

## TUESDAY, November 14, 2017 Field Trip Options

Please wear appropriate field clothing (long-sleeve shirt, pants, sturdy shoes), bring a water bottle, sunscreen, hat, & insect repellent.

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### **FULL DAY (8:30AM – 3:00PM):**

### **TAGGART RANCH (Grandview) & SMITH RANCH (Rio Vista)**

Cap at 50 participants

FIELD TRIP LOGISTICS: Michelle Villafranca; HOST LEAD: Dan Caudle

*Focus: Grass-fed beef production operation, rotational grazing, some restoration, fire, invasive species management*

*Activities: Participants will ride on a trailer to see the ranch.*

### **Taggart Ranch**

Jon Taggart began raising grass-fed beef in 1999 after many years as a traditional cow-calf rancher. He leases this 1400 acre ranch near Grandview, TX where he maintains a herd of about 200 head of steers and heifers for the production of all natural, grass-fed beef. His cattle are raised strictly on grass from the time they are born. They are not grain-fed and never are in a feedlot. Jon does not use hormones or antibiotics on his cattle.



This is a good example of a sustainable ranching operation, with ever improving biodiversity. Taggart has not used fertilizers on these pastures since 2000 and keeps outside inputs to a minimum. He does not use broadcast applications of herbicides to control weeds, or brush species. However, there is an ongoing brush management effort to keep the invasive mesquites under control. He uses some mechanical treatments to remove the unwanted brush species. He may use some targeted individual plant treatment occasionally to control brush in areas where he doesn't want to disturb the soil and vegetation.

He is open to adopting new technologies and exploring new concepts in an effort to increase efficiency and sustainability. He also serves as a mentor and freely shares his knowledge, experience, and advice with students, teachers, other landowners, and others who are interested in the grass-fed beef business.

About 900 acres of this ranch were cultivated fields before Jon began the expensive and time-consuming job of seeding the old cropland fields back to grasses where they once existed. The process took about 10 years, but now the ranch has many pastures with diverse stands of native grasses including switchgrass, Indiangrass, big bluestem, little bluestem, sideoats grama, and many more. There are still some remnants of introduced grasses which have encroached from adjacent ranches and roadsides or were seeded prior to Jon's tenure.

He does use prescribed burning in conjunction with rotational grazing to improve forage quality, help maintain biodiversity, keep resprouting brush species controlled, and achieve his overall management goals. He does not use hormones or antibiotics, and his cattle are never in a feed lot.

The ranch includes a fenced riparian buffer zone that feeds into a conservation reservoir and flood prevention structure. Jon is currently cooperating with the Audubon Society in their Conservation Ranching Program to provide habitat for grassland birds. He works closely with a wide variety of ranching and natural resource agencies and organizations including Texas Wildlife Association, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Texas AgriLife Extension.



For several years he has participated with the Botanical Research Institute of Texas (BRIT) as an integral component of their Bootcamp educational program for school teachers and educators. He is currently participating in an education/demonstration/research program that includes the TCU Ranch Management Program, TCU Institute for Ranch Management, BRIT, Noble Research Institute, Dixon Water Foundation, Audubon, Texas Instruments, and USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

In addition he owns and operates Burgundy Beef, a retail enterprise that includes a beef processing plant, three retail meat markets, mail order sales, and wholesale sales to restaurants. His meat markets are the retail outlet for his 100% grassfed beef as well as 100% grassfed lamb, pasture raised pork and chicken, free range eggs, raw milk cheese, raw unfiltered honey. All of these products are produced by Taggart's network of trusted local producers.



### **Smith Ranch**

The Smith Ranch, west of Rio Vista, TX has been a working farm and cattle ranch since 1887. Lowell Smith Jr. is a fourth generation land steward who operates the 2,000 acre ranch in this transition zone between the Blackland Prairie and Cross Timbers Ecological Regions of Texas.

Starting in 1887, the Smith ranch was a diversified farming operation that grew wheat, oats, cotton, and corn along with cattle. Around 1900, Hereford cattle were introduced, and in the 1940's the Smiths experimented with "fat cattle" for a few years, by finishing calves from grain raised on the farm. Beginning in the 1940's and culminating in the 1970's, nearly all the fields that had been farmed were gradually converted to pastures, though there is still strong evidence of terracing in the old fields. Today, as part of the total ranching operation, the only crop grown is wheat and forage sorghum for grazing and hay, and in 1980 Herefords were replaced with Angus cattle.

Over the years, the ranch has maintained a 35 remnant prairie site dominated by native tallgrasses. The ranch has used this prairie over the years for hay production, by only cutting one hay crop per year. This site gives us a glimpse at what this whole region looked like before settlement. Today, the Chisholm Trail Marker reads.

*Settled in the valley below in 1887 and through the years has protected a 25 acre rare native prairie grass preserve. Imagine millions of bison and Longhorn cattle that grazed on this lush grass just as it is today on the Smith family ranch near Rio Vista.*

### **HALF DAY (8:30AM – 1:00PM):**

#### **TAGGART RANCH**

Taggart Ranch in the morning, picnic box lunch at Taggart's processing plant in Grandview

FIELD TRIP LOGISTICS: Michelle Villafranca; HOST LEAD: Dan Caudle

**HALF DAY (8:00AM – 1:00PM):****TANDY HILLS NATURAL AREA (Fort Worth)**

\*Port-a-let is on-site

Cap at 50 participants

FIELD TRIP LOGISTICS: Anne Alderfer ; HOST LEAD: Don Young

*Focus: Remnant Fort Worth Prairie, community advocacy & volunteerism, education, urban prairies, rare plants, non-profit fundraising, invasive species management*



Tandy Hills is a 160 acre park located in the hills adjacent to the Trinity River just 5 miles east of downtown Fort Worth. The park, managed by the City of Fort Worth Park & Recreation Department protects remnant acres of Fort Worth Prairie ecosystem, which is a historic prairie that runs along I-35 and is defined by the Eastern and Western Cross Timbers.

The Friends of Tandy Hills Natural Area (FoTHNA) is a non-profit group that supports the park. Dedicated volunteers have worked tirelessly for years to document plants (*BioBlitz*), clear invading brush (*Brush Bash*), create prairie awareness within the community (*PrairieFest, Manly Men and Womenly Women Hike, Prairie Sky Star*

*Parties*), and educate generations of youth (*Kids on the Prairie*) about this special remnant prairie. Tandy Hills is especially known for its impressive spring wildflower display. In 2016, FOTHNA hosted the largest BioBlitz in Texas, which documented the diversity of the park. On this field trip, you will meet the FoTHNA founders, who will lead you on a hike to explore the park and look at the unique flora there. They will share their experiences organizing special events that help spread the word about our prairies, how to organize volunteer events, and how to develop an outreach program for local elementary schools.



**FULL DAY (8:30AM – 3:00PM) / HALF DAY (8:30AM – 1:00PM):****LEO RANCH (Decatur)**

\*Box lunches will be served at the Betty and Clint Josey Pavilion at Leo Ranch. Half Day field trip departs for Fort Worth after lunch.

Cap at 50 participants

FIELD TRIP LOGISTICS: Kate Morgan; HOST LEAD: Melissa Bookhout

*Focus: LEED pavilion, conservation easement, water conservation, sustainable ranching, rotational grazing*

The Dixon Water Foundation owns and manages numerous ranches in Texas. They are the recipients of the [2017 Leopold Conservation award for Texas](#) and are dedicated to promoting healthy watersheds through sustainable land management to ensure that future generations have the water resources they need. The field trip will focus on the Leo and Pittman units of Leo Ranch, located in the Fort Worth Prairie ecosystem in Cooke County.

In the morning, participants will tour the Leo Unit, which has used Adaptive Multi-paddock Grazing by cattle and sheep to restore depleted plowed fields to prairie. Lunch will be at the Betty and Clint Josey Pavilion, one of only 14 Certified Living Buildings in the world. In the afternoon, the group will tour the Pittman Unit, a native prairie managed with Adaptive Multi-paddock Grazing by cattle and sheep.



The [Leo](#) and [Pittman](#) Units encompass more than 1,700 acres of tall-grass prairie in Cooke County. The bottomlands of Leo Unit were previously farmed and provide an excellent demonstration site for the restoration of farmland to prairie. The Leo Ranch property has characteristics of three primary ecotones, resulting in a large diversity of plant communities within the easement boundaries. It is ecologically situated at the boundary of the Grand Prairie (Ecoregion 29d) and the sloping woodlands of the Western Cross Timbers (Ecoregion 29c). The nearly level meadow area on the northern portion of the Property is characteristic of bottomland tallgrass floodplain and riparian ecosystems in North Texas.

Recent floral surveys conducted by Native Prairies Association of Texas' *Prairie Seekers* program has noted high quality relict prairie species. Connemara Conservancy holds conservation easements on the property and have conducted many floristic surveys over the years.

**FULL DAY (8:30AM – 3:00PM) / HALF DAY (8:30AM – 1:00PM):****Clymer Meadow (Celeste)**

\*Box lunches will be served. Half Day field trip departs for Fort Worth after lunch.

Cap at 50 participants

FIELD TRIP LOGISTICS: Laura Penn; HOST LEAD: Brandon Belcher

*Focus: restoration, unique geologic features, endemic species, relict prairie, prescribed burns*

The 1,400-acre Clymer Meadow Preserve contains some of the largest and most diverse remnants of the Blackland Prairie—the Texas version of the tallgrass prairie that once stretched from near the Texas Coast to southern Manitoba. The preserve is part of a larger conservation area that includes land owned by The Nature Conservancy of Texas and other private owners.

Named for pioneer Jim Clymer, who bought the first tracts in the 1850s, Clymer Meadow serves as a center for study of the Blackland Prairie and has been the site of more than a dozen scientific investigations ranging in scope from inventories of prairie invertebrates to noxious weed control. Universities, private research organizations, and public and private primary and secondary schools have used the meadow as a teaching site.



Two globally imperiled prairie plant communities are represented here: little bluestem-Indiangrass and gamagrass-switchgrass community series types. Other important grasses include big bluestem, meadow dropseed, sideoats grama, and Canada wildrye. Wildflowers, such as rough-leaf rosinweed, purple Indian paintbrush, prairie clover and American basketflower are abundant.

One of the more unusual features of the preserve is a microtopography called "gilgai" by soil scientists and "hogwallows" by farmers. Normal gilgai are irregular or round, shallow basins, often arranged in a honeycomb-like pattern on level, heavy clay soils. Because they tend to hold water,

they influence the composition of the plant communities. Moisture-loving species such as eastern gamagrass and spikerush occupy the frequently inundated microlows, while drier-adapted species such as sideoats grama and little bluestem are common on microridges.

Because of the prairie's rich agricultural soils, more than 99 percent has been cultivated, making the tallgrass the most-endangered large ecosystem in North America.

The prairie provides habitat for a great number of seasonal bird species. Northern harriers are common through the winter months; eastern bluebirds visit the preserve in the spring; and neotropical dickcissels are abundant during the early summer months.