



A CONSERVATION NOTEBOOK

by Homer Stevens

My passion for land management, and conservation probably began in the 1950's due to the influence of my mother and father.

However, starting in August of 2013 I enrolled in The Texas Master Naturalist program that is jointly sponsored by Texas Parks and Wildlife, and the Agrilife Extension Service. Admission to the program required tuition, attending classes every Wednesday for 12 weeks, attending four field trips, and dedicating 40 hours per year to volunteer service. The subjects covered are Natural History, Ecological Concepts and Ecosystem Management, Hydrology, Geology, Range Management, Ethnobotany, Classification and Naming of Plants and Animals, Soils and Erosion Control, Entomology, Ichthyology, Herpetology, Riparian Area Management, Ornithology, Mammalogy, and diverse specialized inroads into all of these disciplines

Having a B S degree from Texas A & M in Animal Husbandry, an M. S in Biochemistry from Incarnate Word, having taught high school Biology and Chemistry for approximately 24 years, as well as having worked for and with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Agri Life Extension Service, I already had some background in some of the disciplines covered in the class sessions. The bottom line result from having attended the Naturalist program is that I am truly humbled by how much I had forgotten and how many changes there have been since I was active in the afore mentioned institutions and organizations.

Personally I highly recommend the Naturalist program, especially for relatively new land owners in The Texas Hill Country. Much of the information and many of the opinions that will be expressed in subsequent issues will come from experiences in the Naturalist Program as well as text information resulting from formal education. In addition, being from a family that came to this area in the mid 1850's, having

lived on the same property for 70+ years, built a business that involved balancing ecology and economics, most of the articles will be supplemented with opinions gained the hard way "Trial and Error" as well as the world of government and academia.



A tidbit from the Naturalist program. Due to an increase in the number of elk in Yellowstone National Park, wolves were reintroduced! There was a small decrease in the number of elk due to predation by the wolves but a large increase in the number of ducks. The elk adapted quickly leaving their preferred habitat to live in open areas where they could see the wolves and flee or fight. As a result of this, willows formerly eaten by the elk proliferated. An increasing number of willows provided more material for beavers to build dams and make their homes. More dams meant more ponds, and more ponds attracted more ducks.

Being an old sheep herder, I might argue the idea of introducing wolves to solve problems in any ecosystem, but it is interesting to point out the surprising interrelationships that the forces of nature may take. Try looking for such interrelationships in our own Hill Country environment.

Consider how overgrazing by one landowner might have resulted in a huge cocklebur patch on a neighbor's property. Actually I may make it a point to mention in every article how important grass cover is to all aspects of conservation.