Karst Preserve Friends

Village at Western Oaks Karst Preserve and Watershed Management Area
2021 Annual Report

Since everything that the Karst Preserve Friends (KPFriends) does is outside in nature and easily socially distanced, the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic did not have too great an impact on our efforts!

The year started off in February with the Texas ***Snowmageddon***, otherwise known as Winter Storm Uri. Several Ashe junipers (*Juniperus ashei*) and escarpment live oak (*Quercus fusiformis*) throughout the Karst Preserve fell as a result of the weight of the snow and ice on their branches. Limbs that blocked the crushed granite trail were dragged to areas with low organic material or used to deter pedestrians and pets from going off trail into areas of low canopy coverage.

Several of these branches also fell over our 2020 Texas Arbor Day tree saplings. Upon closer inspection, none of our 2020 Arbor Day saplings were damaged by these downed trees or by the freeze. With the wet spring months that followed, all of our 2020 Arbor Day saplings were were thriving in the fall of 2021 without supplemental watering!

Throughout the weekend of March 20, we held our **6th Annual *"Texas Most Wanted: Invasive Plant Buy-Back & Native Plant Swap"***. There were specific hours on Saturday where we gathered to swap our native plants. After the swap, we staged the free native plants along the sides of the trail and left City of Austin GrowGreen Guides for native plant newbies. We also set aside the larger pots of native plants as rewards for individuals who dug up and brought in invasive plant 'carcasses'!

As we did at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, this year's event was also promoted as a self-guided educational opportunity with free native plants. Both years, we have taken an inventory of the native plants before leaving on Saturday and when arriving on Sunday. Because we have found that neighbors take advantage of these extended hours, we will be continuing with this approach in future years.

During the 2020-2021 winter months, some trail users had expressed concern about some tent-colored-blue graffiti on one of the large concrete detention pond drains adjacent to the Karst Preserve. Since this was visible from the trail, we helped **Drew Thompson** paint over it on the Sunday of our spring event. This has remained graffiti free since being painted in March!

Sadly in July, a brief but strong windstorm caused a multi-generational live oak *(Quercus fusiformis)* to collapse within the Senatorial Sink/Live Oak Cave chain link fence. This tragedy was compounded because it knocked over several healthy mature trees when it fell. This created a large tree canopy opening in an area that was shady when we installed our 2020 Arbor Day saplings with **Mark Sanders**.

A quick inventory performed in November 2021 showed that native tree saplings planted inside the Senatorial Sink/Live Oak Cave during the 2020 Arbor Day event survived the shock of the sudden sun exposure and brief dry period of the fall. Also, many of the huisache (*Vachellia farnesiana*) saplings donated by TreeFolks and planted in the clearings near Tiombe Bend in the spring of 2020 have survived!

We hosted our **2nd Annual *"Texas Arbor Day"*** event on November 6th, 2021. **TreeFolks** provided several new species of 5-gallon native trees for the Karst Preserve that were approved by **Mark Sanders**. These species were desert willow (*Chilopsis linearis*), retama (*Parkinsonia aculeata*), bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*), Anacacho orchid (*Bauhinia lunarioides*), and bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*).

Other new native species of trees and perennials were provided by **TreeFolk's Urban Forest Stewards** and approved by **Mark Sanders**. These species were American beautyberry (*Callicarpa americana*), flame acanthus (*Anisacanthus quadrifidus* var. *wrightii*), Osage orange (*Maclura pomifera*), black walnut (*Juglans nigra*), Arizona walnut (*Juglans major*), wild-type pecan (*Carya illinoinensis*), and heath aster (*Symphyotrichum ericoides*). Several sugarberries (*Celtis laevigata*) and honey mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) were also added, since only limited specimens of each have been identified in the Karst Preserve.

Many seeds of bald cypress (*Taxodium distichum*), prairie flameleaf sumac (*Rhus lanceolata*), blazing star liatris (*Liatris punctata* var. *mucronata*) and mesquite (*Prosopis glandulosa*) were provided by **Colin McMichael**. These seeds, along with Mexican buckeye (*Ungnadia speciosa*) seeds and tender saplings, were planted whenever the soil was being disrupted.

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Respectfully submitted on December 16, 2021, by:
Stephanie D. Simmons
TreeFolk's Urban Forest Steward
NWF Habitat Steward