



## **RIPARIAN RECOVERY NETWORK NEWS**

**Riparian: wetlands adjacent to rivers or streams**



**No. 4, June 17, 2018**

### **Who Are We?**

The Riparian Recovery Network is about creating a shared vision for our recovering riparian land that balances our own individual needs with what is required to keep the Wimberley Valley's waterways clean, healthy, and beautiful. The network is about connections - connections with:

- EXPERTS providing learning through seminars, field trips, personal contact, and more ...,
- PLANT RESOURCES including plant identification, recommendations, seeds, and more....,
- EACH OTHER as together we learn and develop the best plan for our individual properties.

### **Mystery Solved!**



On the second Jackaroo Tour, no one could identify the plant shown in the picture on the left. It's American Basket-flower and, while the buds on the ones we saw were white, the flowers are generally purple with white centers (see photo on right). It must have been present in one of the seed mixes that



were spread on the berms created to repair the river bank and control the flow of water coming from the uplands.

## **Gravel Bars and Riparian Recovery**

Floods alter the flow of rivers and streams. Sometimes this process results in the formation of gravel bars. Some ask “how can I get rid of all this gravel?” While dangerous gravel accumulations can occur, most of the time the answer is emphatically “DON’T.” Gravel bars help streams maintain a deep channel by preventing the accumulation of sediment and debris. And dredging can impact both upstream and downstream properties in unexpected and unfavorable ways. Rather, as is often the case, the best solution is vegetation.

But what kind? The environment associated with gravel bars is harsh, lacking both shade and water-holding capabilities. The first plants to naturally inhabit newly formed gravel bars, the “pioneers” so to speak, are a mix of colonizers and stabilizers. Most are normally found further from the stream bank. Around the gravel bar’s wetter edges you will find more traditional moisture-loving species such as Frogfruit, Spikerush, and Bushy Bluestem. And as soil begins to collect on the gravel bar, these more traditional riparian plants will begin to dominate the newly rebuilt bank.

So, if you have a gravel bar or otherwise flood-scoured area on your property spend a not-so-hot early morning observing what is starting to take hold. Here’s some of things you might find:



**Sycamore** - After the Memorial Flood, one of the first seedlings to repopulate devastated areas were Sycamores. Moderately fast growing Sycamores are a key to stabilizing freshly disturbed areas like gravel bars especially when they form large colonies. The roots aren’t as strong as many other stabilizers so subsequent floods are likely to uproot many of these pioneers. But that’s not necessarily a bad outcome. Downed trees often become small dams that trap sediment and form nursery pools for fish and other aquatic species. And those trees that do survive can grow as tall as 50 feet providing much needed shade.



**Baccharis** - Baccharis, also know as Roosevelt weed or poverty weed, is not pretty and, in upland areas, it can be problematic. But during early stages of flood recovery, especially on gravel bars, it can be a blessing. The bushy tops of this 6-10 foot tall, multi-stemmed bush dissipate energy during moderate floods catching sediment and organic material in the process. Thus, it is common to find young sycamore, switchgrass, buttonbush or other more desirable species propagating within a thicket of Baccharis.



**Buttonbush** - This strong rooted, gnarly shrub is another blessing on naked gravel bars. It also grows well on restored banks, even under the shade of Sycamores and other riparian trees. And its flowers, which start to appear in June and bloom through much of July, are a great source of nectar for birds, butterflies, and other beneficial insects. When floods come, Buttonbush sheds its leaves and the stems are flexible enough to bend over. So, after the water recedes, the branches pop back up and new leaves replace those lost. Buttonbush can be easily propagated by simply pushing cut stems into places where there is just a little bit of wet soil.

But beware - not everything that comes up on disturbed banks is good. As many landowners well know, floods spread invasive like Arundo, Bastard Cabbage and Johnson Grass. The good news is some of these invasives may be lose ground naturally or with some assistance from humans. Some have reported they are beginning to see Johnson grass crowded out by Eastern gamagrass. And Bastard cabbage, so worrisome in the spring after the Memorial Day flood, seem to have become less prevalent. Gathering and bagging the seed heads of Johnson grass, Bastard Cabbage and other invasive that spread through prolific seeding can keep them from spreading, particularly into upland areas where their presence can be more problematic.



On two recent site visits, we came across another invasive, Chinese Tallow, to add to the list of “undesirables.” Chinese Tallow trees can reach reproductive age in as little as three years. And then they become a prolific producer of seeds which are carried to new places by both water and birds. After being damaged by a flood, Chinese Tallows can regrow from remaining stems and roots. And fallen Chinese Tallow leaves contain toxins that change soil conditions in ways that are not favorable for desirable natives. If you want to know more about how to get rid of this nuisance, go to <https://aquaplant.tamu.edu/management-options/tallowpopcorn-tree-non-native/>. If you still need more information, contact [aquatic.invasives@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:aquatic.invasives@tpwd.texas.gov).

## **EVENTS**

Arundo Cane is another invasive plant that requires aggressive action. Applying herbicides close to waterways is tricky because of the potential detrimental impacts on aquatic wildlife. But you’ve probably noticed recent progress in eliminating Arundo Cane. That’s due to the Healthy Creeks Initiative which is providing assistance in eliminating it to Blanco River watershed landowners at **NO COST**. This group will hold a two-hour informative workshop on Wednesday, June 20th at the Wimberley Community Center starting at 5:30PM. Food and drinks will be provided so please RSVP by e-mailing [healthycreeks@tpwd.texas.gov](mailto:healthycreeks@tpwd.texas.gov) or calling 512-389-8750. And please pass this information on to neighbors who might not yet be aware of this great program.

If you can’t attend, you can find more information on the initiative at:

[https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/nonpwdpubs/media/HealthyCreeks\\_Arundo\\_InformationPacket.pdf](https://tpwd.texas.gov/publications/nonpwdpubs/media/HealthyCreeks_Arundo_InformationPacket.pdf)

The Riparian Recovery Network News is a periodic Hays County Master Naturalist publication covering topics of interest to the Riparian Recovery Network community. Please share this newsletter with friends and neighbors who would enjoy information on restoring and enjoying their riparian zone. Send any questions you might have or ideas for future topics to [riparian@haysmn.org](mailto:riparian@haysmn.org). And, if you are not currently on our mailing list, use this same address to request your name be added.

