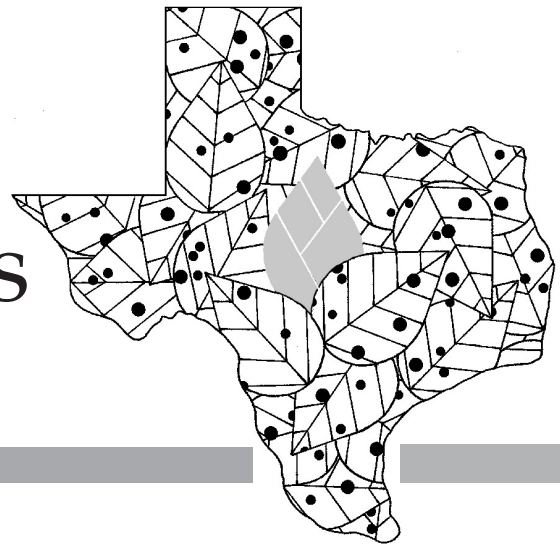


Texas Restoration Notes

Volume 9 No. 2
Fall 2004



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NABA INTERNATIONAL BUTTERFLY PARK AND THE RESTORATION OF SOUTH TEXAS PLANT COMMUNITIES

Sue Sill & Shelley Beville

The North American Butterfly Association (NABA), a continent-wide non-profit organization, is creating an International Butterfly Park located on approximately 100 acres of land along the Rio Grande River in Mission, Texas. This Park is being designed to increase the appreciation and conservation of butterflies and the natural habitats they utilize in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas (LRGV). NABA International Butterfly Park will be the first major outdoor butterfly garden and habitat focused on the scientific study, conservation and education of wild butterflies. The LRGV is a biologically diverse region where the convergence of subtropical, temperate, coastal, and desert influences create ideal situations for species diversity. There are 11 distinct biotic communities that are host or home to 800 species of plants, 700 vertebrate species (including 484 bird species) and 300 species of butterflies.

Currently there is a demonstration garden of approximately 0.5 acre, with an associated Woodland Loop Trail. A butterfly puddling fountain, visitor benches, palapas, and interpretive signs are located throughout the garden to enhance the butterflying possibilities and aid in educational programs.

In addition to the garden, the Park has an important and timely opportunity to restore 72 acres as native plant communities and to preserve the land as a natural area from the pressures of rapid urbanization. The rapid growth of Maquiladora factories that span the international border and the record rate of urbanization have had detrimental effects on habitat and wildlife. The diversity of the region is in jeopardy since 98 percent of the lush, subtropical region of the LRGV has been cleared in the United States. The NABA International Butterfly Park is restoring former agricultural land

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Continued on page 4

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Kevin Thuesen

We live at a point in time where our culture increasingly describes land as "real estate." Sometimes I hear the term 'raw land' or 'undeveloped land,' revealing the bias that land only has true value when it is converted into something different and necessarily structural: a convenience store, a mall, or a parking lot. But you and I—we know better. We see the habitat dissected and subdivided so that only the skeleton of an ecosystem remains, silent and mournful to those who take the time to witness it.

As the pressures of urbanization increase, the need for better management and restoration of those natural spaces that remain becomes more critical. If we are to preserve Texas' rich natural heritage, we must work together to discover new ways to combat the effects of fragmentation, invasive species, and limited seed resources. That is why Texas SER is a critical organization for practitioners like you. It is a forum for ecological restorationists—academic, professionals, and amateurs alike—to come together and discuss the problems we are facing, as well as the innovative solutions we are creating every day. Despite often shrinking budgets, and too few hours in the day, with Texas SER, you are not facing these issues alone. The resources you will discover in your peers could help resolve issues you face now and better prepare you for future issues. As much as the problems we face now are related to people, the solutions are also necessarily tied to us. Texas SER brings us all together once a year to continue putting the pieces back together.

We need more folks like you as members, at our conferences, involved with our board and making the next 10 years of Texas SER even brighter. Won't you join us in this noble endeavor?

Your Vote Counts at TXSER!

Please spend a moment or two with our
EASY on-line survey. Help us be a better
organization for you.

[http://FreeOnlineSurveys.com/
rendersurvey.asp?id=70962](http://FreeOnlineSurveys.com/rendersurvey.asp?id=70962)

Hurry-Survey ends December 31st

NABA *continued*

into 72 acres of quality habitat for butterflies and other wildlife.

The restoration will include rare native plant communities that may historically have occurred there. Twenty acres will be re-vegetated in November 2004 with two of the LRGV most threatened plant communities—Texas Ebony Resaca Forest and Subtropical Texas Palmetto Woodland—plant associations with Global Heritage Status Ranks of G1 and G2 respectively. In 2005, a caliche hill will be added to create appropriate conditions for the rare South Texas plant association called Barretal, a mostly evergreen shrubland that occurs on xeric caliche/calcareous sandstone slopes and bluffs as well as other xeric communities of the Tamaulipan Thorn Scrub.

We strongly believe that increasing the public's awareness and enjoyment of butterflies, and fostering the growth of butterflying, will directly result in increased resources becoming available for the conservation of important natural communities. This restoration effort is the beginning of a long-term project through which NABA International Butterfly Park will contribute to the conservation of the flora and fauna of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Through contributions by the City of Mission, Mission Economic Development Corporation, the City of McAllen, Hidalgo County and National Park Service, and grants from National Wildlife Foundation and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, NABA International Butterfly Park was able to build the demonstration garden and hire a Restoration Ecologist who will plan and implement the 72-acre restoration project on the south tract of park. Early planning for the restoration project was accomplished by Sue Sill, who has a long history of working with rare and endangered native plants in South Texas and Southeast Georgia. The success of the work to date is due in large part to the generous help and collaboration by numerous experts on the Lower Rio Grande Flora. Shelley Beville, until recently a Coastal Resource Scientist for the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, began her position as the Restoration Ecologist on Oct. 1, 2004, and is enthusiastic about the project and the Park's ecological and educational possibilities.

A NEW BEGINNING

Ken Steigman

As the new director of Lewisville Lake Environmental Learning Area (LLELA), I am responsible for managing and restoring 1800 acres of wetlands, prairies, bottomland, hardwood forests and upland savannah in Lewisville, Texas.

After working for 28 years on the blackland prairie, one of my most exciting discoveries is a small parcel of Eastern Cross-Timbers Post Oak Savannah which has some high quality areas, but others with considerable amounts of prior disturbance—a restoration challenge. However, I am fortunate to be able to corral both undergraduate and graduate students to assist with bio-inventories and monitoring of project areas.

Approximately one year ago, a 250-acre enclosure was built to accommodate a herd of 25 bison. Developing restoration plans for the bison enclosure is an important project on the horizon. We hope to implement an intensive rotational grazing plan as one of several treatments to improve the native plant species diversity on upland prairie.

We will be opening a bird-banding station in Spring 2005 to monitor habitat utilization. The station will ultimately conduct breeding bird studies through the MAPS program (Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship). This program allows an assessment of the habitat quality relative to the life requisites of breeding, native songbird species.

This winter LLELA staff and volunteers will participate in Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's *Project Prairie Bird* to assess the quality of the winter grassland habitat for important grassland species whose population decline has been documented. This year's data will serve as a baseline for changes in habitat quality in the future as prairie restoration progresses.

Our current staff focus, however, is developing a self-sustaining revenue stream. Closed immediately after September 11, 2001, because of our adjacent proximity to the Lake Lewisville dam, LLELA will once more be open to the public. Initial public focus will be fishing, hiking, camping canoeing/kayaking and birding. With virtually no infrastructure currently in place, we are busy installing necessary items. But, not so busy that we won't have time to host at least one SER field trip to LLELA.

talks, and they have made for some of our best academic presentations. Always on the third day, our talk slows; physical exhaustion and repeated philosophies and counter arguments stem the freshet of words and our conversation becomes the sound of footsteps, deep breathing, and of course, that stuff around us, nature. Even our rest times are less conversational as we take off and adjust our packs, get a snack, and Ian checks his maps. We take to singing in the evenings rather than talking, playing a child's guitar we bring along, Ian always with his penny whistles. Somehow at the end of our trip, we have little to say to each other because we are conversing in other ways—gestures, smiles, silence, adjusting a shoulder strap. However, it takes a few days for us to come to these other stories and languages. We like others of our species are better equipped to fill up our meetings with our usual ways of conversing.

By now, the gentle listener has surely considered the paradox and silliness of my task—my giving up on language. Most likely she has noted that I have to this point added 494 words to the discussion of my *dis-ease* with describing the natural world and offered nothing, either homeopathic or pharmaceutical, as a therapy or cure. Too, she has most likely surmised this mood is in part a product of my impishness—if the percentages of approval lean to one side, I inevitably weigh in on the other. Friends and family members say, “He loves to debate.” Foes and formers say, “He’s a pain in the ass.” Fair criticisms it seems to me, but today’s musing feels more lasting than just orneriness—more like trying to describe something I’ve mostly seen in passing or new environmental storylines I have a sense are being written now. My desire to give up on language isn’t giving up on it at all, of course. I guess I’m just giving up on some of the narratives we’ve inherited—and for me now, in the free time and joy of this warm evening, the martins still going about their lives, my wife sitting next to me, I am trying to push back the urge for metaphor, the comfort of solitude, and the desire for some spiritual resonance.

This seems a likely place to begin a brief discussion of Thoreau, being a bit of a crank himself. I’ll tell you up front there are few things I dislike as much as one more interpretation of Thoreau as it has anything to do with the natural world. Perhaps no other figure in the environmental movement has suffered as much from a blind, cult-like allegiance to some idealized notion of the role of the natural world in individualism. As

Lawrence Buell says in *The Environmental Imagination*: “[Thoreau] is one of the few American writers to have become canonized as both a popular hero and a hero of high culture.” These prostrations at Thoreau’s feet have led much of 150 years of nature writing along a trajectory of romantic self-discovery—need to find myself; live alone by myself in nature; find myself; tell everybody else how I found myself. The list of authors and thinkers who have followed this recipe in cookie-cutter fashion with rainbow sprinkles of Thoreau quotes is, kindly said, long! But those who have read the whole of Thoreau’s work know what I have described here isn’t Thoreau, especially his work and efforts after having left the pond (1849-1862). What I am critiquing here is *Walden* and the two predominant narratives drawn from it: the hero quest and transcendentalist spirituality.

Joseph Campbell has suggested that the hero quest is an archetypal storyline—the individual decides to leave his civilization in order to go through a series of trials and discoveries, comes to a new understanding by these experiences and returns to his civilization with a new understanding, yet somehow separated from them by his experiences.

In American environmental narratives the hero quest is an adolescent rite of passage, though, where the natural world serves as a vehicle for one’s self-examination and trial; where others, human and non-human, are less important than the idealized “I”; and where community in any form restricts the self or is distinctly separated from the self. Not surprisingly, the narrative voice of this archetype looks not so deeply at the natural world as having intrinsic value, but how it may inspire, encourage, or challenge the speaker. Individuals (people, plants and critters) play a less vital part of the story and function more as caricatures and plot devices, and community, whether it be our current, forsaken “dominant paradigm” or familial history, must be shunned for individual authenticity. For novice readers, check the last chapters of a nature book and see how often the author uses “I”; at least Thoreau uses it more sparingly near the end of *Walden*.

Too, people are left out of these kinds of searches and texts. I am reminded of the Emerson line in “Self-Reliance” about leaving one’s spouse, children, parents and siblings if one must in order to find his self-reliance, and of course Emerson was thinking only of men leaving the family. His conversations are to himself

MORE TXSER VOLUNTEERS

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In the vicinity off
August 15 for *Fall* issue &
May 1 for *Spring* issue

Electronically when ever humanly
possible (graphics must be on a
separate file from document)

and us only as an imagined audience as he digs deeper through supposed bonds of society, as though obligation and commitment are not a kind of human ecology. The farther he finds himself from any human responsibility, the freer he is to find himself or what too many in this tradition would call his "true self."

Inspiration and spirituality are dangerous topics for the nature writer, for they presuppose the author order what he sees to fit some ideal of what the sensory experiences should mean: enlightenment, connection, longing, ecstasy. The tradition is so steeped in transcendentalism that authors feel almost compelled to make something more of the non-human world, or maybe better stated, authors feel the need to make something meaningful for humans out of the non-human world-self-realization, cosmic understanding, even the "darkness" of a Darwinian world. For example, must things always mean something? Not surprisingly, these stories often read like self-help books written with a "natural setting." Surely, there are times that one might truly be inspired by an observation, but can we as authors leave such things behind the words and let such a life-change affect the word choice and not the story?

I am being reminded now about my negativity. My wife is finishing a good cabernet; she looks at the setting sun through the purplish-red of the wine, and swirls the sediment in the bottom of her glass, as she says, "Offer more than what you don't like." Our puppy is chewing on a small piece of firewood; mulberry from my father's house. So I stop the musing for a while looking back to the birds appearing and disappearing behind the bamboo.

Maybe she's right, and after a little grumbling, I'll agree. I have wondered what such a work would be like because there really isn't a tradition for it in American literature. We have natural histories, transcendentalist testimony, and advocacy, but we don't have much in the way of place-making as most citizens go about it. The majority of our nature writing celebrates wilderness areas more often than margins, observes the extraordinary over the commonplace, and embraces the misanthrope over a gregarious sort. These preferences suggest a critique of modern society-cities stifle the soul, everyday existence is lacking, and the individual is more important than the community. However, much has been written, performed and taught about place-based writing in the last few decades. Most of these works treat their home with reverence and love—deep, passionate love. Some have a good naturalist's understanding of the local place, using geology, botany, etc. They explore the emotions of their relationship to a place—ancestry, family, partner, child, spirit, etc. Maybe even God, or a god. I can't help feeling many of these works are the legacy of Walden—the Pond his world and his world an avenue to universal patterns, doves, hounds and bays, the eye of the universe. Perhaps this is the significant danger in our American wilderness legacy—that wildness must be not only a pristine condition but also a spiritual state for the author.

I'm told, though, that long-term ecological restoration needs public

participation, and any sense of a long-term public needs restoration, too. As a writer I believe in this connection, not because I concern myself with environmental issues, but because it is at the core of why I write—close observation deepens relationships—non-human and human alike, and relationships that deepen benefit all involved and narrative has the ability to express the voices of multiple characters in a storyline.

Holmes Ralston III says:

The logic of the home, the ecology, is finally narrative, and human life will not be a disembodied reason but a person organic in history. Character always takes narrative form; history is required to form character. The theory can provide a skeleton but not the flesh. This is true, perhaps more evident in culture, but it is not less true in the human relations with nature.

Restoration asks us to rethink all this and work relationally with our home—a home most likely degraded by human interaction. A sense of place is created in the process of restoring, and in restoring, a deeper home than field guides and pretty views might ever offer. A home created in the working with and learning in the working.

Such a work it seems to me would reject that legacy of romanticism, for the natural world, in most places, is damaged at the ecosystemic level, and seeking solace from something we have injured without acknowledging that injury seems ignorant at best and abusive at worst. Our daily lives would be a part of the story not the exception. And the stereotyping of those in white hats and those in black hats would be replaced with deeper characterizations. “American places are but a moment's bright flash, followed by long, confused memories,” writes Howard Mansfield in *The Same Axe, Twice*. So many of our narratives are about the moment, the unique, the wondrous. Always shifting, changing, moving. Maybe rethinking our environmental stories offers us a chance to quit moving and settling, to begin living and working with our neighbors, to start a local dialogue about what's local, and how to live within the local, and most importantly, to learn how to listen.

In “Walking” Thoreau seems to focus most of his attention on “wildness” being as the frontier spirit and from this he says we might derive a *grammatica parda*, a mother wit derived from the vast, howling mother of ours, Nature. Most often, his *grammatica parda* is translated / interpreted as a visceral and physical language of the earth, a soiled (in the best sense) grammar. However, Thoreau follows these comments here with a discussion of what he calls the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance. “What we call knowledge is often positive ignorance; ignorance our positive knowledge,” he writes. He continues by claiming: “Which is the best man to deal with—he who knows nothing about a subject and, what is extremely rare, knows that he knows nothing, or he who really knows something about it, but thinks he knows it all.” My own sense of his notion of a *grammatica parda* is one where the speaker is not so sure of nature's meaning for himself or the universe—one where the wise speaker or writer listens to the language of others from multiple backgrounds and experiences and gathers them as compassionately as possible. There is an egotism to language embedded in its existence as deeply as our own species' ego; it wants to be the thing it represents. Maybe too, it is our own desire to find something in language that redeems us or connects us spiritually. A certain humility on the author's part might in part free her language from such desires.

Maybe an *unassuming nature* is what I am most interested in—when a writer lets go, to the best of one's ability, of his desires for the product and lets things *be* in words by what he doesn't know and sees, by what he has heard, read, overheard, and laughed with others about. A strength of ignorance that provides her the courage to approach scientists, philosophers or linguists with her research and learn.

All this seems to be at the heart of restoration aesthetics. As artists, scientists, philosophers, janitors, *etc.*, we must think through the language of our profession, believe in the relevancy of our background to others and the importance of their involvement in community, and practice incredible patience and attention in listening and learning. Our communication must broaden and detail, use analogies and comparisons readily intelligible, find commonalities and disagreements, and be open to improvement and editing. Finding local

audiences outside our discipline needn't lessen the quality of the art or science. American environmental writing has a long history of advocacy: the nationalism of the 18th and 19th centuries (our species are bigger than your species!), the first cries about loss in the late 19th century, the jeremiads of the 20th century, and the downright "pissed off" of the western writers. The author's voices vary between wise and placid to passionate and shrill. Some of these works have brought about profound change—Muir, Carson, and Abbey for example. Others not. The tradition survives, though, on an *us vs. them* tone that pleases many involved in environmentalist works. It's easier to rally folk against something or somebody than to create a dialogue between lots of people.

My wife is wise. She tells me when I am being a jack-ass, distant, obsessive, etc. This list could certainly go on. It hurts when she tells me these things. Yet she also tells me when I am loving, being a good listener, involved, and working with her in the marriage. I am a better person for that dynamic, and I do my very best to be an equal partner and offer her the tough and loving lessons she offers me.

Restoration is about relationship, and at its best mutual and attentive. Our partner in this physical and spiritual relationship is as flawed and perfect as our own understandings of it. And how we work within this relationship has everything to do with how healthy all things will be in the future.

An art and science is arising that sees in stories, and looking with deep humility at how to build a mutual and sustaining dependence. This is, after all, the deepest home—listening, learning, and giving to everything and everybody else, and in turning from self, growing in self, whether as an individual or a species.

The martins have stopped. Or I can't see them for the dark now, so I can only presume they have stopped and begun roosting for the night. The screech owls have started their calls to each other across the open spaces of the backyards. The bamboo rattles in an imperceptibly soft wind; the smell of a barbecue drifts in from somewhere down the street. The beer is cool: tangy and bitter at first taste, and then sweet. It is always light enough to write in the journal about pleasantness and something deep, but I'll hold off for a little while more.

SERMEX

Chris Best

Howdy TXSERites one and all:

Glafiro Alanis, a professor of botany at the Universidad Autonoma de Nuevo Leon, who is an influential crusader for biodiversity conservation, asked me to help him organize an ecological restoration workshop for students and faculty of the biology department. The event took place Aug 16-17 (I have just returned), and was very worthwhile. Some 20 faculty members and around 50 students participated in the two-day event.

You will remember Dr. Javier Jimenez, a biology professor at the UANL Forestry Sciences Department in Linares, who is the current president of SERMEX, our Mexican chapter. Javier has presented several times at our events on restoration of the endemic dwarf pine, *Pinus culminicola*, on Cerro Potosi, and reforestation at Chipinque Ecological Park; both of which projects he addressed during this event.

Glafiro, Javier and I discussed SERMEX. We all lamented that there really is just a handful of dedicated members at the Forestry Sciences Department. However, Javier had already taken it upon himself to find a dedicated successor to the role of president. He will be providing me with contacts soon, but in any case he says there are plenty of people in Mexico who want to participate (and I can confirm this even from my peripheral view), they are just lacking some energetic people who have the time to organize this thing.

In my quasi-official role as SERMEX liaison for life, I will keep y'all informed (note my highly appropriate use of a Texanism).

Sincerely,
Chris Best
US FWS

David Taylor works with the Center for Environmental Philosophy at the University of North Texas. He spent a year developing community outreach for ecological restoration efforts in Flagstaff, AZ and is currently editing Pride and Place: An Anthology of Texas Nature Writing, forthcoming from UNT Pres.

EVENTS:December 2004

6-10th: Orlando Florida
*First National Conference on
 Ecosystem Restoration*

This 1st National Conference on Ecosystem Restoration (NCER) will enable national and international information exchange on many issues involved in landscape-scale ecosystem restoration. Join your fellow scientists, educators, and restoration practitioners to discuss similarities, differences, successes, and failures of ecosystem restoration programs throughout the country.

<http://conference.ifas.ufl.edu/ecosystem/>

18th: Davis Mountains, Texas

The Nature Conservancy Christmas Bird Count

Meet at the TNC Davis Mountain Preserve EARLY in the morning. And, contact John Karges at 432-426-2390 (or, jkarges@tnc.org) for more information.

February 2005

5-11th: Fort Worth, Texas
*2005 Society for Range Management
 (58th Annual Conference)*

"Rangeland Trails under the Lone Star. Historically the main trails were ranching. Then moved off into the new issues of the urban-rural interface of rural economic development or our communities. We see different uses of the rangelands today compared to traditional uses." –George Peacock, co-chair.

<http://www.rangelands.org/texas2005/>

8th: Rockport-Fulton, Texas

Texas Audubon Whooping Crane Tour

Coastal birding during the peak of whooping crane season. The day begins with an optional early morning birding trip to Cape Valero, followed by a talk on the Audubon TX Coastal Program/History of the Whooping Crane. After the provided lunch, participants spend the afternoon on a shallow draft skimmer boat that allows access to the best whooping crane viewing sites. The tour ends by 5pm.

Fee: \$150, includes a light breakfast for morning tour participants, boat admission, Audubon guide, and lunch.

Limited to 25 participants

continued next column

Contact LK Loflin at Audubon Texas (512-306-0225 x15, or, lloflin@audubon.org) to reserve a space
<http://www.tx.audubon.org/events/events.htm>

9th: Fort Worth, Texas

*SRM-SWS-SER Joint Symposium: Wetland and
 Riparian Restoration in Urbanizing Landscapes*

Organizers: X. Ben Wu of Texas A&M University and William J. Mitsch from Ohio State University
 Contact Ben Wu at xbw@tamu.edu for details

<http://www.rangelands.org/texas2005/techprog-w.htm>

18-19th: Mad Island Marsh, Texas

The Nature Conservancy Coastal Bird Workshop

TNC hosts a coastal bird workshop at the Texas State Marine Education Center and the Mad Island Marsh Preserve. Cecilia Riley, Executive Director of the Gulf Coast Bird Observatory is the presenter. The \$20 fee includes dinner and the speaker fee. Contact Cathy Porter at 361-972-3295 (or, cporter@tnc.org) for details and directions.

<http://nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/texas/help/art9332.html>

26th: Austin, Texas

*NPSOT & the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
 Joint Symposium: Those Other Natives; Grasses,*

Ferns, Sedges, Cacti, etc. & Soils and Organics

<http://www.npsot.org/chapters/chapters.html>

<http://www.wildflower.org>

April 2005

22nd: College Station, Texas

*Texas A&M University Ecological
 Integration Symposium*

Speakers to date: David Allen (U of Michigan), David Schindler (U of Guelph), Dennis Martinez (Restoration of Tribal Lands), and Robert Twilley (U of Louisiana, Lafayette). FREE. Look for their website in the next couple of months from the TAMU search engine, <http://www.tamu.edu>.

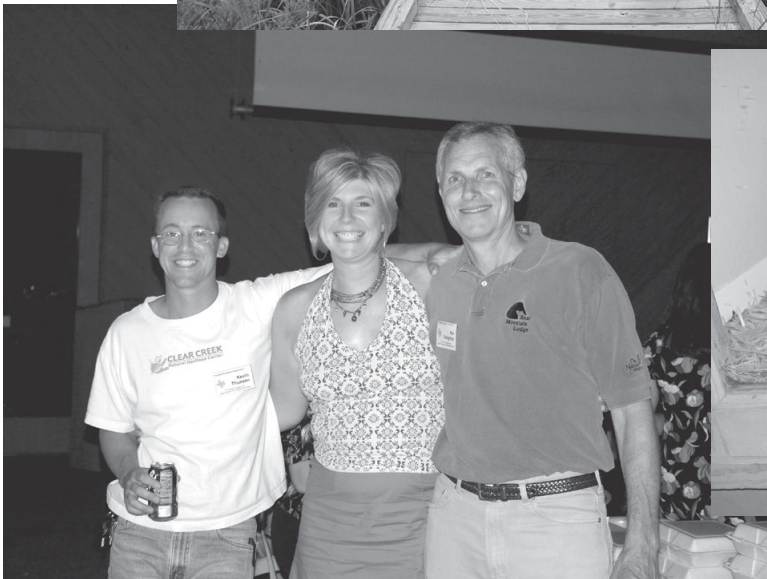
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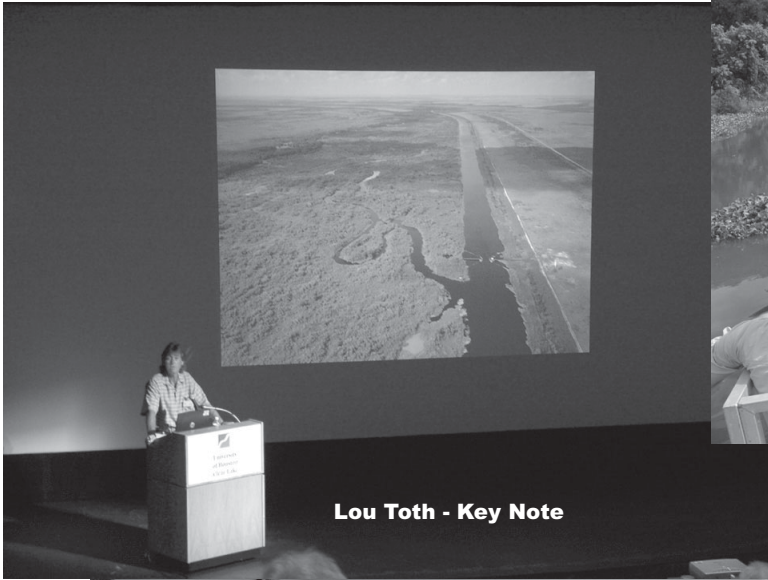
12-18th: Zaragoza, Spain

SER2005: 17th Annual International SER Conference

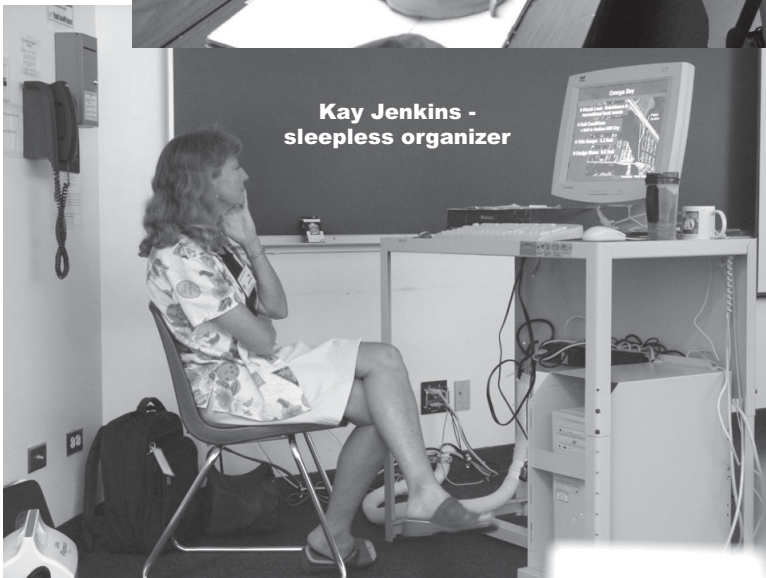
<http://www.ser.org/content/2005Conference.asp>

SNAPSHOTS FROM THE EDGE... OF HOUSTON: TXSER CONFERENCE 2004





Lou Toth - Key Note



**Kay Jenkins -
sleepless organizer**





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