



# SPRING CREEK OUTDOORS

## Newsletter

### From Stressed to Blessed

#### News & Reminders

-New property MLDP Conservation Option enrollment deadline is June 15

-Reminder to contact us soon to finalize fall deer survey dates! Available days are filling up fast.

-New MLDP “pay to play” fee: all payments must be paid in full prior to permit issuance.



The old adage about the changing Texas weather has been on full display this year! From the bone-dry winter months capped off by the historic mid-February “Ice-apocalypse”, to the drought-stricken spring, and now to the rains that turned into localized flooding, it has been quite a ride. And it is only June! What else will the Texas weather throw at us for the second half of the year? Only time will tell! One thing is for sure though—the native habitat is running behind schedule but working hard to catch up. The lack of spring moisture made habitat recovery from the February cold spell fall behind schedule. Only recently have some oak trees, huisache, blackbrush, and guajillo finally put on all their full complement of leaves. Many, including myself, thought perhaps the huisache, blackbrush, and some oak trees were permanently dead, but sufficient ground moisture and additional time proved us wrong. Very few plants that I have found actually died from the extreme weather and now that favorable rains occurred, most plants are working hard to make up for lost time. Grasses, shrubs, trees, and vines are flowering and putting on seeds like crazy! It is wonderful to see the pastures full of wildflowers and native grasses bent over with full seed heads. It has been a long time since all plants—from grasses to the tallest of trees—have coordinated their explosive new growth like they are now. Now is also a good time to go afield and learn your plants and their value to wild things. One resource that I think you will find extremely useful is the Plant ID video series found on our very own website: [www.SpringCreekOutdoors.com](http://www.SpringCreekOutdoors.com) We filmed the series last summer during the peak of the corona virus shutdown. It spans the bulk of Texas and contains the majority of the browse species found throughout Texas. We are still adding to this collection so check back often, but I think you will really enjoy viewing the nearly fifty different videos currently posted. If you don't find a particular species you would like to see identified, send us a note and we will do our best to make it happen.

The recent rains have blessed all wild things at this point. Baby everythings are about to “pop” and the new growth, new bugs, new cover, new forage and new places to hide could not have come at a better time for them. Weeds are cover, Johnsongrass is cover, tall grasses are cover, and new growth shrubbery is cover, too, so this latest rainfall event looks to be very good for our newest generations of wild critters. In the meantime, leave your shredders in the barn! Keep practicing predator and feral hog control to help control their numbers and negative impact, and when you see a whitetail fawn do NOT pick it up. Peak fawning date for central Texas is June 15 and south Texas is July 15. That means take a photo of your new found friend but leave them laying right where you find them. The mother is certainly nearby so take a photo, back off, go about your business, and let mom do her thing. Mother Nature is called that because she knows better about how to handle things than we do more times than not, so do your part to help encourage and protect wild spaces and wild LIFE.

## Corn Prices Keep Going Up

Global corn production is down and demand is up, that means hunters can expect higher prices to fill their feeders this fall. There are many reasons for this, but the primary ones include large-scale drought in the United State, Ukraine, and European Union with below average production along with Argentina ceasing all corn exports this year to bolster their own supplies. China has led the global market in demand as they began to recover from a widespread Asian Swine Fever that decimated their domestic hog market. As those markets begin to recover, the demand for feed increases. In 2019-2020, China imported 7.6 million metric tons of corn while in 2020-2021, they have already imported an estimated 16.5 million metric tons. Also, competition with soybeans and wheat on the same fertile farmlands have some farmers changing crops in order to diversify and fill other markets.



Corn prices are up 50% from this time last year so hunters can expect to feel the burn this fall as they head to the ranch and begin filling feeders in preparation for the fall hunting season. What can you do now to help reduce the pain? Contact your corn provider and negotiate a locked-in corn bulk order and pricing if you can. If you have the storage, perhaps take possession of it now and save it for later if possible, or at least pay for it via bulk contract if your feed dealer is willing and able to do so. Another alternative is to plan to scale back on corn, add in roasted soybeans (more nutritious for the wildlife anyway), and plan alternative feed sources such as food plots, native brush management techniques (fallow disking, staggered shredding, prescribed burning), and enhanced livestock rotational grazing. “Enhanced livestock rotational grazing” may mean rotating livestock thru the different pastures quicker, improving hoof action of those livestock in out-of-the-way parts of the pasture by adding supplemental water stations and/or mineral locations, or possibly changing up the livestock entirely. Maybe your prolonged cow/calf operation takes too much time and effort so consider changing to a steer-only operation or even bulls-only in the rougher terrain pastures of the ranch. The idea here is to stretch out the nutritional value of the property because you can expect very high artificial feed prices in the long run. Get prepared now so that the “hit” is more of a nudge and not a powerful punch to your wallet. Being flexible and fluid can not only save you money, but it can also greatly enhance your management success.

## Pond Stocking

In a lot of ways, ponds and ranches are very much the same thing. A small, closed-off body of water is going to have the same problems that a small fenced off ranch will, such as over population and food source depletion, both of which increase your chance of sudden and extreme die offs. The mentality of throwing every fish back so there are fish available in the future is about the same as never shooting does

so you have deer in the future. While both ideas are definitely true to a point, they can quickly get out of hand. Problems can appear faster on smaller ponds than large ones, but even larger lakes can struggle with these issues.

A good rule of thumb for a healthy pond or lake is the population of fish should show at minimum ten baitfish for every predator in the pond. Evaluating fish populations can be done in several ways, the most effective of which is electro-fishing. A specially rigged boat with a generator and electrodes that hang into the water will move back and forth across the water “shocking” the fish so they can be netted and put into the boat. Done correctly, it causes no long-term harm to the fish and they are back swimming normally almost immediately. As with surveying deer populations with a helicopter, sometimes this method is not ideal, whether it be cost, small pond size, or accessibility. At this point we look at other methods to determine the health of the fishery such as counts and measurements collected via the use of traps, nets, seines, and with a hook and line.



A bass must consume ten pounds to grow one pound of weight, catfish require three pounds to gain a pound, and both require more above that to maintain their weight. So, for a single bass to grow to eight pounds it must eat well over eighty pounds of perch, minnows, and other things! Numbers like this make it easy to see why accurate stocking recommendations are so critical. Stocking numbers and species can vary greatly based on goals and objectives and are heavily influenced by the pond itself. Certain fish species do not coexist well together. For example, in ponds where the goal is to grow trophy bass, we do not stock green sunfish or hybrid sunfish (green sunfish/bluegill cross) because green sunfish have a large enough mouth to compete with smaller bass for forage. Another example is crappie are not typically recommended to be stocked in lakes smaller than ten acres as they can quickly overpopulate and stunt the growth of themselves and other fish species present.

Most ponds in Texas that hold water can support some numbers of fish just as most ranches can support some numbers of whitetail deer. Keeping the animals fed and monitoring the population is key to maximizing their potential.

## **Tax Conversion Documentation**

Tax time is likely at the back of your mind this time of year. That annoying issue has just been taken care of and is the last thing you want to be thinking about now, but now is the best time to knock out things for next year. The deadline for annual reports and new 1-D-1w tax conversions is in the spring for most counties, but waiting until after deer season is over causes all kinds of headache that are easily avoided if you plan ahead. Most folks spend some time at the ranch working in the early summer fixing things that broke during deer season or working on new projects and making improvements. While you are out working before the summer heat gets too hot and before hunting season rolls back around, take a minute to document your projects. Snap a picture of filling protein feeders, of the windmill having new leathers installed, or of the bulldozer pulling a roller chopper across your pasture. Save the receipts for everything and email them and the pictures to yourself. Stopping to send yourself this stuff will make April much less headache and save a trip to the ranch to take photos of something that might not be as obvious in a photo by next spring.

County appraisal districts are tasked with making sure those who are receiving special valuations on their property are actually meeting the requirements of those valuations. As time goes on more dishonest

landowners are trying to pull the wool over the eyes of these appraisers. By documenting projects as you go along you save them and yourself the headache of an audit to confirm your compliance or worse, a hefty tax bill because you cannot prove all the hard work you have done.

## Spring Creek Outdoors Plant ID Video Series

This past summer we filmed the beginning of our Plant Identification series. Everyone understands that plants are critical to having healthy populations of wildlife, but many people do not know the fine details beyond that. Some plants are better than others for forage and some may be only valuable as cover, but are nonetheless important. This video series highlights the more common browse plants across West, North, Central and South Texas, and their benefits to all types of Texas wildlife. We have forty-five videos up and live now with many more on the way in the future. You can view these videos at the link below and we recommend you watch the introductory video for a full explanation of the series.

<https://springcreekoutdoors.com/videos/category/plant-identification-videos/>

## Special Permit Deadlines and Reminders

**Deer Management Permit (DMP)** There are no application deadlines for DMP but there are capture and release deadlines that must be coordinated. Contact us for more details.

**Trap, Transport, and Process Permit (TTP)** TTP Applications must be submitted 30 days prior to planned activities and capture may occur anytime between October 1 and March 31.

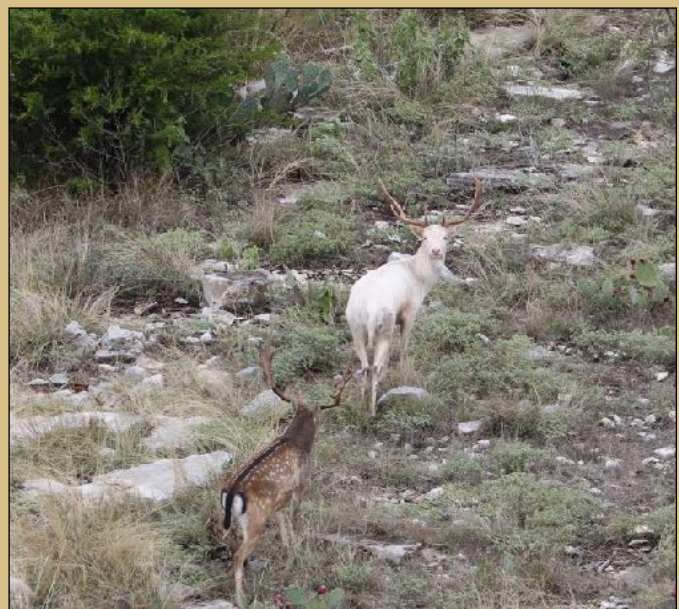
**Trap, Transport, and Transplant Permit (TTT)** Although the only hard deadline in this application process is that Trap and Release site requests must be submitted by January 1, it is an involved process with many moving parts and is best begun at the end of summer. Please contact us if you are considering a TTT project.

**Reminder to all MLDP ranches** Maintain the required Harvest Log after each deer is taken. Harvest Logs must be kept on site during the hunting season.

## Exotic Explosion

I have been a huge fan of whitetail deer ever since I can remember. I learned to hunt them with my father as he carried me into the woods and up to his favorite tree stands to sit with him. Because of my upbringing chasing whitetail deer, I decided to make a career out of them. I ate, drank, slept, dreamed, and chased anything and everything to do with whitetail deer. I subscribed to every deer related magazine and I pushed lawnmowers hundreds of miles to help pay for each subscription. My passion became my schooling and my schooling became my career and for that I have been extremely blessed.

But something is changing. As I enter my fifth decade loving whitetails and my third decade managing them professionally, I see a shift in the paradigm and it concerns me. My career has carried me into many valleys and thickets throughout Texas managing whitetail deer and I am beginning to see more people managing for OTHER THAN whitetail deer. I spent my entire life studying, loving, scrutinizing, researching,



handling, and learning about whitetail deer and demand has remained very strong---until lately. More recently the calls are more about exotic species—those non-native species introduced from other countries that include critters such as axis and fallow deer, blackbuck, nilgai, kudu, gemsbok, and scimitar horned oryx antelope, just to name a few. Whitetails are being dethroned as the king of wildlife in many parts of Texas and there are multiple reasons why. One of the primary reasons this is happening (because I ask every new client) is the government over-regulation of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has placed such restrictive movement/hunting/permitting regulations and testing requirements on whitetails that many landowners (and hunters) are losing interest. Another reason is that as ranches shrink in size, the need for income and year-around use becomes paramount. Whitetail season lasts only four to five months while the bills arrive all twelve. Exotic species do not fall under TPWD's regulatory authority and may be hunted each month of the year and able to generate income as needed. Exotic species are, as a general rule, very good to eat. Both males and females are very tasty table fare and provide a steady supply of venison to the family's freezer. Some female exotic species produce impressive headgear that may also be harvested as trophies. Some properties may not be conducive for whitetail deer such as open grassland (native or improved) or rocky hills lacking quality soils and quality browse plants. In such cases, many exotic species excel and flourish because the habitat may be more similar to their original homeland. As larger acreages are split into smaller ones, the habitat becomes more fragmented and exotics are much more forgiving than are whitetails. The proliferation of high fences are threefold these days—high fences are a requirement of some TPWD permits; maintaining control on smaller acreage is difficult; and exotic species value (hunter demand) continues to increase.

So as you travel down the back roads of Texas, realize there are many reasons you are seeing more and more exotic species in the pastures these days. I will forever be a whitetail deer enthusiast, but it appears that exotic species are not only here to stay, but are booming their way into the future.

### **LET US HEAR FROM YOU!**

As always, you can reach us through the contact form on our newly updated website and at our office phone number, (325) 623-5464. With 3 biologists on staff now, there is also a better chance of catching us on the road.

Macy Ledbetter lives in San Saba and can be reached at (361) 449-6376

Matt Nuernberg lives in Poth and can be reached at (210) 324-8904

Wade Ledbetter lives in Mason and can be reached at (361) 449-6702