discussed that similar opportunities could become available in Northeast Texas in conjunction with the Shortleaf Pine Initiative that is in its early stages.

Following the presentation and discussion of the Open Pine/Shortleaf/Longleaf Forest Ecosystem Priority a Working Group was formed with initial membership being composed of the following individuals:

Dave Holdermann (TPWD), Rusty Wood (TPWD), Jim Neal (Caddo Lake Institute), Jim Mueller (USFWS), Jason Ellis (TFS), Lee Andersen (TFS), Cliff Shackelford (TPWD) and Gary Calkins (TPWD).

Sulphur River Corridor Overview

During the presentations and discussions associated with the Steering Committee's five CDN Priorities it was suggested by the CDN membership that the Sulphur River Corridor be considered as an additional priority area. Matt Seavey (USACE) gave an overview of ongoing projects and activities in the Sulphur River Corridor:

Wright Patman Lake: There are ≈ 75,000 acres of easements associated with the lake;

White Oak Mitigation Area: ≈ 25,000 acres,

The Sulphur River corridor is one of the largest bottomland hardwood corridors in Texas;

There is ongoing Shortleaf Pine restoration on USCOE property; and

Red River Army Depot has an active open pine management program.

Following the presentation and discussion of the Sulphur River Corridor Priority Area a Working Group was formed with initial membership being composed of the following individuals:

Matt Seavey (USACE), Luke Baker (TPWD), Penny Wilkerson (TPWD) and Trevor Tanner (TPWD).

Working Group Guidance

Working Groups were asked to build on the information provided at the CDN meeting and were given the following guidance for their respective CDN Priority Areas:

Utilizing the best available information and expertise the Working Groups will work to accomplish 5 major planning objectives for the CDN.

1. Identify and describe the conservation targets associated with the Priority Area;
2. Identify the threats to those targets;
3. Identify methods for abating those threats;
4. Identify and describe ongoing, planned or new projects that the Working Group feels can be accomplished or enhanced by collaboration of CDN partners.
5. Identify a geographic boundary for the Priority Area.

USFWS Southwest Region Focal Areas

Jim Mueller (USFWS) gave a short update on the USFWS Southwest Region emphasis areas. The Neches River and Cypress Basin are both priorities in the East Oklahoma/Texas emphasis area. Jim provided the following link for the emphasis area webpage <http://www.fws.gov/southwest/AboutUs/emphareas.html>. Jim encouraged those writing proposals for projects in either of these river basins to be certain to include that the project is in an emphasis area especially if requesting funding from the Southwest Region. This will ensure that the project gets appropriate prioritization.

Working Dogs for Conservation Project

Laura Speight reported that the Northeast Texas CDN Invasive Species Detection and Outreach Project (Working Dogs for Conservation) has been fully funded by the USFWS Aquatic Invasive Species Program. The \$83,000 project has received a grant in the amount of \$52,829. Goals of the project are to

- 1) To minimize the spread of zebra and quagga mussels in freshwater ecosystems of northeast Texas; and
- 2) To raise awareness of aquatic invasive species in the NETX CDN service area.

Laura said she hoped the project would offer the opportunity to raise the awareness of all invasive species issues within the CDN service area.

The Working Dogs for Conservation Working Group is composed of *Laura Speight (TPWD)*, *Vanessa Neace (TPWD)*, *Meredith Longoria (TPWD)*, *Jim Neal (CLI)*, *Tim Bister (TPWD)*, *Brian Van Zee (TPWD)* and *Andrea Webb (TPWD)*.

Turkey Focal Area Activities

Jason Hardin presented an update of ongoing activities associated with the TPWD Turkey Focal Areas. Jason noted that turkey stockings are now being focused on areas identified by the TPWD Turkey Decision Support Model and a larger number of turkeys are released in each release area. He reported that this strategy appeared to be a more effective and efficient than stocking strategies in the past. He also noted that there was a good deal of overlap between the turkey focal areas

and the CDN Priority Areas since the CDN Delivery Prioritization Tool used the Turkey model as one of its spatial data inputs.

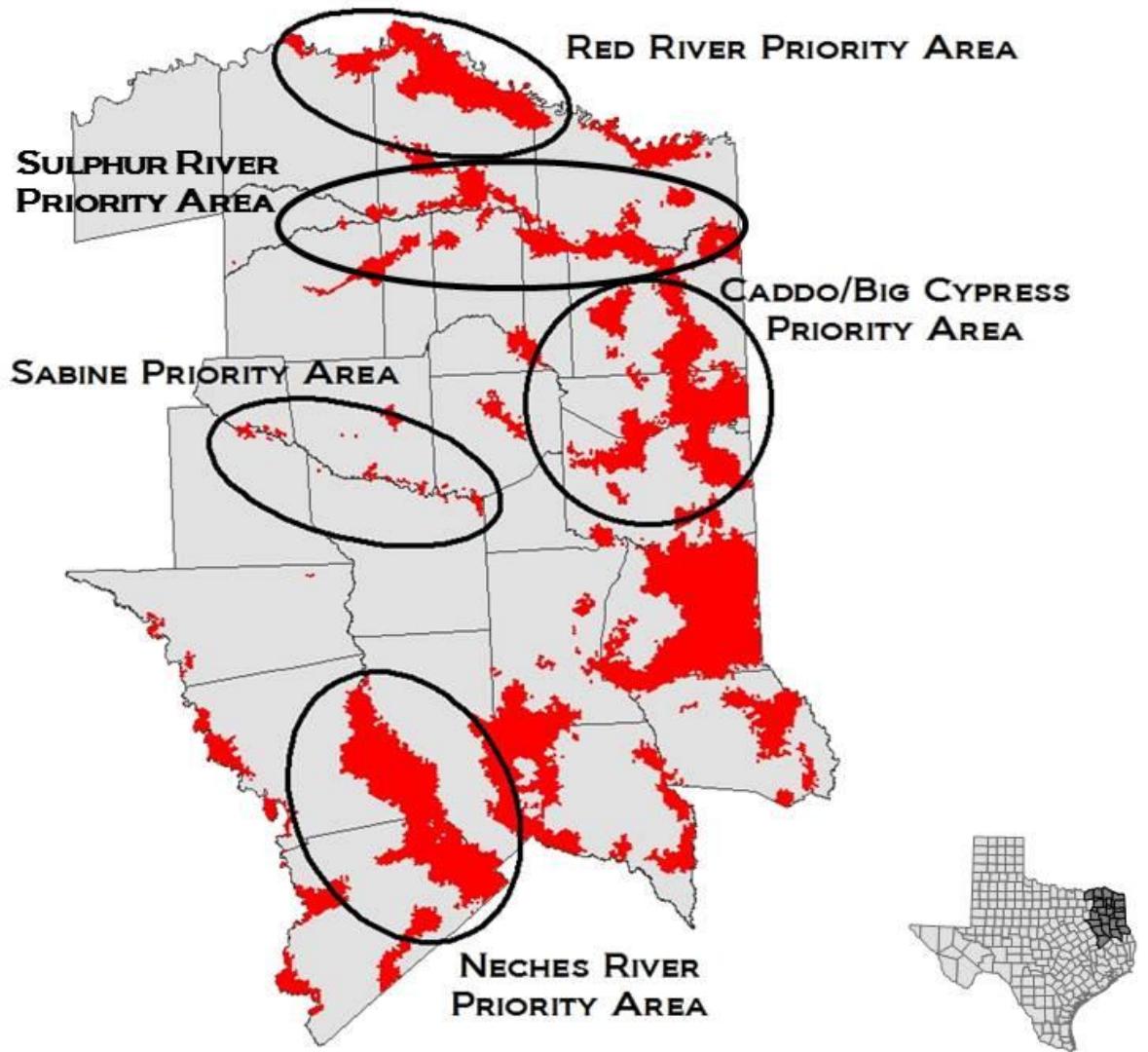
Little Boggy Ridgetop to River Bottom Project

Jeff Reid reported on a USFWS Partners for Wildlife Project, approved by the NETX CDN, under the 2014 Cooperative Agreement between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and The National Wild Turkey Federation. This project obligated \$40,000 of 2014 National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) Hardwood Habitat Cooperative Agreement (F14AC00962) funds (\$100,000) to the Little Boggy Ridgetop to River bottom project. The project goal is to control invasive species to restore and enhance fish and wildlife habitat through chemical control of non-native invasive species on 370 acres, prescribe burn 200 acres of uplands, and approximately 280 acres of mesic/transitional forests, and moist soil management units in an attempt to restore native habitat conditions. It also includes surveys for the federally threatened Neches River Rose-mallow (NRRM), and planting of approximately 2 acres with NRRM plants genetically identical to the plants that grow on the property. It also involves enhancement of saline prairie habitat suitable for two (2) other federally listed plants (Texas Prairie Dawn and Geocarpon minimum). In total, habitat improvement actions to be implemented under this project include approximately 482 acres. The cooperative agreement (NWTF HHC CA F14AC00962) has a target of 450 acres. Around \$50,000 remains under this CA to do additional projects. This project was developed in cooperation with the Northeast Texas Conservation Delivery Network and was developed in the spirit of the East Texas/Oklahoma Emphasis Area guidance under development by Region 2 of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m. All Working Group members met following adjournment to receive guidance on follow-up work associated with CDN Priorities.

Revised Northeast Texas CDN

Delivery Priority Areas



NORTHEAST TEXAS
Conservation Delivery Network
September 30, 2015
Nature Center, Tyler Texas

Agenda:

9:00 - 9:15	Welcome & Partner Introductions	Laura Speight
9:15 - 10:00	CDN Delivery Prioritization Tool Revision	Jason Estrella
10:00 - 10:15	Break	
10:15 - 10:30	CDN Focal Area Priorities and Partner Projects	Laura Speight
10:30 - 10:50	Upper Neches River Priority Area Overview	Jason Ellis
10:50 - 11:10	Caddo Lake-Big Cypress Bayou Overview	Corey Mason/Tim Bister
11:10 - 11:30	Red River Corridor Overview	Steve Arey
11:30 - 1:00	Lunch	
1:00 - 1:20	Sabine River Corridor Overview	Jim Neal
1:20 - 1:40	Open Pine-Shortleaf/Longleaf Ecosystem Overview	Wendy Ledbetter
1:40 - 2:10	Turkey Focal Area Activities	Jason Hardin
2:10 - 2:30	Little Boggy Ridgetop to River Bottom Project	Jeff Reid
2:30 - 3:00	Review & Finalize Action Items Working Group Action Items Next Meeting/Location	Laura Speight

The Steering Committee and Working Groups will meet briefly following the general meeting.

Northeast Texas CDN Working Groups

Neches River Priority Area

<i>Ron Deroche</i>	<i>USFWS</i>
<i>Jason Ellis</i>	<i>TFS</i>
<i>Jason Hardin</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Dan Johnson</i>	<i>NWTF</i>
<i>Jim Mueller</i>	<i>USFWS</i>
<i>Jim Neal</i>	<i>Caddo Lake Institute</i>
<i>Daniel Price</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Jeff Reid</i>	<i>USFWS</i>
<i>Rusty Wood</i>	<i>TPWD</i>

Caddo Lake-Big Cypress Bayou Priority Area

<i>Tim Bister</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Ron Deroche</i>	<i>USFWS</i>
<i>Brad Dreyer</i>	<i>Hancock Forest Management</i>
<i>Wendy Ledbetter</i>	<i>TNC</i>
<i>Vanessa Neace</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Jim Neal</i>	<i>Caddo Lake Institute</i>
<i>Jeff Reid</i>	<i>USFWS</i>
<i>Robert Speight</i>	<i>NETMWD& Caddo Lake Bio Alliance</i>

Red River Corridor Priority Area

<i>Steve Arey</i>	<i>USFWS PFW</i>
<i>Kenneth Gee</i>	<i>Oaks & Prairies Joint Venture</i>
<i>Wendy Ledbetter</i>	<i>TNC</i>
<i>Ragan White</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Penny Wilkerson</i>	<i>TPWD</i>

Sabine River Corridor Priority Area

<i>Lee Andersen</i>	<i>TFS</i>
<i>Chris Farrell</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Larry Le Beau</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Wendy Ledbetter</i>	<i>TNC</i>
<i>Kevin Herriman</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Jim Neal</i>	<i>Caddo Lake Institute</i>
<i>Cliff Shackelford</i>	<i>TPWD</i>

Sulphur River Corridor Priority Area

<i>Luke Baker</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Matt Seavey</i>	<i>USACE</i>
<i>Trevor Tanner</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Penny Wilkerson</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Steve Arey</i>	<i>USFWS</i>

Open Pine/Shortleaf/Longleaf Forest Ecosystem Priority

<i>Lee Andersen</i>	<i>TFS</i>
<i>Gary Calkins</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Jason Ellis</i>	<i>TFS</i>
<i>Dave Holdermann</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Jim Mueller</i>	<i>USFWS</i>
<i>Jim Neal</i>	<i>Caddo Lake Institute</i>
<i>Cliff Shackelford</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Rusty Wood</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Robert Allen</i>	<i>USFWS</i>

Working Dogs for Conservation Project

<i>Tim Bister</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Meredith Longoria</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Vanessa Neace</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Jim Neal</i>	<i>Caddo Lake Institute</i>
<i>Laura Speight</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Andrea Webb</i>	<i>TPWD</i>
<i>Brian Van Zee</i>	<i>TPWD</i>