



# 2017 NEWSLETTER

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**U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

**Arlington, Texas, Ecological Services Field Office**

**Southwest Region**

**2017 was a great year for the Arlington Ecological Services Field Office (ARLES).**

Our staff of 16 Full Time Employees, and one Student Conservation Association intern worked on a variety of projects in the Environmental Review, Classification, and Recovery Branch and in the Pre-listing and Restoration Branch, to implement Service regulations, policies, and conservation initiatives across a 112-county area in north Texas. These projects support and protect native fish and wildlife including federally-listed species and the habitats on which they depend on survival.

In this newsletter, we describe some of the partnership activities we engaged in over the last year on a variety of endangered, threatened, and candidate species, including the black-capped vireo, sharpnose shiner, and smallnose shiner, the red-cockaded woodpecker, the monarch butterfly, lesser-prairie chicken, Texas kangaroo rat, western chicken turtle, Texas emerald dragonfly, triangle pigtoe, and Texas heelsplitter, and Louisiana pigtoe.

We are proud to be a part of the Texas conservation community, working with State, Federal, and local partners to conserve, protect, and enhance the diverse ecosystems that support the native fish, wildlife, and plant communities of the Lone Star State.



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# WELCOME TO ARLES

*“Our mission is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.”*

*- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mission Statement*

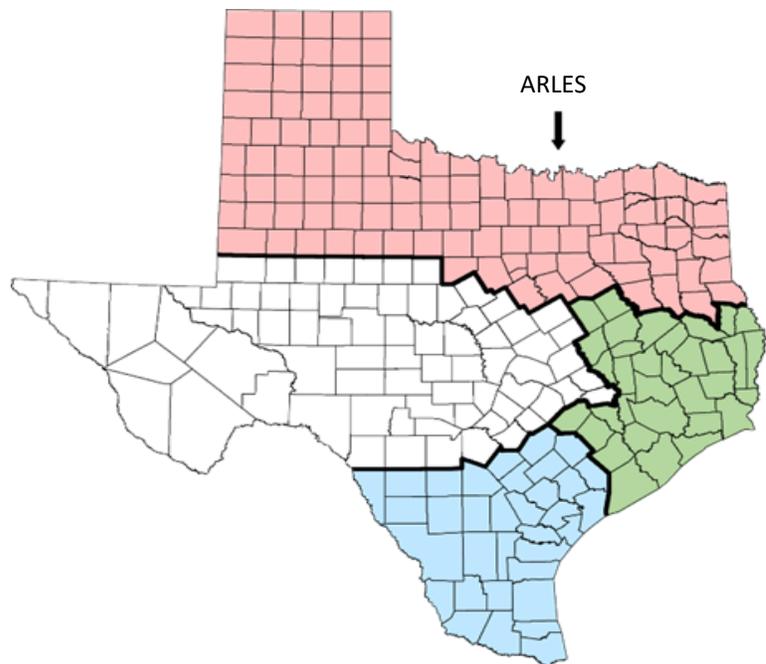
The Arlington Ecological Services Field Office (ARLES) provides assistance through five programs: education/outreach, endangered species, environmental contaminants, federal permits and projects, and Partners for Fish and Wildlife.

ARLES was established in 1950 as a Division of River Basin Studies Office in Fort Worth, Texas. The ARLES is one of the oldest Ecological Services Field Stations in the United States and was the first field station created in Texas. The office was relocated to Arlington in 1990.



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## ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, CLASSIFICATION, AND RECOVERY

*The Environmental Conservation Online System (ECOS) provides public access to information from numerous FWS databases.*  
<https://ecos.fws.gov/ecp/>

The Environmental Review, Classification, and Recovery (ERCR) branch processed informal consultations, Endangered Species Act (ESA) technical assistance requests, completed formal consultations, and conferences. Additionally, the ERCR branch processed numerous recovery requests and processed annual and interim reports submitted from recovery permit holders. Staff worked on conservation banking, water development projects, Army Corps of Engineers mitigation banking, wind farm projects, and reviewed and edited biological data for multiple species in the Environmental Conservation Online System (ECOS), which appear as species profiles available for public viewing.

### SPECIES PROFILE: LESSER PRAIRIE CHICKEN

The lesser prairie-chicken is a ground-nesting grassland bird that occupies grasslands across a five-state range in portions of Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Kansas and Colorado. The lesser prairie-chicken is commonly recognized for its dramatic and entertaining courtship displays. Plumage of the lesser prairie-chicken is characterized by a cryptic pattern of alternating brown and buff-colored barring. Males display brilliant yellow-orange eyecombs and reddish-purple air sacs during courtship displays.

Lesser prairie-chicken populations need large tracts of relatively intact grasslands and prairies to thrive. The vast majority of lesser prairie-chicken habitat occurs on privately owned and operated lands. Therefore, voluntary participation by landowners is key to maintaining, enhancing, restoring and reconnecting habitat for the species. Conservation efforts that benefit the lesser prairie-chicken also benefit other grassland dependent species like the mule deer, pronghorn and scaled quail.



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### SPECIES STATUS ASSESSMENTS

The Species Status Assessment (SSA) Framework is an analytical approach developed by FWS to deliver foundational science for informing all Endangered species Act (ESA) decisions. An SSA is a focused, repeatable, and rigorous scientific assessment. The result will be better assessments, improved and more transparent and defensible decision making, and clearer and more concise documents.

### LISTING AND RECOVERY

**Black-capped vireo** status – Following the completion of the SSA report for the black-capped vireo, a proposed rule to delist the species was completed. A black-capped vireo post-delisting monitoring plan was drafted to guide management and monitoring for a 12-year period.

**Shiner SSA revision** – The 2014 revision for the sharpnose and smalley shiners is underway. The shiner SSA was the second SSA in the nation and will likely be the first SSA report to undergo a revision.

**Peppered chub** – The peppered chub is a small minnow that can be found in prairie streams of north Texas; its conservation status is currently being evaluated using the SSA framework.

**Texas kangaroo rat** – The Texas kangaroo rat is a small brown mammal with a white belly, named for its hind feet that resemble that of a kangaroo. This species has been documented in 11 north-central counties of Texas.



Sharpnose and smalley shiner



Peppered chub



Black-capped vireo



Texas kangaroo rat

## NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR FORT HOOD: FWS MILITARY CONSERVATION PARTNER AWARD

FWS recognized Fort Hood as this year's National recipient of the prestigious FWS Military Conservation Partner Award on June 7, 2017. Fort Hood is one of the Army's premier installations and the largest installation in the continental U.S., encompassing 218,824 acres in Bell and Coryell counties, Texas. It conducts the full range of mission-related training activities and also successfully manages the largest known populations of the endangered golden-cheeked warbler and black-capped vireo.



*"It is an honor and a privilege to collaborate with the Armed Forces on efforts to conserve our national resources on military lands. Fort Hood has clearly demonstrated their commitment to not only protect our country but our country's natural resources for future generations" - former Regional Director Dr. Benjamin N. Tuggle*



The FWS has worked in cooperation with the military to conserve fish and wildlife resources found on the 30 million acres of land owned and managed by the Department of Defense since passage of the Sikes Act over 46 years ago.



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### OUTREACH AND PARTNERSHIPS

Outreach and community involvement are effective ways for ARLES staff to communicate with the public on conservation matters. This year ARLES has been involved in community festivals, educational presentations, career days, and other events such as the Steve Harvey Fall Fishing Day. In May, a Student Conservation Association intern began a year-long internship serving as liaison for education and outreach.



*Above—Biologist, Brian Small, helps a youth participant at the Steve Harvey Fall Fishing Day at Cedar Hill State Park*



*Top Right— A souvenir from Grapevine TX's Butterfly Flutterby in October*



*Middle and bottom right—Biologist, Missy Singleton, educates the public using native Texas freshwater mussel displays at the Earth Day TX celebration*





**Earth Day Texas** – One of the biggest Earth Day events is Earth Day Texas in Dallas (April 22, 2017). A combination of exhibitors, vendors, speakers, sponsors, and volunteers all come together for three days to greet nearly 150,000 people. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was proud to be part of Earth Day Texas and enjoyed raising awareness of how all of us can help create a cleaner, healthier world for wildlife and people.

**River Legacy Living Science Center** – ARLES participated in various events at the River Legacy Living Science Center such as the Backyard Bird Count, W.A.T.E.R. Festival, Scout Badge Day, and Earth Day. Katie, the SCA intern gave presentations to summer camp groups covering a variety of topics.

**Monarch butterfly festivals** – In September and October, ARLES staff participated in Grand Prairie and Grapevine, TX sponsored monarch butterfly festivals. ARLES staff provided



education material about monarchs and other pollinators.

**Steve Harvey Fall Fishing Day** – ARLES, Texas Parks and Wildlife Dept., and the Steve Harvey Foundation partnered to take to take 25 Dallas area boys fishing at Cedar Hill State Park. For many of the young men this was their first fishing experience and they were excited to spend the afternoon learning about fishing and being outside.

**Some other events**— presentations on dragonflies to the Texas Master Naturalists and at Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge (FWS); sessions on Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act to Housing and Urban Development; sessions on listing under the ESA to Oncor and Texas A&M-Central Texas; and participating and providing technical input at a Louisiana pinesnake meeting/site visit with the U.S. Forest Service, Texas Comptroller, and others.

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### PRE-LISTING AND RESTORATION

The Branch of Pre-Listing and Restoration, which includes activities in the Environmental Contaminants, Partners for Fish and Wildlife, and Pre-Listing program areas, had a busy year working with partners to meet a myriad of conservation challenges and goals, including projects with private landowners that restored of 6,875 upland and 965 wetland acres of habitat across north Texas, working with local municipalities and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to develop best management practices for protection of migratory birds at wastewater evaporation ponds in west Texas, and conducting surveys for freshwater mussels.



### DONNA CANAL AND RESERVOIR

ARLES staff teamed up with EPA staff and others to remove contaminated fish at a Superfund site in south Texas (Hidalgo County), known as Donna Canal. The Donna Canal site, located near the U.S./ Mexico border, is currently being investigated by EPA to determine the source of a banned organic chemical known as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) that have been detected at high levels in the fish from the canal. Although a fishing ban is currently in place with signs posted throughout the area, recreational fishing continues. Until the source can be identified and steps can be taken remove this persistent chemical from the environment, the EPA views the removal of the contaminated fish as a high priority to protect public health.



## SPECIES HIGHLIGHTS—FACT SHEETS AVAILABLE ONLINE



Photo credit:  
Dr. Neil Ford, UT-Tyler

Triangle pigtoe



Texas heelsplitter



Louisiana pigtoe



Texas screwstem



Rough-stemmed aster

## NATURAL RESOURCE DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

Fish, wildlife, and other natural resources can be injured when oil or hazardous substances are spilled or released into the environment. When hazardous spills occur, a variety of local, state, and federal agencies respond, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contaminant specialists that collect data to help document the impact of the spill on wildlife and other natural resources that are managed by the Dept. of the Interior. The USFWS has responsibility for conserving National Wildlife Refuge lands, endangered and threatened species, migratory birds, and other natural resources. Trustees seek to identify the natural resources injured during hazardous spills, to determine the extent of the injuries, and recover damages from the responsible party. Once damages have been assessed and a settlement has been reached, a plan of restoration activities to compensate the public for resources that were lost can be carried out.

*The primary benefit of the NRDA program is that injured natural resources can be restored at no cost to taxpayers.*

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## PARTNERS FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE PROGRAM

*The mission of the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is to efficiently achieve voluntary habitat restoration on private lands, through financial and technical assistance for the benefit of Federal Trust Species. This year, the PFW Program worked with private landowners and a variety of State Agencies and non-profit organizations to provide on-the-ground conservation throughout North Texas.*



## CONTINUING TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

In May, one of our landowner partners in conservation, Mr. Nelson Roach, sponsored an interagency site visit at his property in east Texas to highlight a project that restored eight miles of in-stream habitat along Big Cypress Creek. Attendees included representatives from the Northeast Texas Water Utility District, TPWD, Caddo Lake Institute, and Texas A&M Forest service who met to discuss the importance of stream restoration projects. The discussions included best management practices to improve water quality and the importance of the “forest-to-faucet” approach to watershed management. This method benefits rare species like native freshwater mussels and paddlefish and will also improve water quality downstream at Lake O' the Pines reservoir which serves as a source of drinking water to nearby communities. Located on 7,500 acres in Camp County within the Big Cypress watershed, Mr. Roach owns one of the largest contiguous tracts of intact bottomland hardwood and upland forests in east Texas. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and TPWD worked with Mr. Roach to conduct prescribed burns to open up the understory of wooded areas and restore natural flows by replacing water crossings that once constricted flow and impaired water quality.



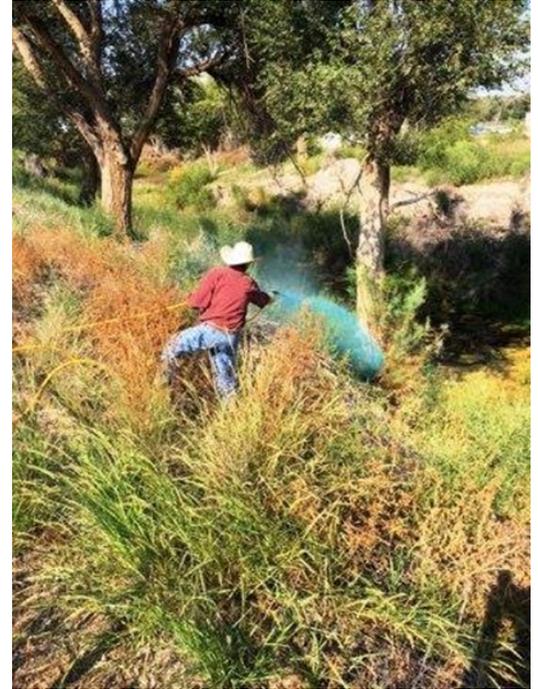
## PARTNERSHIPS IN ACTION

The PFW program and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department are working with private landowners to remove salt cedar in the Upper Brazos Watershed. The removal process involves the application of herbicides by aerial spraying and stump cutting to remove the invasive trees, which will enhance stream flows and improve habitat for shiners throughout the Upper Brazos Watershed.

The PFW program is also working with private landowners in east Texas to help native mussels in the Neches and Big Cypress watersheds through restoration projects that are designed to protect water quality and restore the natural hydrology.

Prescribed burns are being used to restore native long-leaf pine habitat to benefit the red-cockaded woodpecker, Louisiana pine snake, and other pine forest-dependent species.

Lastly, ARLES staff met with representatives with the National Alliance of Forest Owners (NAFO) to discuss future collaboration on the conservation of rare species .



## LONE STAR LAND STEWARD AWARD



The FWS is proud to work with Mr. Greg Grant, a private landowner in east Texas. With the help of the PFW program, Mr. Grant has restored short and long-leaf pine habitat on his property for the benefit of native wildlife, including seven of eight known species of east Texas woodpeckers that have been sighted in the area. Mr. Grant was recognized for his work and presented with a Lone Star Land Steward Award presented by TPWD and the nonprofit Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation at their annual award ceremony in Austin (May 2017). Greg lives on his great-grandparent's farm in Arcadia, Texas where he works to create habitat for native cavity-nesting birds, pine savanna birds and a number of pollinator species as well as educating others by hosting tours of his property.



[HTTPS://WWW.FWS.GOV/  
SOUTHWEST/ES/  
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## LOOKING FORWARD

2018 promises to be action-packed for the ARLES office with projects and activities, big and small, to advance conservation, including:

- Species Status Assessment and listing decision for the peppered chub, a prairie fish native to west Texas
- Species Status Assessment for two east Texas plants (Texas screwstem and rough-stemmed aster) and three east Texas mussels (Louisiana pigtoe, Texas heelsplitter, and triangle pigtoe)
- A final decision on whether to de-list the black-capped vireo
- Strengthen and create new partnerships and opportunities to work with agencies, communities, and individuals in north Texas

## ARLINGTON ECOLOGICAL SERVICES FIELD OFFICE STAFF



ARLES Staff from L to R: Erik Orsak, Sean Edwards, Robert Allen, Beverley Hodges, Morgan White, Katie Kuzdak, Clay Nichols, Debra Bills, Duane Lucia, Valerie Morgan, Missy Singleton, Jeff Reid, Steve Arey, Brian Small, Omar Bocanegra, Sid Puder, and Jacob Lewis

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