



A CONSERVATION NOTEBOOK

by Homer Stevens

There is not much about nature that isn't interesting and intriguing. That being said these events may occupy opposite ends of a spectrum by being inspiring and stimulating or just down right aggravating.

It all started with nice spring rains that culminated in a Memorial Day flood. The ultimate effect of precipitation is probably positive even though there are many negatives.

It's great to have Medina Lake full again and all the river crossings flowing with water and overflowing with picnickers. Out here on the farm Hicks Creek has been running since at least March, and it appears it may make the winter. Since none of us this side of heaven have the switch we'll have to accept the washed out fences and roads as well as the even more serious consequences of the floods. Fortunately the fall rains were not as devastating, but very timely and beneficial. Starting in August we had 7.57" followed by 4.69" in September. These late summer, early fall rains gave us two really vigorous growing seasons.

The interesting, intriguing, inspiring, stimulating, results revolve around the two distinct growing and blooming seasons that resulted with our local flora. Our lantana, cenizo, crape myrtle, yellow bells, sage etc. that were planted in the landscape were joined by a multitude of various species of wild flowers in the pastures to give us a real color treat in the late spring and early summer. Then with only a short pause in mid summer all these plants came back even more vigorously in late summer and early fall. The fall event being special because the root systems, and foliage were already established, and the regrowth and new blooms were significantly striking.

Now! The topic of the quarter! The same thing that happened with the flowering species occurred with the native grasses. They reached knee high in the spring, and continued on to waste high by fall. One of the

aggravating factors in this occurrence was the immense proliferation of KR Bluestem absolutely everywhere--pastures, pens, roadsides, lawns, "You Name It".

Let's look at "Native American Seeds" fall catalogue description of KR.



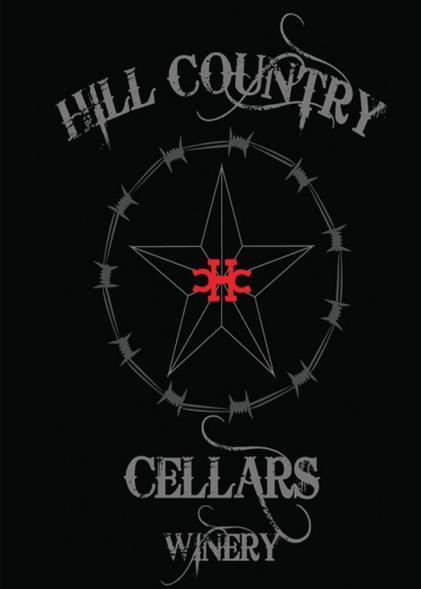
"Also known as yellow bluestem, this grass spreads through prolific seed production and rhizomes. Introduced to Texas via the King Ranch (KR) in an effort to stabilize sand dunes. This grass makes up to 9 seed crops per year. Fast growing, dense, short vegetation prevents other warm season native grasses from getting a foothold. Seeds move around in the wind and animal fur. Likes disturbed areas. Becomes more aggressive with mowing. Prescribed fire in summer followed by drouthy conditions can provide up to 85% reduction in population." The catalogue also recommends use of a Tomahawk in eradicating this grass. Their picture of the Tomahawk resembles a common garden hoe and would require the same hand --arm power source.

The absolutely most aggravating thing about KR is its presence in lawn areas. It tends to send up bunches of spindly seed bearing spikes that make the lawns look unkept in very short order. In fact Native Seeds assessment of 9 seed crops may be under stated. KR is not going to give up. It will

continue to send up new seed heads as many times as they are cut off. The leaf area of the plants spreads so close to the ground that it is difficult for most domestic animals to graze, reducing its value as a range plant.

Early on after its introduction by the King Ranch our state highway department recognized that due to its natural habits of ground hugging leaf bases and determined viable seed production it had great potential for erosion control. The department then proceeded to purchase large quantities of KR seed and seed the shoulders of many new roadways. The strategy worked but provided all of us with an aggravating little weed that tends to want to dominate all of our lawns and pastures.

When you are out Tomahawking the KR plants in your lawn, remember that it has saved many of our highway shoulders from erosion.



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