





# THE NEED TO KEEP CURRENT

## Reading, Seminars and Training Lead to Better Management Skills

By Paul D. Ohlenbusch

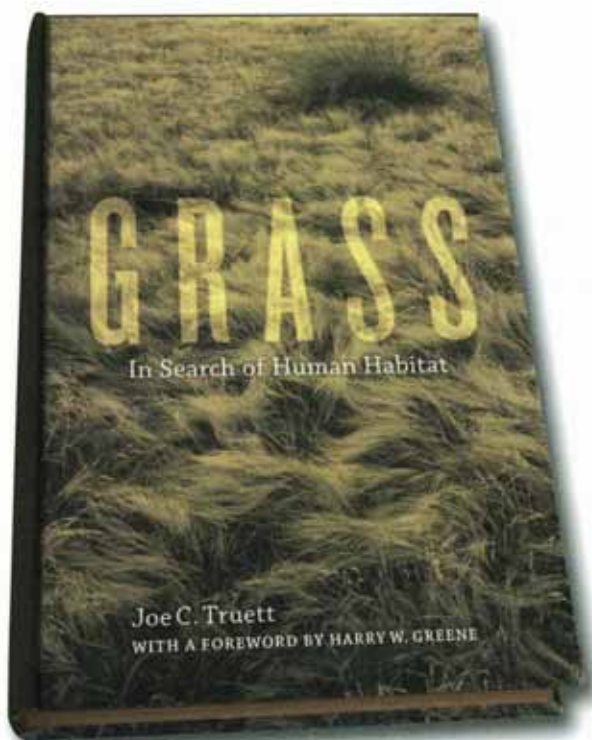
A critical part of managing is to keep up to date with the changes in technology and practices. Books, magazines, symposia, meetings, and training sessions are just a few of the opportunities available to keep up. I find keeping up is an absolute necessity. Science, technology, and practices are changing rapidly. When I started my career in the mid 1960s, vegetation management and related disciplines were based on succession and climax. That means all vegetation follows a path that starts with rock becoming soil and eventually a forest. Today, we know that the vegetation existing on a site today has many paths it can take both positive and negative. What path will depend on weather, management, use, and many other factors.

I am going to review two books plus some plant identification aids. The first two are recently published books that may provide you with some insight into how things have changed. Both are authored by individuals that are basically reviewing their journey. The first is a life journey while the second is a shorter localized journey.

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***GRASS: In Search of Human Habitat* by Joe C. Truett**

In his book, Mr. Truett traces his journey from East Texas through a lifelong study of the grasslands. He grew up in the backwoods of East Texas with parents shaped by hard times of the 1930s depression. Mr. Truett graduated from Texas A&M with a wildlife degree. He cites three circumstances that kindled his belief that we are “genetically programmed” to appreciate grasslands. The first is his rural childhood which gave him an exposure to the rural life. Second, decades of investigating the habitat needs of animals. Third, the lack of appreciation for educators and policymakers to understand the “importance of habitat in shaping our behavior.”

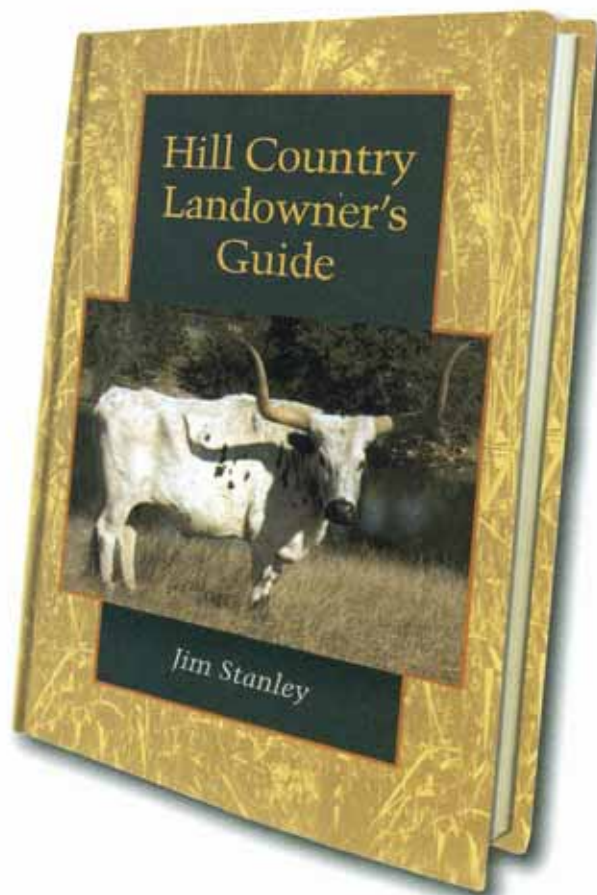
*Grass* is a book that is easy to read. It is divided into chapters and most have short essay type sections. The thoughts and concepts presented lead to an interesting ending. The book has 192 pages in 20 chapters with the first chapter entitled *Promethean Legacy to Long Road Home* plus an epilog. The development of his concepts and theories of the human habitat are thought provoking and requires one to examine their own perceptions of land management. He relates events and experiences to develop his points. He comments on social status and wealth related to habitat in order to lead you to where he leaves you in the book. It is interesting and quietly asks how you relate to and understand your habitat.

Mr. Truett is Senior Biologist with the Turner Endangered Species Fund. Don't let that fact keep you from reading this book. The book contains notes listing the source of materials mentioned in the book as well as a references list.

***Hill Country Landowners Guide* by Jim Stanley**

While this book was written for the Texas Hill Country, the management concepts and philosophies can be applied anywhere. Mr Stanley grew up in Gaines County in the oil fields but worked on cotton farms. He has degrees in chemistry from Texas Tech and Indiana. He spent his professional career in teaching and commercial research. After retiring to Kerrville, he became a Master Naturalist and worked with landowners. The book is really the philosophy he has developed from what he has learned through the Master Naturalist Program and his relationship with Hill Country landowners.

The book opens with the assumption that you are reading the book because you have land and have questions about managing it. His philosophy is that we are caretakers not owners of land. That is, landowners, are only taking care of the land for the next generation. There are color photos to illustrate his points. He also credits many people from state, federal, and private groups for





providing the science and information to develop his management concepts.

The book has 176 pages in 23 chapters plus 2 appendices, a glossary, a bibliography, and an index. Chapter titles include *The Philosophy*, *What Have We Done*, *Every Case is Different*, and *Where to go For Help*. Many chapters deal with topics such as overgrazing, over browsing, erosion, exotics, and native grasses. Within these topics he provides thoughts to help develop rational concepts, both positive and negative. It is light reading with serious undertones.

While written by a "late comer" to the subject, his philosophy and concepts are well documented and lets one understand them. A key point he makes is that no two properties are alike. The factors that make them different include past management, vegetation, topography, and the owner. A note: My own experience agrees with his concept. Only the land owner should make the management decisions based on their situation, not what someone else is doing.

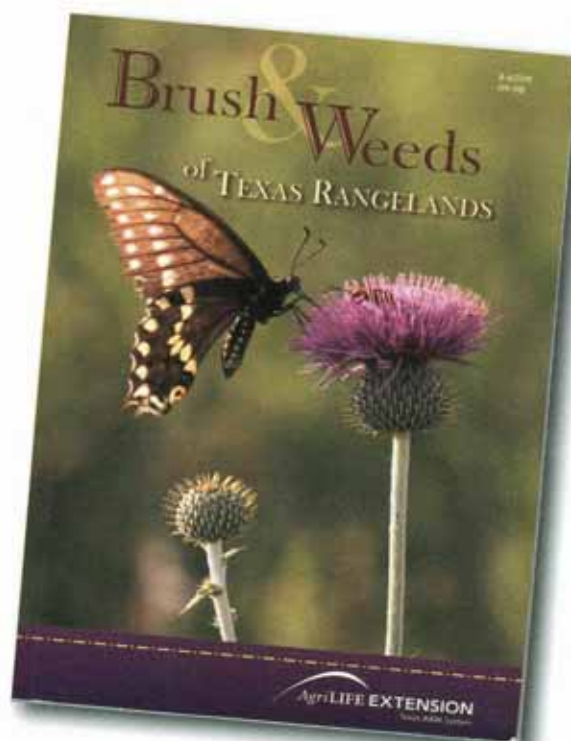
#### SOME PLANT IDENTIFICATION HELP

One point made in both books and I agree is the need to identify and know your vegetation, at least the dominant plants. You may have someone locally that can identify the plants but may not know about their growth requirements, flowering period, and similar characteristics that can help manage them. The following are examples of some good references that should help.

**Woody Plants** Most landowners have woody plants high on their list of concerns.

#### *Brush and Weeds of Texas Rangelands*

This soft cover book is a quick reference with good color

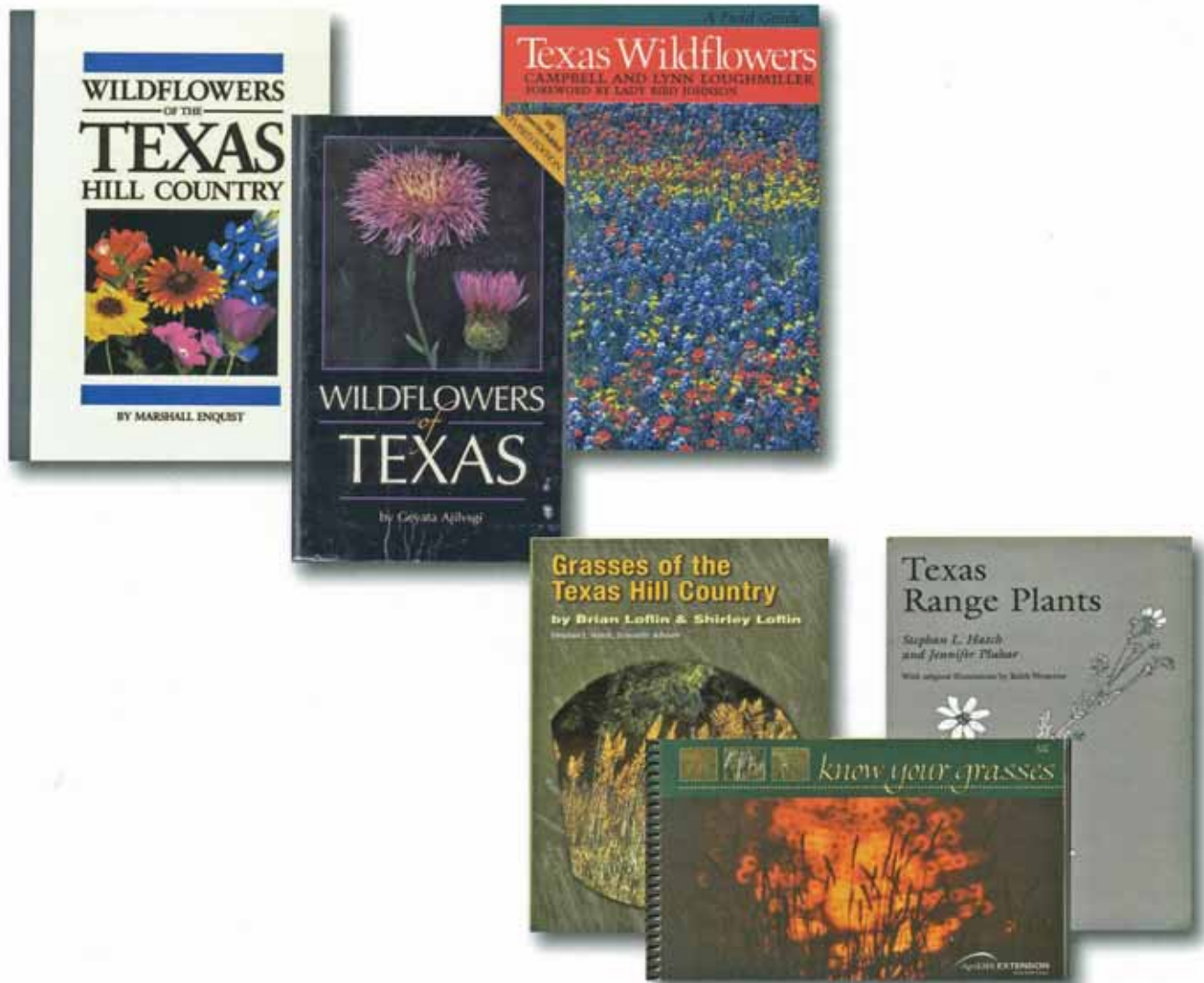


photos and general information about the woody plants of Texas rangelands. It is the work of five Texas AgriLIFE Extension Rangeland Specialists headed by Dr. Charles Hart. There are 96 plants included. Each has the vegetation areas they are found (10 regions). Included is a region by region listing of the plants included. The book is published by Texas AgriLIFE Extension and is available through the county extension office or Texas AgriLIFE Bookstore on line.

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Get out to meetings, seminars and workshops and learn about new research, practices and technologies to help you grow your business.



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**Broadleaf Plants** Land managers usually call wildflowers forbs, weeds or broadleaves but some of the best references are wildflower books.

**Texas Wildflowers: A Field Guide**

This paperback book is a part of the Texas Natural History Guides from the University of Texas Press. The book has colored photos of the flowers, some with more than one photo, plus a description of each plant. It includes over 100 plants, a glossary, and index. One limitation is the plants are arranged by family. The latest edition is 2006.

**Wildflowers of Texas**

This paperback book has over 400 flowering plant photos arranged by flower color making it easier to identify plants. It includes descriptions of the plants plus the areas where they are found. Each species has a half page phot with a half page description. The book is published by Shearer Publishing in Fredericksburg.

**Wildflowers of the Texas Hill Country**

This is an example of a regional book with 166 species. Ninety one are in the Composite (sunflower) family. Each has a good color photo and description. The species are arranged by family which is a consideration. The book is published by Lone Star Botanical in Austin.

**Grasses** Grasses are the basic plants of rangeland. Easy to use references for grasses are limited.

**Know Your Grasses**

This spiral bound soft cover publication has been around for decades. The latest printing was in 2008 by Texas AgriLIFE Extension. It has 92 grasses, both native and introduced. It is illustrated with descriptions, line drawings, livestock and wildlife values, and has a map that helps know where they are found. It is available from Texas AgriLIFE Extension county offices or the online Texas AgriLIFE Extension Bookstore.

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## MANAGEMENT NOTES FOR MAY THROUGH JULY



Water is critical. Carefully monitor summer water sources to insure availability. Develop options if sources appear to be less than optimal. Also, begin evaluating water needs for fall and next year.

Monitor rainfall history for the past 12 months, the forecast for the next 3-6 months, and current soil moisture status. Even if current soil moisture is good, projected plant growth will probably be below average if the previous growing season had drought conditions. Plan for below average growth in 2010.

Monitor the status of grazing and browse use to date. The amount of use on highly desirable species over winter is critical. If use was heavy, plan to reduce 2010 stocking rates to allow the preferred species to recover and improve.

Use the grazing and economic management results for 2009 and finalize adjustments to the 2010 and 5-year management plan based on past weather together with current and potential economic conditions.

Implement the plans for 2010 broadleaf and woody plant control.

Evaluate the prescribed burns completed in 2010. Begin formulating burn plans for 2011.

Manage 2010 seeded areas that need improvement as well as long term management.

Consider updating or starting a land resource record. If you use photographs, establish points that you can go back to and photograph at least every year.

Above all, manage for today and the future based on what has happened in 2009, not just today. Management is not easy! Develop a management plan if you don't have one!

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### *Grasses of the Texas Hill Country*

This is a good regional publication. The soft cover book has color photos, descriptions, users, and other information. The book is divided by the seed head type making it easier to identify grasses. It includes reasonably detailed information for each species. The book is published by Texas A&M University Press.

### *Texas Range Plants*

This softback publication is more technical than most folks like. It includes 74 grasses and 61 forbs and woody plants. Included are line drawings and very detailed descriptions plus wildlife and livestock values. Each plant has one page with the drawing and another with the information. It is published by Texas A&M University Press.



### KEEPING UP THROUGH MEETINGS, ETC

Meetings, seminars, workshops, tours, and a lot of other opportunities are available to learn about new research, practices, and technologies. I have a few thoughts about which you should consider. First, who is sponsoring the event and who are the presenters. They should be providing factual, research based information, not just promoting equipment, supplies, and services. Second, the information should apply directly or can be used to meet your needs. Third, is there the potential for followup consultation or help readily available.

I always remember three quotes about people that help others. "All you have to do is...!" "It's the only way to do it!" and "I'm from the government and I'm here to help you!" Actually, the latter isn't always true. There are employees of government agencies who know what they are doing and can help. I think I was one of those!

*Next time, as I have prepared the last several articles it became apparent my concepts, philosophies, and how I work with people have been changed over the years. So, follow me on my journey!* *AA*