



## South Texas Natives eNews

News from the South Texas Natives Program at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute

### South Texas Natives Summer 2010 Update

**By Forrest Smith**

*South Texas Natives Coordinator*

What a difference a year makes! While 2009 was a year of extremes in terms of drought, 2010 has so far been a year of more than adequate rain for native seed production. Our seed drying racks in the barn are already full and will stay that way through November. Currently, we are attempting to provide relatively large quantities of seed for growers, instead of the small amounts seed developers have traditionally distributed. We've taken this approach because of how apparent the lag time is between release of material and actual commercial availability. Under the traditional seed distribution philosophy, releases may take a decade or more to be readily available, or fail to ever really be successfully commercialized. So, instead of providing seed for 1-2 acres of initial production, our goal is to provide seed for 10-25 + acres to a grower interested in a plant release. This effectively jump starts the market.



At our seed production fields at Rio Farms, we'll be busy harvesting important breeder seed fields over the summer and fall. Despite disparaging 2009 production conditions, STN was able to produce and distribute seed for establishment or expansion of commercial production fields of pink pappusgrass, whiplash pappusgrass, slender grama, and hairy grama. Our seed production effort is paying big dividends with each of these species now well established in the commercial seed industry. Other seed increases of selections of sideoats grama, little bluestem, big bluestem, and yellow Indiangrass are continuing to be evaluated and harvested intensively. Sideoats grama is slated for release in 2011. This spring, we added seed increase fields of the Plant Materials Center's (PMC) selections of Halls panicum at Rio Farms. This early successional grass will be a welcomed addition to the native seed lineup for South Texas, especially for use by

TxDOT. Also this spring, initial increase plots of several legumes were added at Rio Farms, including: golden dalea, pussyfoot dalea, and prostrate bundleflower. Another native forb, Rio Grande clammyweed, will be aggressively

Summer 2010

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increased later this summer with Rio Farms' help, hopefully resulting in seed being available commercially by year's end, and forging the way with a novel production partnership with Rio Farms.

In Kingsville, we were able to make a fantastic harvest of several hundred pounds of our redseed plantain release last month. The plantains were also successfully grown at the Texas AgriLife Research Station in Beeville this winter. The plantain seed will go to a commercial grower this fall and hopefully get this much needed cool-season forb into the commercial market quickly. Also at Kingsville this spring we established a new seed production plot of the PMC's past release of Kinney false rhodesgrass. STN has stepped up to try and get this excellent release available to consumers. Although officially released in 1998, growers have been hamstrung in getting lasting production initiated because of the small amounts of seed available to establish fields with.

We cannot thank our supporters enough for their sustaining contributions to the important work of developing native seed sources for South Texas. This program has kept going through the economic turbulence of late without missing a beat, we chalk that up to doing relevant work, and doing all we can to communicate our effort to make each \$ of funding we're trusted with go to good use. That said, we have current needs in facilities and "long-term" support, so please let us know if you are able to help.



STN put in motion an ambitious set of goals a decade ago-we hope that you'll agree that South Texans are substantially closer to being able to effectively restore native habitats today than in 2001. We also realize that developing a release of a plant is not enough when it comes to solving the native seed problem; ensuring that the seed reaches consumers is just as important. The past decade has shown that the traditional models of integrating a plant release into the commercial market frankly don't work when it comes to native seed releases. That a release of a native plant like slender grama should be handled, grown, and commercially integrated differently than a new wheat or sorghum cultivar has taken some arduous learning.

In a recent visit to Kingsville, administrators from the Plant Materials Program repeatedly told us that the work in South Texas to develop native plant materials is the model they wish to see expanded nationwide. The strong collaboration between STN, the PMC, the seed industry, and consumers is without equal. That's a strong statement from a program in existence for over 70 years. In another testament to the success of STN, later this year an entire issue of the nationally distributed, peer-reviewed *Native Plants Journal* will be devoted to our publications. We hope this publication will concretely convey the message of what agency collaboration and landowners who care about the land can do if they set their minds to it.

However, there is still room for improvement, and rest assured that until bags of native seed mixes for every new TxDOT highway right of way, range restoration project, or oil & gas field reclamation need in South Texas can be bought and planted, STN is not satisfied. The other million dollar question: can native seed ever reach the low cost of exotic grasses, and take price out of the equation? We'll answer that the same way we've answered the challenges we faced in 2001 when this effort began - by setting that question as a guiding goal and working as hard as possible to reach it. We fully understand that the final success of STN will be measured by being able to economically obtain successful restoration results in South Texas with our native seed

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sources. We're pushing forward with the mantra that if it was easy, it would already have been done; and if we don't do it, nobody else will!

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