



## Spring Workshop Scored a Big Hit on April 12

An in-depth **Grazing Workshop** was held Saturday, April 12, 2008 for those with EQIP contracts and/or members of the Gillespie Prescribed Burn Association. Gillespie County Farm Bureau provided the classroom facilities, and later the group visited two ranches to see how grasslands came back after cool-season prescribed burns.

Workshop topics included: **Plant Identification**, by Willard Dearing, **How Grass Grows**, by Amanda Kirchner, NRCS Fredericksburg field office, **Range Health**, by Allan McGinty, Professor & Extension Specialist, Rangeland Ecology & Management, TX Cooperative Extension. A mid-morning break was extended because discussions about the classes were so animated.

After a noon meal, Charles Anderson, Zone Rangeland Management Specialist for NRCS in San Angelo, spoke on **Stocking Rates and**

**Monitoring**. B.J. Lange, NRCS Fredericksburg field office, described the **Role of Prescribed Fire**.

The group toured Marvin Pipkin's ranch north of town, and Charles Anderson explained more about the benefits of prescribed fire and how grasslands return afterward. The second stop was Perry Hohenberger's ranch. Burns were conducted with NRCS at Mr. Pipkin's ranch on January 4th and at Mr. Hohenberger's on Friday March 28th.

Workshop participants received a CD containing the day's presentations, a Grazing Recordbook for Texas, and Grazing measurement walking stick. The event was sponsored by the Gillespie County SWCD, USDA NRCS, Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI) and Association of Texas Soil & Water Conservation Districts. The CDs will also be available at the May 15 Field Day.





## Experiencing Prescribed Fire

by: B.J. Lange, Rangeland Management Specialist, NRCS Fredericksburg Field Office

**Fire.** It is just naturally occurring element of the Texas Hill Country that has kept people alive for hundreds of years, yet so many have associated negativity with its use. I can remember as a child seeing smoky the bear on television and thinking that fire was supposed to be a bad thing; that a forest fire was the same thing as a burn where I lived in the Texas Hill Country. Turns out, I was mistaken.



As I grew older, I began to see farmers and ranchers using fire as a tool to help break down the thatch layer in their coastal field, to burn brush piles, and to kill brush and re-growth cedar that had encroached onto their land. The first prescribed burn I ever went on changed my views on fire, and I saw the good it could do. I saw how you could take a drip torch and light a back-fire along a safe fire-guard and watch it slowly creep back into the wind to create an even safer barrier to a fire jumping into a neighboring piece of land. I saw smoke rise up and blow away from a well traveled road and a home due to good planning. I saw hours of preparation lead to a successful burn where not one drop of water was sprayed on the ground to put a fire out. I saw fire in a positive light that day and I found that with extensive preparation that fire was not only positive, but necessary.

Since my first prescribed burn, I have been on many others, and I learn something new just about every time I go on one. I have found that fire has a

behavior that is predictable. It might be something as trivial as the fact that fire burns up hill, or that your humidity is higher under trees because of the shade and will not burn as well under them generally. Basically, the more burns you go on, the more you understand fire and its behavior and the more comfortable you become with its use.

As an employee of the Natural Resources Conservation Service I attended a prescribed burning school, learned how to write prescribed burn plans, monitor the weather for safe burning conditions, and learned to tailor the burns to landowner objectives. For example: Many people have spent thousands of dollars to remove ashe juniper on his/her land and guess what happens? The juniper comes back!...that is if we don't control it somehow. Some people will pay thousands of dollars again to control the millions of juniper that come back under the live oak trees from birds dropping the seeds, and some realize that fire is the more economical way to go.

Being a landowner myself, I have had the chance to see what lack of fire can do to the land, as well as the good it can do for the land. When I first started managing the family ranch, it had been somewhat over-grazed and the land was being overtaken with brush like persimmon, cedar, tasajillo, algerita, etc. With so many other management items to tend to, I decided that I didn't want to continually cut cedar for the rest of my life on the property and use hundreds of dollars on chemicals to control the cactus and other brush, so I decided it was time to re-introduce fire back into the management of the land like it was used historically.

By cutting back the number of cattle stocked on the land, using a sound rotation where you graze half and leave half, and implementing two successful burns, I have seen a significant positive change in the land. I am seeing more palatable grasses and forbs return in greater diversity. I see brush being knocked back and kept in-check I see the livestock condition improve, and I see improvement in the condition of the wildlife and their habitat. Fire has been a life-saver and a land-saver for me, and I hope to be able to continue to use it as a management tool in the future.



### Experiencing Prescribed Fire, continued

When you sit back and think about it, the media tends to look for "shock value" in a story. When you turn on the news in the evening, the majority of the stories you see are about devastation and destruction and many of the stories about fire are shown in this manner too. Very seldom, if ever, is a story done about how green the land has come back after being



burned and how the wildlife and livestock will prefer the burned area over the non-burned areas due to the fresh re-growth and diversified plant community.

We live in a society that feeds off that "shock value" and sometimes we tend to maybe lose site of the benefits of the things that do not, or in some cases, should not have a "shock value." This is not to say that fire cannot be devastating, but when used under a prescription under safe conditions, fire has a place and should not be categorized amongst those with "shock value."

If you are interested in learning more about prescribed burning, you can contact the Gillespie County Prescribed Burn Association and become a member. With this membership you will have access to people and equipment for implementing your own burns and also have the opportunity to watch and help with a prescribed burn to gain experience. Ultimately, it's about neighbor helping neighbor, and by working together, we can become good stewards of our land.

For more information contact:

Gillespie Chapter of Edwards Plateau Prescribed Burn Association — President, Allan Ersch 830-997-7874.

Fredericksburg NRCS/SWCD Office 830-997-3349 ext. 3.

## Annual 2008 Conservation Awards



Winners in the 2007/2008 Poster and Essay Contest, pictured with Gillespie County SWCD Directors, and representatives of Security State Bank & Trust and LCRA.



### Annual 2008 Conservation Awards, continued

Winners in Gillespie County SWCD's annual conservation contests were honored March 26, 2008 at the Lions Club hamburger dinner in Fredericksburg. The awards program honors those who dedicated their efforts to conserve natural resources and enhance wildlife habitat.

**Poster Winners:** Scott Burlison, son of Amy & Scott Burlison was named 1st place winner. Jacob Krebs, son of Mary and Will Krebs placed 2nd, and Keagan Sieckmann, son of Gini & Mitchell Sieckmann, placed 3rd.

**Essay Winners:** Bailey Baethge, daughter of Michael and Veronica Baethge, was named the 1st place winner. Marlo Jimenez, daughter of Tanya and Jessie Jimenez, took 2nd place. Peyton Kneese, whose parents are Melinda & Bryan Kneese, placed 3rd.

Gillespie Co. SWCD Directors presented engraved plaques from LCRA and savings bond certificates from Security State Bank & Trust to the poster and essay winners. First place winners received \$200, second place winners received \$100, while third place winners received \$50 savings bonds.

**As part of the 2008 Texas Conservation Awards Program,** Curtis Eckhardt, DVM, was honored as Outstanding Conservation Rancher; and Liza & Jack Lewis were recognized as Outstanding Wildlife Conservationists. Engraved plaques were presented to them by the Gillespie Co. SWCD. Presentations illustrating the winners' conservation efforts were given at the dinner by NRCS staff B.J. Lange and Amanda Kirchner. In the Texas State Soil & Water Conservation Board contest for Area II, Jack & Liza were selected as runner-up Wildlife Conservationists. They received an engraved plaque at the Area II Awards Banquet on May 6 at Wall, Texas.



Dr. Eckhardt reviews his EQIP contract with Tom Hammer, NRCS District Conservationist.



Liza and Jack Lewis at their ranch headquarters.

Note: The Fall Field Day on October 1, 2009 will be held at the Lewis Ranch.



## Collect Box Tops For Education! By Pat Kroll

(Updated from the May 2008 Gillespie Co. SWCD newsletter)

Did you know that the little coupons on the flaps of cereal boxes can earn schools money for books or computers? Since General Mills began the program in 1996, \$250,000,000 was earned for schools nationwide. **Box Tops for Education** even has its own web page, and you can look-up how much money your school has earned since 2002. Their web address is <http://www.boxtops4education.com/>.

Each box top is worth 10¢ to your school. Box top expiration dates are 1 to 2 years after the boxes are printed. Some of our local schools are already benefiting from this program, but you could collect the box tops too, and help your favorite schools in a big way.



**Box Tops for Education** aren't just on cereal boxes. They're on products from Betty Crocker, General Mills, Hefty, Huggies, Kleenex, Old El Paso, Pillsbury, etc. I urge you to collect these coupons, drop them off at your local school, and watch the dollars grow.

On the Box Tops website, you can also sign up for **Marketplace**, and when you shop specific stores online, your selected school earns a donation without any additional cost to you. The percent earned varies greatly, but it's really worth checking out.





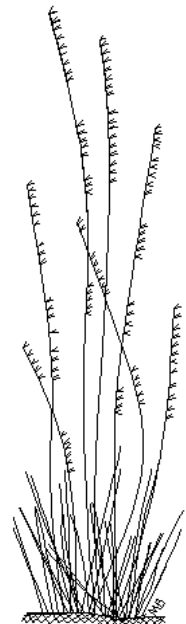
## Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

**GLCI**, with USDA-NRCS, works to ensure that the owners and managers of the 684 million acres of privately owned grazing lands in the United States receive the important attention and increased technical assistance needed to maintain this valuable sustainable resource. GLCI supports research projects with grants, provide speakers, organize field days, and capture available knowledge in a statewide database of ecological site descriptions.

During FY2000, land managers received assistance to plan conservation systems on more than 4.6 million acres of private grazing lands. From those plans, landowners applied conservation practices or systems on more than 3.6 million acres.

To learn about future events, visit GLCI at:

<http://www.glci.org/UpcomingEvents.htm>



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