



Oaks and Prairies Wildlifer

A newsletter for landowners in the Post Oak Savannah
and Coastal Prairies Regions of Texas

TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE

Summer 2019

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District Field Notes

BY DAVID FORRESTER

I visited with a couple out of DeWitt county a few weeks back at a Texas Big Game Awards scoring school and banquet in New Braunfels, TX. They indicated they had only received 7 inches of rain in their part of DeWitt county since the first of the year. As wet as we are around La Grange and other parts of the district, I was astonished. Although I think most of the district is in fantastic shape regarding rainfall and habitat conditions are excellent, there may be pockets out there not quite as wet. However, we're not nearly as bad as we were in 2011, so we can be happy about that. We are heading into what is normally a very hot and dry period, but it looks like most of the district is set up to make it through in pretty good shape.

Biologists have been running white-wing and mourning dove surveys, as well as, trapping and banding. Trapping is going a lot better than last year with birds readily coming to bait. Quail surveys start in August, as well as, dove lease set up for our public hunting opportunities. The LMA enrollment deadline (June 15th) has come and gone. Biologists worked to make sure folks got enrolled properly. Biologists will be working to complete their own state deer population estimates (DMU lines) and working with landowners and coops to run the local population estimates. All of this starts about mid-July and runs through September.

Senate bill 733 passed the legislature this past session and this gives Texas Parks and Wildlife Department authority to charge a fee for the Managed Lands Deer Program. The bill also allows TPWD to use the money raised within the wildlife division. Basically, those participating in the conservation option and harvest option may see a fee for participation in the future. Right now, discussions are in the works on how the fee structure will look and what will be charged. This may impact our wildlife management association participants.



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Considerations for Planting Native Seed for Wildlife on Rights-of-Ways

WRITTEN BY DOUG JOBES, TEXAS NATIVE SEEDS

The Texas Native Seeds Program is a statewide effort working to improve native seed availability and provide guidance on native habitat restoration.



TEXAS NATIVE SEEDS

Introduction

Increasingly, many Texas landowners are faced with energy rights-of-way passing through their property, or having to deal with an easement of some kind. In many cases there may be opportunity for interested landowners to plant these disturbed areas with wildlife and pollinator-friendly plants. Native plants are beneficial to a host of wildlife and pollinator species, and while native seeds are readily available there are several things that the landowner should consider and keep in mind before purchasing. Vast amounts of information exists on the internet concerning native seed, and coupled with conflicting advice based on regional differences, a difficult decision can be made even harder. The Texas Native Seeds Program (TNS) is a statewide effort working to improve native seed availability and provide guidance on native habitat restoration. One of our goals is to ensure that landowners who are interested in restoring native habitat for wildlife understand the fundamental elements of the seed purchase and the planting process. We believe that outreach and education is vital in promoting the use of regionally adapted native species, which is important from both ecological and practical standpoints. While it may not be for everyone, Texas landowners who choose to plant natives should have a reasonable expectation of quality, and favorable results. This article is designed to give guidance to those who have made the decision and may be interested in planting native seeds in their right-of-way.

Negotiating for natives

When it comes to lease agreements there is no room for vagueness in your desire for native reseeding. Remember that it is your land and you can demand that the area be planted with what you want. Increasingly, most pipeline and utility easement holders will be receptive to your desires, but they must be addressed in the easement agreement. If the proper steps aren't taken during your lease agreement negotiations then you may be out of luck.

Basically, you have two options for planting. One choice is to get a seed mix recommendation from TNS or another qualified organization and request it be planted by the right of way owner. The specific seed mix desired can be written into the agreement and will ensure that what you are getting is the best adapted and of the best quality for your region. A recommendation from TNS will include specific information regarding the native species to be used, percentages of each species in the mix, and planting rate (Figure 1). If you are more of the do-it-yourself type then you can opt for compensation to conduct restoration yourself. This may come in the form of a payment in addition to the easement payment, in which you will buy the seed and pay for the planting. If you choose the latter it is important to know that reseeding costs associated with natives are higher than those of traditional agricultural seed and exotic grasses. Also, keep in mind that some native grass varieties are more expensive than other varieties of the same species. Seek advice and or a recommendation from TNS to be better informed about the cost before your agreement is finalized.

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Figure 1. A seeding recommendation provided by Texas Native Seeds will contain the names of each species as well as Pure Live Seed (PLS), the planting rate, and PLS/acre.

seed variety/ species	% of mix (PLS)	lbs. PLS/acre	seeding rate PLS lbs/ac
Carrizo germplasm Little bluestem	20	4	0.08
Wilson germplasm Yellow Indiangrass	15	5	0.08
Lavaca germplasm Canada Wildrye	15	10	0.15
Welder germplasm Shortspike windmillgrass	10	1	0.03
Mariah germplasm Hooded windmillgrass	10	2	0.15
Duval germplasm Red lovegrass	15	1	0.1
South Texas germplasm Sideoats grama	10	5	0.15

In addition to the exact seed mix, easement agreements should address timing, management, and planting details. Other common negotiation points include steps to be taken in the event the initial seeding is unsuccessful and regarding verification of use of the proper seed mix. Landowners must also use some diligence to ensure that the items outlined in the agreement are followed.

What natives should you choose for your Right-of-Way

Most landowners interested in planting natives already understand the importance of native plant species for wildlife, however, many lack confidence in knowing what plant species to purchase for their project. This can become problematic when you are attempting to buy or specify native seed mixes because many don't realize or even know what native species exist in their area. TNS recommends that you speak to someone who understands and can explain to you the details associated with such a purchase. One easy way to determine what plant species would occur in your area is to ask one of your local Texas Parks and Wildlife Biologists or one of the TNS staff.

Be an informed consumer

When investing in native seed it is extremely important to consider what it is you are buying. If you do not, planting costs can increase, and results can be misconstrued or incorrectly interpreted. Simply put, not all commercially available seed is equal, and those buying native seed should be aware of this. Relying on second hand information or other unformed advice has led to lackluster results on many Texas properties.

When researching native seeds you will likely notice they are a relatively expensive product, especially when compared to the traditional non-native seeding options such as bermudagrass or Kleingrass. A typical and very basic seed mix could cost around \$50/acre whereas a more diverse mix can easily total over \$100/acre. The most expensive option of all are usually listed as a Wild Harvest, and these products labeled as "Texas Native" or "Wild Harvest" should be closely examined for quality assurance. Serious issues of Wild Harvest mixes contaminated with non-native grasses or unwanted weeds have been documented, and is one of the many reasons that TNS strongly encourages landowners to avoid this option. Another potential product you may encounter are those containing variety names listed as "Native" (Figure 2) or "VNS" which stands for Variety Not Specified. If you see this listed you should ask more questions or reconsider the purchase all together (Figure 3). You can request a copy of the seed report analysis for each species in the mix.

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Considerations for Planting Native Seed for Wildlife on Rights-of-Ways, continued

This will give you important information such as variety name, germination, and dormancy that will help you determine the quality of your potential purchase.

For more information check out the YouTube video at the following link:

Reseeding Natives in South Texas: Reading Tags, Storage and Handling

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0k7HEmlRYqO>

The origin of purchased seed can have two very distinct meanings. The most important of which is not the location of the seed dealer, but the origin of the seed product itself. A term that is used to help understand the importance of seed source is “local ecotype”. In the native seed industry, this describes species of a particular seed source that was collected within a particular eco-region. Texas for example, has 10 major eco-regions that in some cases have dramatically different rainfall amounts, soil types and temperatures from one another. Even in the case of significant overlap in plant species distribution within these eco-regions, there exists observable differences in populations of the same plant species. For example, a common component of most native seed mixes in Texas is little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) (Photo 1). Little bluestem is a dominant native grass species that has a distribution roughly encompassing the entire US mainland. However, native little bluestem plants in Oklahoma, Nebraska, or New Mexico exhibit differences from those growing naturally along the Texas Gulf Coast. This is referred to as a regional or local adaptation and has been observed globally among most plant species. In evaluation plots across the state, TNS staff have documented that these differences can manifest greatly in physical characteristics such as plant size, or phenology such as flowering time which influences seed set, and timing of plant dormancy. So, it is reasonable and logical to conclude that a planting recommendation for near Austin, Texas should not include a little bluestem that is sourced from Nebraska because these seeds are not well suited for the extreme climate differences.

Kind:	Curly Mesquite	Variety:	Native
Lot:	204557MOT099	Origin:	AZ
Date tested:	10/09	Pure Live Seed:	89.07%
Pure seed:	94.75%	Germination:	92.00%
Inert:	05.25%	Dormant seed:	2.00%
Other:	0.00%	Total Germ:	94.00%
Weed:	0.00%	Noxious:	None

Little Bluestem	45%
Sand Lovegrass (Bend)	15%
Switchgrass (Blackwell)	15%
Indiangrass (Lometa)	10%
Sideoats Grama (Haskell)	10%
Big Bluestem (Earl)	5%

Left: Figure 2. Varieties listed as “Native” should be avoided. While this particular example has been lab tested for germination, dormancy etc. its origin is from Arizona and has not been tested for performance in the area you intend to plant. **Right: Figure 3.** A native seed recommendation should include a variety name. If it is not included the buyer should ask the seed company for more details. In this case, 45% of the mix (little bluestem) could have originated from anywhere and its potential adaptation to the specific planting site is unknown.



*Photo 1: Examples of little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) differences in plant performance at an evaluation site. Plant differences can be expected based on seed origin, and it is one reason why locally adapted species should be a top choice in plantings. (Left) Evaluations of several commercially available varieties and local collections of little bluestem show a remarkable difference in plant growth even when grown under the same field conditions. (Right) Little bluestem that is not locally adapted may flower and seed several weeks before those of local collections. Photo©Tony Falk, TNS.*

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Considerations for Planting Native Seed for Wildlife on Rights-of-Ways, continued

Understanding the need for regionally adapted species in restoration and reclamation plantings is a fundamental reason that Texas Native Seeds Program was initiated. This statewide program collects, evaluates and commercializes native species that are well suited for soil and climate conditions within the ecoregions of Texas. To date, approximately 40 species or releases have been developed by TNS. While the majority of species have originated from South Texas, TNS has expanded to a statewide program and is working towards releases within other regions, and several suitable seed options are available for most parts of the state.

Planting and follow-up maintenance

Now that you understand the importance of purchasing quality seed there are a couple of things you should consider before and after planting your right-of-way. First of all, the seed bed must be favorable for seed germination and plant establishment. As stated earlier, seed bed preparation is one of the most important factors in a successful native planting. The best way to describe an adequate seed bed is that it's not too soft or too firm. It is important to know that native seed comes in all shapes and sizes, and those that are just a few millimeters in size shouldn't be planted too deep. However, other seed that is larger should be placed deeper in the soil. To help with this, most recommend the use of a specialized seed drill designed for planting natives. These drills have different boxes designed for specific types of native seed and have features that allow for correct planting depths. A traditional one box seed drill will not plant most native seed mixes properly. Another option that can be used and may be more applicable for smaller plantings is a broadcast spreader. This type of seed spreader attaches to the three-point hitch and PTO of a tractor and spins the seed out across the planting area. One important note about this method is that a culti-packer or a heavy rolling object may be necessary to press the seed into the soil after broadcasting.

Once you have planted an area, it is likely that some follow-up maintenance will be required. The native seedlings require careful attention as you monitor for the presence of non-native weeds. It is typically recommended that you treat any unwanted species via Individual Plant Treatment (IPT) with a herbicide. In cases of dense weed infestations, shredding or herbicide applications could be warranted, but care should be taken to ensure that the chemicals used will not injure planted species. Again, any of the local professional resources should be able to provide insight regarding the identification of these unwanted species as well as their recommended treatment. If possible, grazing should be avoided at least for the first year after planting or at least until after the first seed set to ensure that the plants have developed adequate root systems for plant survival.

To sum things up, if you are interested in buying native seed, or having it used on a right-of-way crossing your land, but feel that the process is a bit overwhelming, TNS staff are willing and able to help you through the process. If you have questions about a potential purchase, or what species to choose please feel free to contact any of the regional TNS staff. A complete list of contacts is available at the following link.

<https://www.ckwri.tamuk.edu/research-programs/texas-native-seeds/teams>



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A graduate of the University of Georgia, Doug received his B.S. in Wildlife Resources Management. In 2008, He attended Oklahoma State University for his M.S. in Wildlife Ecology and Management. An appreciation for native plants, their foundation in wildlife conservation and a growing interest from those in the region led him to pursue a career in the applied research field associated with Texas Native Seeds. Private landowner groups and other interested stakeholders are an important part of the project and his particular interests are in educating and demonstrating various aspects of native habitat restoration.