

2015

**PRAIRIE**  
**CONSERVATION**  
**ASSESSMENT**





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dear Prairie Partners,

The coastal prairie has been an indispensable part of Greater Houston since we won our independence in 1836. The prairie's rich soils were plowed to feed us and produce cotton to clothe us. It's grasslands built a cattle industry that has given us material wealth, clothing, and our treasured Texas barbecue. It's rich grasslands and prairie potholes gave us places to hunt and bird watch. The prairie's vistas have inspired some of our most memorable songs and a rugged independent spirit. In short, the prairie has contributed mightily in creating what we think of as our Texan identity.

Now the prairie that gave us so much desperately needs our help. The coastal prairie of Texas and Louisiana is just as imperiled as tropical rainforests, coral reefs, and the polar ecosystems. Just 1/10 of 1% of the coastal prairie remains in what prairie ecologists have come to call 'platinum quality.' Yet, hope remains. There are tens of thousands of acres of lower quality prairies and rice fields which could be restored back to diverse tallgrass prairies. There are still platinum prairies to be saved. Just as exciting, there has been an explosion of interest in planting pocket prairies in our cities for monarch butterflies, native bees, and colorful migratory birds and to connect our children and adults alike to their home ground - the prairie!

Making significant progress in these efforts will require a new model of collaborative action among local prairie groups because of the enormity of the challenge and because of Houston's accelerating growth. In 2015, the Coastal Prairie Partnership (CPP) conducted a series of groundbreaking meetings - the *Prairie Conservation Assessment* (PCA) - the chief aim of which was to identify bottlenecks limiting prairie conservation, restoration, and education and to identify collaborative actions that would be most beneficial in breaking these bottlenecks. Over twenty-five federal, state, nonprofit, and business institutions and over seventy prairie experts contributed to these meetings from across the Houston-Galveston region. They related, in frank terms, their greatest challenges, hopes, and needs for restoring and saving coastal prairies in our area for future generations. The result was a much needed pathway forward, the *2015 Prairie Conservation Assessment*. This Executive Summary highlights the PCA's most significant findings.

We invite you to consider the recommendations in this assessment and join us in the work of saving and restoring our coastal prairies. The time to act is now.



Cassidy Johnson  
President  
Coastal Prairie Partnership



Jaime González  
Community Conservation Director  
Katy Prairie Conservancy

# 2015 PRAIRIE CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT

## RAISING AWARENESS OF LOCAL PRAIRIES

### ☐ Most Significant Bottlenecks identified:

- Lacks basic market research on attitudes, opinions, and awareness of prairies. This makes marketing the prairie to both donors and visitors difficult.
- Lacks a common set of promotional and education materials, including brochures, books, and other printed material.

### ☐ Top Collaborative Actions/Priorities for Raising Awareness of Local Prairies:

- Conduct market research with a local university on the general public's attitudes, opinions, and awareness of prairies.
- Produce more prairie-related printed materials, especially a guide to local prairies.
- Create common branding of local prairies.
- Develop prairie education materials for local teachers.
- Train additional prairie guides for both rural and urban prairies.

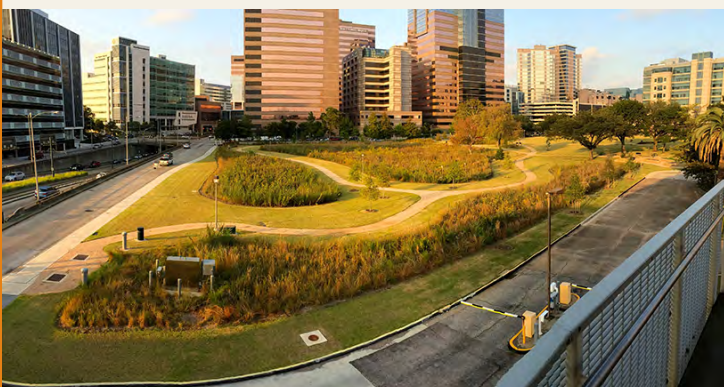
## URBAN PRAIRIES: CREATION, MAINTENANCE, AND USAGE

### ☐ Most Significant Bottlenecks identified:

- Deficit of available equipment and trained personnel to greatly increase urban prairie restoration.
- Lack of materials that communicate the protocol for creating, maintaining, and using urban prairies.
- Shortage of live prairie plants for pocket prairie establishment.

### ☐ Top Collaborative Actions/Priorities for Urban Prairies:

- Conduct more local prairie restoration workshops for various stakeholders including municipalities, landscape architects, wildlife professionals, and private landowners.
- Produce a campaign for raising awareness of urban prairies.
- Provide for better coordination of equipment and personnel for urban prairie establishment and restoration.
- Produce a guidebook for establishment of new prairie gardens.
- Establish a seed swap system for those restoring urban prairies.



MD ANDERSON PRAIRIE - AN URBAN POCKET PRAIRIE



STUDENTS STUDYING ON THE PRAIRIE

# 2015 PRAIRIE CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PRAIRIE RESEARCH

### ☐ Most Significant Bottlenecks identified:

- Lack of basic research on local prairie microbial communities and restoration techniques - particularly in restoring rice fields to prairies.
- Lack of mechanisms to share relevant prairie research between researchers and restoration ecologists.

### ☐ Top Collaborative Actions/Priorities for Prairie Research:

- More Best Management Practice Research - Particularly in grazing regimes, control of invasive plants and insects, and establishment techniques.
- More Water - Prairies Research - Especially for understanding the roles that prairies play in infiltration and runoff rates.
- Microbiological Research - Baseline research about prairie microbial communities and efficacy of applying microbial teas to new restorations.
- Better communication of current research to and between, academicians, practitioners and landowners.

## LARGE-ACREAGE PRAIRIE RESTORATION

### ☐ Most Significant Bottlenecks identified:

- Lack of equipment, when needed, for landscape-level restoration on the southern and eastern portion of the Greater Houston Region.
- Lack of a diverse suite of locally-adapted early and mid-successional grasses.
- Lack of personnel and equipment to restore former rice fields to prairies throughout the region.

### ☐ Top Collaborative Actions/Priorities for Large-Acreage Prairie Restoration:

- Work toward higher diversity and availability of locally-adapted prairie seed - particularly early and mid-successional grasses.
- Provide greater availability of prairie restoration equipment and personnel (including the potential establishment of a Habitat Action Team for the east and south Houston regions).
- Better communication about best prairie restoration and management practices for landowners and resource agencies.



PRAIRIE RESEARCH MEETING



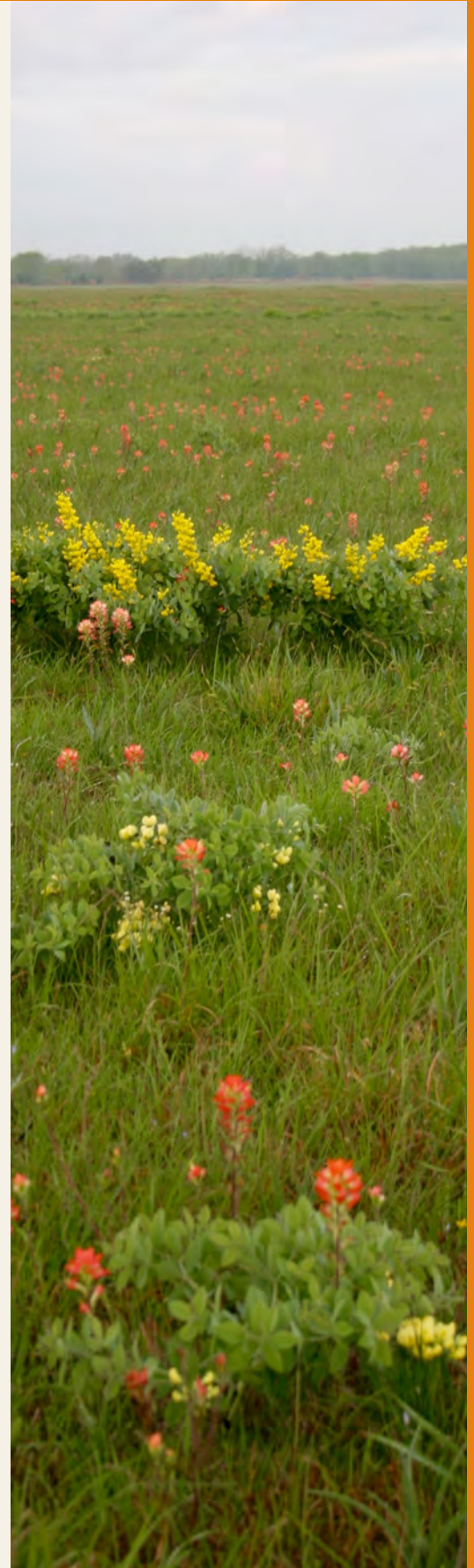
PRAIRIE RESTORATION IN HARRIS COUNTY

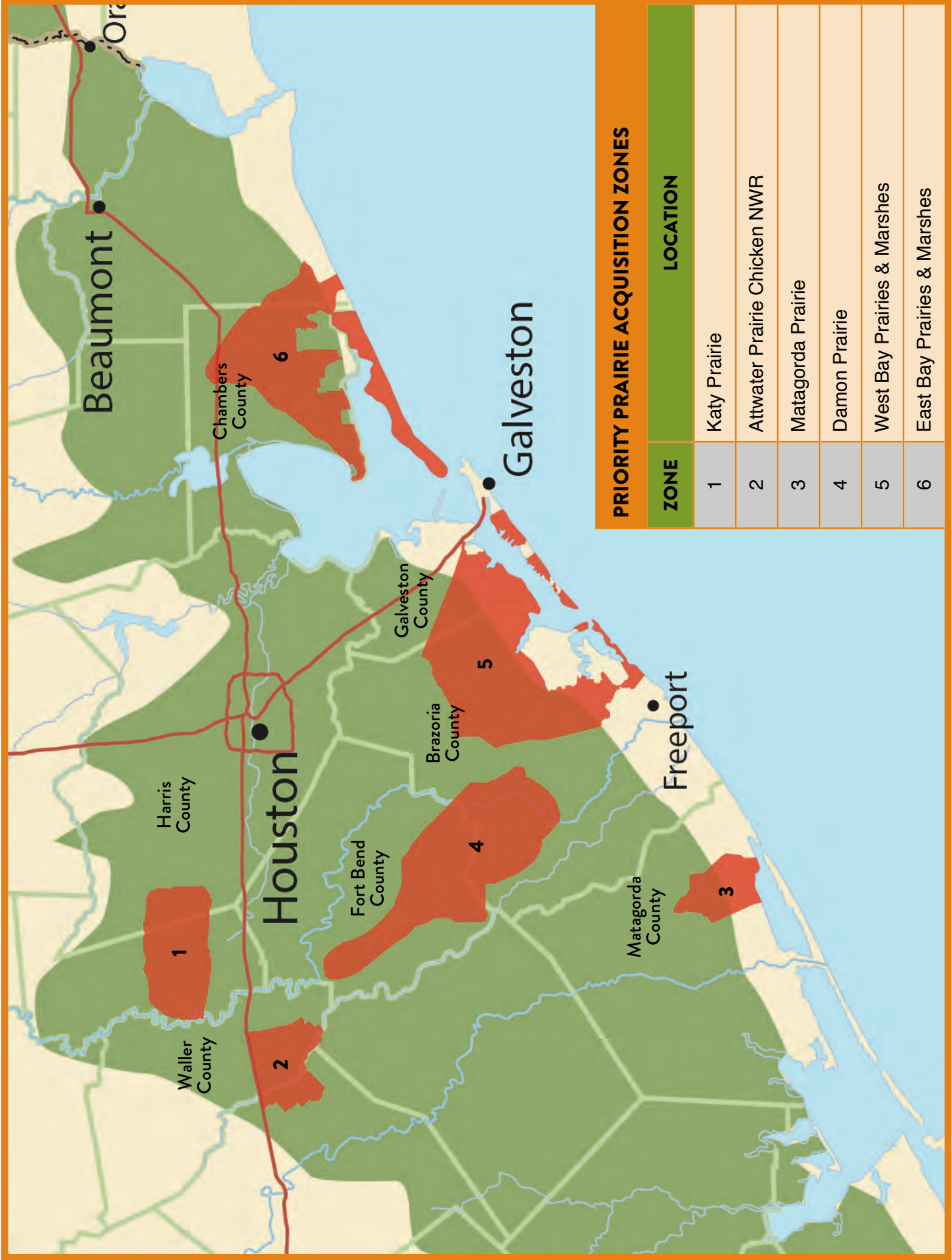


# 2015 PRAIRIE CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PRAIRIE ACQUISITION PRIORITIES FOR GREATER HOUSTON

- **Most Significant Bottlenecks identified:**
  - Collaborative funding of landscape-level prairie acquisition.
  - Engaging ‘champions’ for the Damon and Matagorda Prairies.
- **Top Collaborative Priorities for Prairie Acquisition:**
  - Work collaboratively to acquire large blocks of prairie lands in the Greater Houston Region
    - Committee felt that working jointly on a first acquisition would be very helpful. One potential candidate for this project would be the Damon Prairie of Brazoria County because of its size, connectivity to riparian corridors, relatively affordable cost per acre, and its proximity to the Columbian Bottomlands Acquisition Zone, Nash Prairie, and Brazos Bend State Park.
  - Establish ‘priority zones’ for collaborative prairie conservation:
    - The Prairie Acquisition Committee established six priority zones as a part of the PCA process. Those zones are:
      - **Katy Prairie:** Katy Prairie Conservancy identified as this zone champion.
      - **Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR -** USFWS identified as zone champion.
      - **Matagorda Prairie:** No champion identified during PCA process.
      - **Damon Prairie:** Katy Prairie Conservancy identified as potential zone champion.
      - **West Bay Prairies & Marshes:** Galveston Bay Foundation identified as this zone champion.
      - **East Bay Prairies & Marshes:** Galveston Bay Foundation identified as this zone champion.





**PRIORITY PRAIRIE ACQUISITION ZONES**

ZONE	LOCATION
1	Katy Prairie
2	Attwater Prairie Chicken NWR
3	Matagorda Prairie
4	Damon Prairie
5	West Bay Prairies & Marshes
6	East Bay Prairies & Marshes



# 2015 PRAIRIE CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT

## PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

- Armand Bayou Nature Center
- City of Houston Parks and Recreation Department
- Citizens Environmental Coalition
- Coastal Prairie Partnership
- Houston Arboretum & Nature Center
- Katy Prairie Conservancy
- Galveston Bay Foundation
- Harris County Flood Control District
- Houston Audubon Society
- Houston Wilderness
- Houston Zoo
- Native Prairies Association of Texas
- Native Plant Society of Texas - Houston Chapter
- Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture
- Scenic Galveston
- Sierra Club - Lone Star Chapter
- Trees for Houston
- Texas A&M University
- Texas Master Naturalists
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Department
- Texas Sea Grant
- University of Houston
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- Wildlife Habitat Federation

## PCA GOALS SUPPORT THE FOLLOWING

- Armand Bayou Nature Resources Management Plan
- Attwater Prairie Chicken Recovery Plan (USFWS)
- Bayou Greenways Initiative
- Coastal Prairie Conservation Initiative (TPWD, TNC, NRCS, USFWS, and GCLI)
- Galveston Bay Estuary Plan (TCEQ)
- Houston Arboretum Master Plan
- Houston Parks and Rec. Department Master Plan
- Houston Toad Recovery Plan (TCEQ)
- Memorial Park Master Plan
- Landbird Conservation Plan (Partners in Flight)
- National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honeybees and other Pollinators
- Natural Resources and Environmental Literacy Plan (TPWD)
- Texas Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan (NOAA)
- Texas Conservation Action Plan (TPWD)
- Texas Essential Skills and Knowledge Texas (Texas Department of Education)
- Texas Monarch and Native Pollinator Conservation Plan (TPWD)
- Texas Prairie Dawn Recovery Plan (USFWS)
- Texas Children in Nature Strategic Plan (TPWD)
- Vision for a Healthy Gulf of Mexico Watershed (USFWS)



**Horsemint**  
native to local prairies  
prairie native



The Coastal Prairie Partnership is a grass-roots coalition comprised of local, state, federal, non-governmental institutions, teachers, ranchers, individuals, schools, and private landowners working to achieve common prairie conservation and education goals. Find out more at [prairiepartner.org](http://prairiepartner.org).





**PHOTO CREDITS**

Carolyn Fannon - front cover , children, and Nash Prairie. Jaime González - MD Anderson Prairie, meeting, prescribed burn, and horsemint. Don Verser - prairie pothole. Shari O'Neal/ Shutterstock.com - monarch butterfly.

**PRAIRIE POTHOLE AT LAWTHER-DEER PARK PRAIRIE**