



Tyler Wayland/East Texas Natives Project

East Texas Natives Project is working to enable native plant restoration as growth of the region affects natural habitats.

Where the pipeline meets the prairie and the piney woods

# Project works to help restore native plants in East Texas

BY TYLER WAYLAND  
Contributing Writer

In East Texas, we do not have to look far to see the evidence of growth and change affecting natural habitats.

Panola and San Augustine counties, for example, now represent two of the top 10 natural gas producing counties in the state.

Highway construction impacts are increasing as the I-69 corridor continues to be built throughout the region, and as the state's population continues to grow, East Texas is seeing rapid increases in people and land fragmentation. All of these are indications of progress, growth, and success in the region, but, natural habitat loss and declining native plant and wildlife populations tend to follow. In fact, it is suggested that over the next 40 years, Texas will lose over 800,000 acres of valuable rangelands, forests, and wildlife habitat due to land development and fragmentation.

While it is critically important to protect what native habitat remains, it is also imperative that we work to restore native plants that are lost in land development, energy production, or transportation system development when the opportunities arise.

Oil and gas pipelines, transmission line rights-of-ways, and highway roadsides are all opportunities for large scale, ecosystem level restoration. Inherent in each of these scenarios are opportunities to revegetate disturbed sites with native grasses and wildflowers rather than with the non-native, invasive species that have so historically been the easy "go-to" for reseeding.

By planting native species on new pipelines or transportation rights-of-ways, there is real potential to create hundreds, if not thousands of miles of prairie corridors to connect remaining habitats and have positive impacts on wildlife conservation in east Texas. However, the largest challenge preventing these efforts is the lack of quality and quantity of locally-adapted, or "ecotypic" native seed available to use.

East Texas Natives is working



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East Texas Natives is working to alleviate this bottleneck in native seed supply.

to alleviate this bottleneck in native seed supply. Today in East Texas, there are very few, if any, appropriate native seed sources available to meet restoration demands in the region. In an effort to solve this problem, we

have expanded our native seed source development work into the East Texas region with the East Texas Natives project. East Texas Natives is part of the state wide Texas Native Seeds Program successfully operated by the Caesar

Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. We are focusing on the development of ecotypic native seed sources for the piney woods,

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oak woods and prairies, and blackland prairie ecosystems of east Texas. These seed sources are developed by selecting superior native plant populations that are adapted to this region and that have co-evolved with the wildlife populations and climates here in east Texas.

Our work includes collecting seed from remnant native plant populations across the East Texas region. Once collections are obtained for a species, these native populations, alongside any existing commercial varieties, are evaluated over 2-3 years at multiple sites across the region to select the best performing populations- those that can be grown in large volumes, and those that meet restoration needs.

Once identified, seeds from selected populations are grown in seed increase fields with the goal of producing enough seed to enable commercial growers to establish large production fields. Following successful increase and performance testing, research findings are published, and resulting seed sources are released for commercial production and made available at quantities large enough to meet the restoration demands in the region. In the end, large volumes of seed will be available for purchase by landowners, energy operators, and agencies to use to successfully restore native plants in east Texas.

This model of seed source development has been successful in south, central, and west Texas over the last 18 years. The Texas Native Seeds Program helps guide several hundred native plant restoration projects annually and is responsible for developing and making native seed releases available in the commercial seed market. Past seed releases from the program now pro-

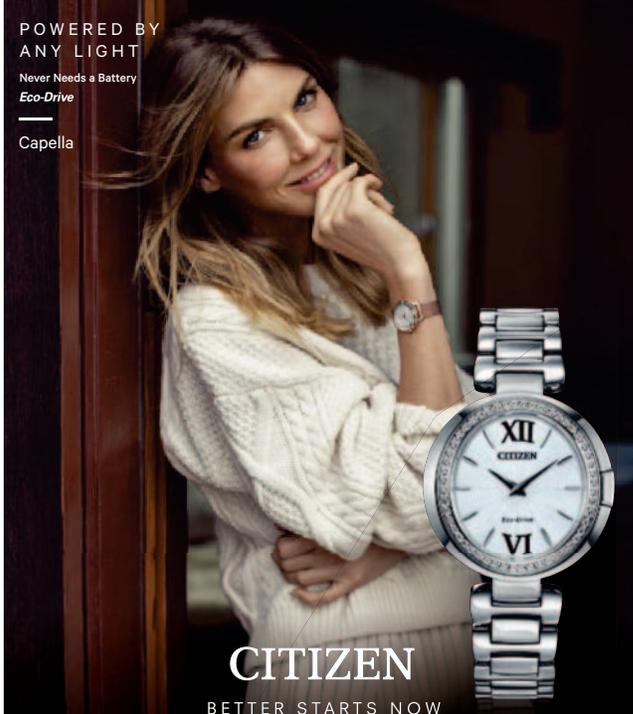
vide enough seed to restore up to 60,000 acres annually in areas of the state where we have operated longest. Through continued operation and added partnerships, we hope to have similar scales of impact in East Texas.

For more information on the efforts of East Texas Natives and the Texas Native Seeds Program please contact

Tyler Wayland at [tyler.wayland@tamuk.edu](mailto:tyler.wayland@tamuk.edu) or visit the program website at <https://www.ckwri.tamuk.edu/research-programs/texas-native-seeds-programs-tns>.

*Tyler Wayland is assistant Director of East Texas Natives Project with the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville.*

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