

Fort Worth Prairie Park

Updated September 2023

Plains Youth InterACTION™ Restoration Not Incarceration™



Monarch butterfly



Keeping the prairie healthy.



Mike and Cindi Holt hiking the prairie.



Springtime wildflower abundance.



Star watch party.

Note: Many of the upland open plains photos shown here were taken on our pristine 2,000 acre public land prairie that was sold for development by the Texas General Land Office. Since then, we have worked to reconstitute and grow the Fort Worth Prairie Park out of what native Fort Worth Prairie remains in the area, with US Army Corps of Engineers/Benbrook Lake as the base.







Ice Age wetland.





Bison reintroduction: first bison/"buffalo" on the Fort Worth Prairie in over 160 years. They lived out the rest of their lives on the wild prairie before this specific tract of public land prairie was sold for development. We fought 8 years to save this 2,000 acre tract.



Dickcissel — a grassland nesting bird.



Jarid Manos, Founder of Great Plains Restoration Council, on Big Bluestem Hill, before it was sold to developers. Stands of big bluestem grass showcase strong, old-growth native prairie on deep soil biomes — in a good rain year this wild grass will reach 8 feet high on the Fort Worth Prairie.



Hosting reporters from the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.



Civic tours.



Wild open prairie sunset.



Plains Youth InterACTION™ Summit between urban Fort Worth youth and Oglala Lakota youth from Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota.





The Monarch Cathedral, a roosting place along Rocky Creek where the September Monarch butterfly migration from Canada rests for the night after refueling on the sweet nectar of late season wildflowers on the open Fort Worth Prairie, and two of our local Plains Apache/ Comanche youth Candis and Jared.



Rock Creek riparian zone and bluffs, with the water running south to north into Benbrook Lake/Clear Fork of the Trinity Rive. This was where the mountain lion was said to roam into the mid-2000s. This tract now comprises the City of Fort Worth's new 275 acre Rock Creek Ranch Park acquisition that adds to the preservation area.

History — Fort Worth Prairie Park

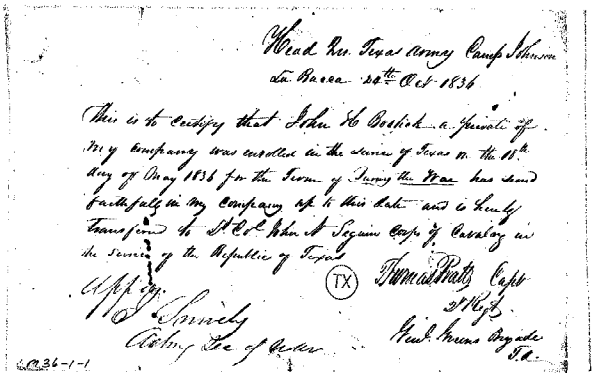


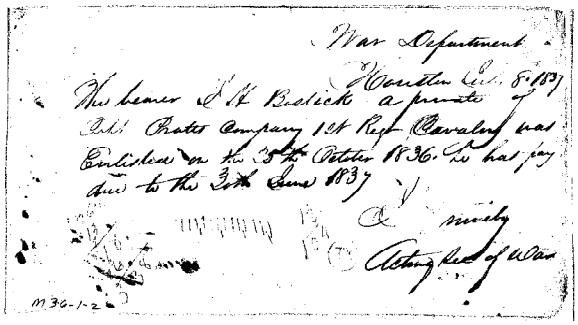


Caddo and Wichita Indigenous people lived in well-built grass houses.



Southern Underground Railroad through the Texas prairie to Mexico. Scholars are unearthing new research, including travels from where Lake Grapevine now is southwestward. (Image from NPR.)





The FWPP includes part of a land grant given to a soldier John Bostick, for serving at the Battle of San Jacinto with Juan Seguin in 1836, who never settled here.



Hand-dug cistern/well.



Peter Daniel Muhlinghaus, frontier settler on the Fort Worth Prairie. Remnants of his 1850s stone homestead still exist on the Fort Worth Prairie Park.



Frontier rock wall.

Restoration Not Incarceration™ — Fort Worth Prairie Park













Wildlife — Fort Worth Prairie



Crested Caracara (“Mexican Eagle”) with a scissor-tailed flycatcher on his back harassing him.



Bobcat.



Painted Bunting.



Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher.



Loggerhead Shrike.



Black-swallowtail butterflies.



Great Blue Heron on East Dutch Branch Creek.



Vegan Mourning Dove eerily eyeing a grasshopper impaled on a thorn by a Loggerhead Shrike.



American Kestrel aka Sparrow Hawk.



Ruby-throated hummingbird



Northern Harrier Hawk among some brush-overgrown country. GPRC's Restoration Not Incarceration™ work helps restore open grassland. Northern Harriers are another grassland-dependent, ground-nesting bird.



Red-Bellied Woodpeckers.



Young white-tailed deer with it's tail up as a warning.



Coyote hunting in the morning.

Plains Youth InterACTION™ — Fort Worth Prairie Park



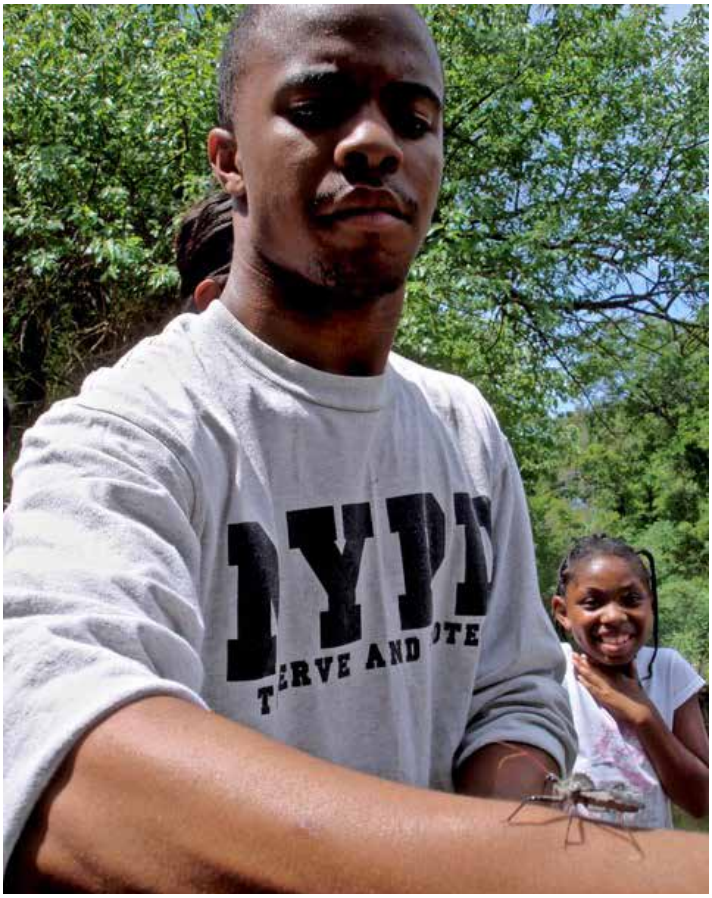




KB discovers an ammonite fossil.



Dr. Tony Burgess from Texas Christian University (TCU) and one of our youth Kalule Kabuta gathering native seed for the Botanic Research Institute of Texas' (BRIT) green roof.





Visiting Oglala Lakota youth from Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, South Dakota singing a ceremonial song to honor the Fort Worth Prairie and Rock Creek, and local Indigenous people of times past, during a Plains Youth InterACTION™ summit.



Ecosystem Services

Ecosystem services are defined as the goods and services provided by ecosystems to humans.



Building a new pocket wetland on the Fort Worth Prairie. We removed invasives around the new wetland site, which is near the entrance and was impacted, and reseeded it with carefully- sourced native grasses and forbs.



Carbon Cutbank, one of our education sites. A lot of a native prairie is underground, with roots that can reach many feet deep. In addition to voluminous water absorption and water pollution filtration, healthy native prairie removes carbon from the atmosphere and stores it thousands of years in the soil. Because their roots are underground, prairies are a very stable source of carbon sequestration.



Benbrook Lake/the reservoir built on the Upper Clear Fork of the Trinity River during the Roosevelt administration, with surrounding native Fort Worth Prairie helping protect water water quality and providing important native wildlife habitat and open space in a park-poor region.

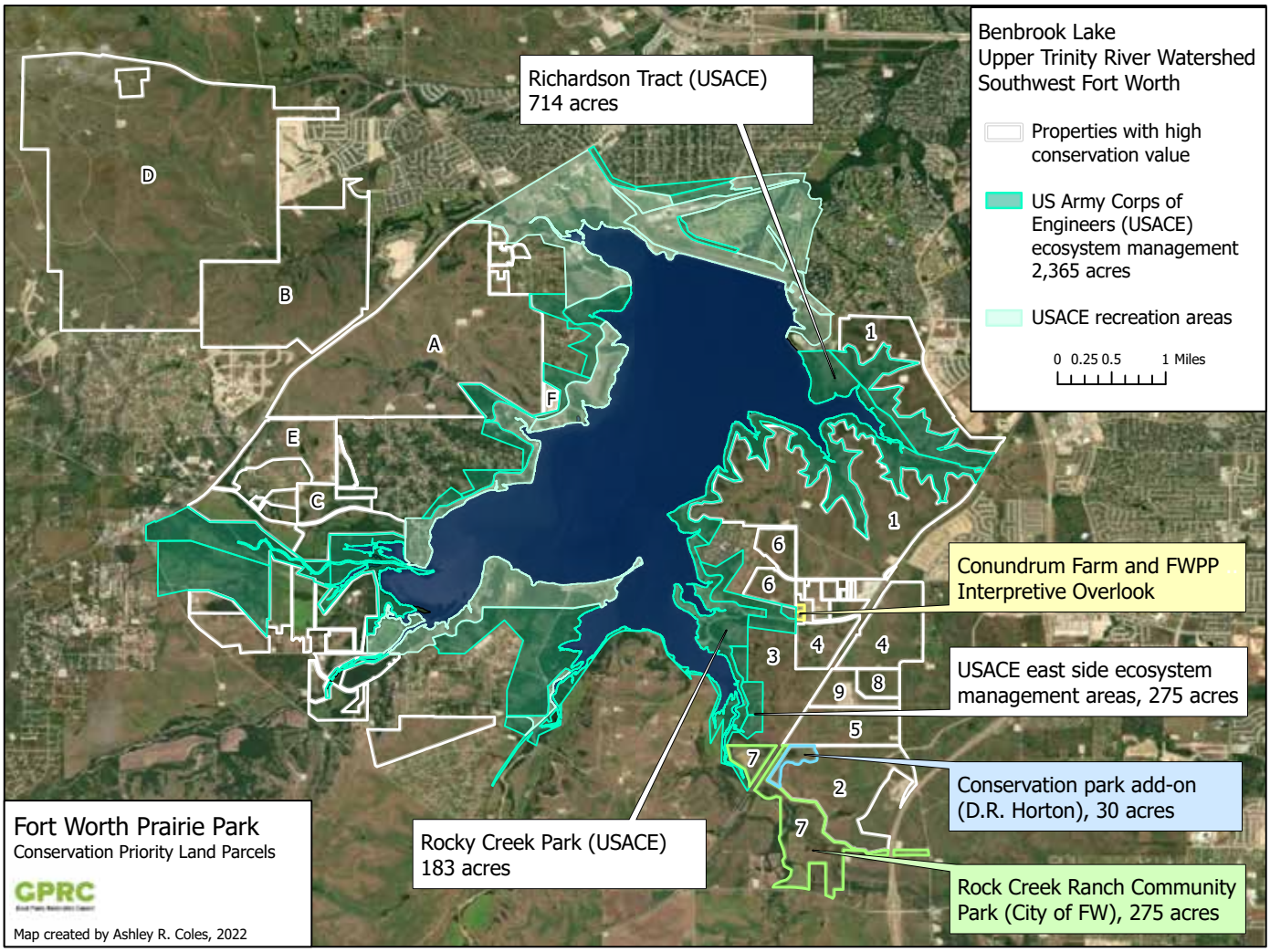




Fort Worth Prairie Park visit with Tarrant County Commissioner Roy C. Brooks, Great Plains Restoration Council, Tarrant County Youth Advocate Program, and Funky Town Food Project/Conundrum Farm. That's Woodrow to the right checking out the Fort Worth Prairie superbloom the spring rains blessed us with in 2023. He's a different kind of prairie dog. Behind us you can see the next stage of work — all the tree and brush overgrowth that is still choking out native prairie, and scheduled for the next restoration season. This tract here is part of the federal lands of the Fort Worth Prairie Park preservation complex.



East Dutch Branch Creek, a main tributary of Benbrook Lake/ Upper Trinity River, protected by strong 10,000 year old native Fort Worth Prairie.


Benbrook Lake
Upper Trinity River Watershed
Southwest Fort Worth
Properties with high conservation value
US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) ecosystem management 2,365 acres
USACE recreation areas
0 0.25 0.5 1 Miles
Richardson Tract (USACE)
714 acres
Conundrum Farm and FWPP Interpretive Overlook
USACE east side ecosystem management areas, 275 acres
Conservation park add-on (D.R. Horton), 30 acres
Rock Creek Ranch Community Park (City of FW), 275 acres
Rocky Creek Park (USACE)
183 acres
Fort Worth Prairie Park
Conservation Priority Land Parcels
GPRC
Map created by Ashley R. Coles, 2022

GPRC
Great Plains Restoration Council

Prospectus Fact Sheet

Fort Worth Prairie Park
Great Plains Restoration Council
www.GPRC.org

Mission

Create the largest protected public Prairie Park in North Texas of several thousand acres that helps avert the extinction crisis facing the 10,000 year old native Fort Worth Prairie Ecosystem and provides refuge, health, clean water, wild natural green space and well-being for people and wildlife.

Background

Fort Worth and the larger DFW Metroplex were founded upon virgin prairie, yet is “park poor” when it comes to Western-scale conservation lands. The Fort Worth Prairie Park will not only be a grassland park for all of North Texas, but the country’s first major city wildland park protecting ancestral wild prairie as part of its identity.

Description

The native Fort Worth Prairie includes upland tallgrass prairies in deep soil and shallower limestone soil shortgrass prairies, Ice Age wetlands, tabletop plains that provide nourishment, breeding, and resting grounds for migratory Monarch butterflies (IUCN Red List “Endangered”) and rapidly declining grassland nesting birds, pristine creeks, gallery forest and more. The Fort Worth Prairie is unique in that it lies directly on America’s “Dry Line”, the 98th Meridian, where the East meets West.

Current size

Approximately 3,000 acres in a mix of federal, City, private and NGO lands in the Upper Clear Fork of the Trinity River Watershed around Benbrook Lake and along Rock Creek and East Dutch Branch Creek. GPRC has an MOU a managing partner for the prairie with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which owns the federal lands. A public NEPA commenting process has also been completed, whereby the USACE updated their Master Plan for the first time in 45 years. Now all remaining high-quality native prairie on their holdings is officially designated as Environmentally Sensitive Areas.

New acquisition and preservation

The City of Fort Worth recently approved a 275-acre purchase acquisition on the south end of the federal preservation area, at a cost of $6,750,000. On the north end, Great Plains Restoration Council negotiated a 42 acre conservation donation from JPI, a developer, and Tarrant Regional Water District protected 6.5 acres adjacent to that. (Both of the latter are directly contiguous to Sid Richardson Tract of the USACE, and protect some of the last unprotected undeveloped upland of the East Dutch Branch Creek watershed.)

Goal

Approximately 4,000 acres, working with willing landowners and the community, as an alternative to development.

Needed

Critical upland tabletop plains are needed to complete the Park. The current waterway and swale prairie lands already enrolled. serve as the ecological core.

Cost

$60 million to $100 million would permanently protect a Fort Worth Prairie Park of several thousand acres, though land prices continue to rise as development encroaches and open prairie gets scarcer. For context, the community spent $80 million for the Fort Worth Museum of Science and History. A permanent management endowment fund would cost additional.

Ecosystem Status

The Fort Worth Prairie ecosystem is endangered and disappearing fast. Once 1.3 million acres, it is now one of the rarest ecosystems in North America. Native prairie of all ecotypes is the most endangered and least protected in North America, and development is threatening the last of the remaining 10,000-year old prairie in North Texas.

Location

The area around Benbrook Lake in southwest Fort Worth is the last stronghold for the embattled Fort Worth Prairie ecosystem.

Watershed protection

Remaining wild prairie protects perennial creeks, Benbrook Lake, and the overall Upper Trinity River watershed that leads all down through Texas into Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico. A TCU study from former Environmental Sciences professor Dr. Tony Burgess shows that development and destruction of these remaining wild prairies will cause runoff pollution to flow directly into our waterways, whereas native prairie and its deep roots provide extraordinary absorption and filtration.

Native Wildlife and Plant Biodiversity

Our last wild Fort Worth Prairie explodes with life. Scissor-tailed flycatchers, dickcissels, grasshopper sparrows, bobwhite quail, American woodcocks, yellow-billed cuckoos, painted buntings, northern harrier hawks, rare and amazing crested caracaras (an eagle-like bird), wild turkeys, bobcats, beaver, coyotes, Texas brown tarantulas, giant swallowtail butterflies, white and largemouth bass, slough darters, longnose gars, box turtles, narrowmouth toads, white-tailed deer, big bluestem, little bluestem, yellow Indian grass, prairie bishop, Missouri foxtail cactus, snow-on-the-prairie, Monarch butterflies and so much more are depending upon us.

Climate change resilience

Native prairie directly removes carbon from the atmosphere and stores it in the deep-rooted soil for thousands of years. When native prairies are destroyed, this carbon is not only released into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change, but also destroys all future carbon sequestration services provided by the native prairie. Native prairie grassland carbon sequestration is highly stable, as it is stored underground, unlike forests. Wild, healthy prairie provides important climate change services as Western forests burn more frequently.

Quality of life

Natural amenities in the form of landscape-level wild open space that protect native ecosystems, with all its outdoor recreation, biodiversity, clean air and clean water, and public health benefits, improve a city's civic attractiveness and daily well-being.

Opportunities

In conjunction with the City of Fort Worth Open Space Department, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Native Prairies Association of Texas and others, and foundation and community partners, we work to conserve remaining native Fort Worth Prairie. Additional new lands can be protected through fee acquisition and conservation easements.

Fort Worth Prairie Park Preservation Committee

The Fort Worth Prairie Park Preservation Committee is comprised of influential business leaders and conservationists.

Ecological Health

Great Plains Restoration Council is the founder of the Ecological Health initiative, defined as "the interdependent heath of people, animals and ecosystems". In Ecological Health education, people take care of their own full-dimensional health through taking care of the Earth. Ecological Health is taught nationally with the Fort Worth Prairie Park as the model.

Restoration Not Incarceration™: Paid outdoor green job-training in prairie restoration and nature-based work therapy

Great Plains Restoration Council (GPRC) "does conservation through people.: For example, in the historic absence of bison and fire, some tree and brush overgrowth has begun to choke out prairie biodiversity in places, especially on Corps swales leading up from waterways, and must be removed to protect endangered biodiversity. GPRC's program Restoration Not Incarceration™, in partnership with Tarrant County Youth Advocate Program and others, employs formerly incarcerated youth and young adults on a re-entry track to restore the prairie back to 1800s conditions, while also providing valuable life-skills training, technical education and certification in Tier I, II, and III of Ecological Health practices and principles. Restoration Not Incarceration™ field crew teams cost approximately $1,000 a day, delivering an increase in acreage of native prairie on land already protected. A couple years of new work needs to be scheduled now.

Benefits to Society

Nature-based work therapy has been shown in several studies to reduce recidivism and help participants build a lifeline to a healthier, more sustainable future for themselves. In some cases, young people realize they can be leaders themselves and go on to serve others and the living natural world. In Ecological Health, service recipients become service providers. On a broader scale, preserving wild open space dramatically improves public health and wellness physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually for everybody.

Honoring History

As we stride into the future, the Fort Worth Prairie Park can include interpretation of the first frontier Anglo settlers (there are frontier stone homestead archaeological ruins), local Caddo and Wichita tribes who lived in well-built grass houses, Kiowa and Comanche who visited from the west, and a trail memorializing the 1850s Southern Underground Railroad whereby escaped enslaved people of African descent traveled across the Texas prairie toward Mexico and freedom.

##

Storm water run-off, groundwater recharge, and flood control services of native prairies:

Established native prairie will intercept as much as 53 tons of water during a one inch per hour rain event. (University of Nebraska, Lincoln).

Established native prairie can absorb 9 inches of rainfall per hour before runoff occurs. (University of Northern Iowa, 2008), and (Clark O. 1940. "Interception of rainfall by prairie grasses, weeds, and certain crop plants." *Ecological Monographs.* 10: 243-277.)