

Native Plant Society of Texas: Strategic Goals & Objectives for 2009-2012

I. Advocacy Goals and Objectives

The theme of advocacy emerged strongly right from the beginning of this planning process. It is therefore appropriate at the beginning of this strategic plan document to give a definition of the term “advocacy” as generally employed in this planning discussion. “Advocacy” is here generally understood as any pro-active work to educate both social leaders and society in general about the issues of importance to NPSOT and to influence the public political process in a positive way for native plants, plant communities and their habitats. It is permitted under the law for non-profit organizations to engage in such activities as long as they stop short of endorsing specific political candidates. The spirit of advocacy reflected in the planning discussions is one of a passionate concern for the state of the environment itself—that steps be taken not merely to protect native plants because they are attractive, but because their survival, and the restoration of their habitats, are essential to our long-term well-being as a species.

Based on the discussion, it appears the will of the group is to begin to implement all of the goals in this section in 2009 and consistently continue realizing them over the next three years.

1. Advocate for the needs of native plants, native plant communities and their habitats with elected officials and other government officials

- Amend the bylaws to create, in 2009, the elected position of Vice President of Advocacy, for a one to two-year term. The VP of Advocacy's responsibility will be to create, in conjunction with the President and, in time, the Executive Director, an Advocacy Plan for the organization and to oversee and coordinate all advocacy work undertaken by NPSOT at the state and chapter levels. The VP of Advocacy will also help create and work with an Advocacy Committee composed of two to four members drawn from chapters across the state, appointed by the President.

- The VP of Advocacy, with appropriate professional consultation, will create (adapting from existing legislation in other states and cities) template laws and ordinances to protect and address the needs of native plants, their habitats and their communities at the local and state levels and will work with the Advocacy Committee to distribute that information as appropriate according to the Advocacy Plan.
- The VP of Advocacy will work with the Advocacy Committee and other NPSOT members to strategically contact public elected and appointed officials to educate them regarding native plant issues, to promote passage of specific legislation, and will encourage NPSOT members in general to be advocates for native plants within their communities.
- The VP of Advocacy will recommend to the President, after appropriate inquiry, collaborations in advocacy work with other organizations concerned with the environment in Texas.
- The VP of Advocacy's expenses will be funded from general revenues, but the organization will also seek grant support from appropriate foundations and corporations to underwrite the expenses of this work.

2. Work with counties and cities to adopt native plant ordinances and to promote public landscaping practices that benefit native plants, their habitats and their communities.

- VP of Advocacy and the Advocacy Committee will distribute template native plant and habitat preservation and protection ordinances to local chapters.
- VP of Advocacy will also see that template ordinances are put on the website as pdf files so that they may be downloaded for study and discussion.
- The VP and Committee will also mail suggested ordinances to selected cities that don't have chapters, targeting city managers as well as elected officials, and will make follow up contacts as appropriate.
- The VP and Committee will also hold workshops at the chapter level on how to implement native plant ordinances with local governments.

- VP and Committee will also make presentations to county commissioners to educate them regarding practices they can promote.
- VP and Committee will work with symposium committee to provide accredited Continuing Education courses for city & county employees on best native plant practices.

3. The VP of Advocacy and the Advocacy Committee will work pro-actively with state agencies that affect plants statewide and become the preferred resource for information about roadside management. Agencies will include TXDOT, flood control districts, local parks and recreation departments, Texas Parks and Wildlife, agencies dealing with serious wetland issues, federal parks, the US Dept. of Agriculture and major state contractors.

- In accordance with the Advocacy Plan, hold scheduled meetings of the VP of Advocacy, members of the Committee and President as appropriate with administrators of TXDOT and other selected agencies to educate them about native plant issues.
- Work to become the recognized state-level source of information on native plants and their communities with an active botanical advisory.
- Undertake this work in coordination with the person holding the position of Environmental Liaison.
- Consider making the person who holds the position of Environmental Liaison a board officer.

4. Be more effective with communicating native plant advocacy messages in the public media.

- Solicit donated services of an appropriate public relations firm to create a short DVD telling the story of native plant/native plant communities/habitats in Texas, their needs, and the work of NPSOT to protect and promote them.
- Use this DVD in public and private presentations.
- Obtain donated services from the same kind of firm to create a publicity plan in conjunction with the advocacy plan.

- Use publicity plan to place articles about native plant chapters in local newspapers, state level news published in major newspapers, and running of free public service announcements on television and radio at the local chapter levels.
- If obtaining donated services, put a representative from the public relations/marketing firm on the development board.
- Get newsletter out to school libraries for \$5 annual subscription and implement a complimentary issue distribution list of VIPs.
- Designate person responsible in organization for conducting this new PR/marketing initiative.

5. Be an advocate for native plants within the education system

- Implement the scholarship program.
- Develop and provide curriculum enhancement materials for Texas public teachers in the biological sciences to fit with the TEKS standards—from elementary grades through high school. Find grant funding for that work from Texas or national foundations.
- For Texas universities, establish more active connections with college and university departments of environmental studies to support chapter and state program activities and to draw upon for expert opinions and leadership in advocacy work.

II. Chapter-Level Organizational Goals and Objectives

There was general agreement in the discussions about chapters that they are the backbone of the organization and that the state level of the organization both could and should increase its services to chapters. The goals and objectives for this section emphasize those points.

1. Improve Chapter Liaison work so as to build the organization's capacity

- The Chapter Liaison volunteer needs to travel at least quarterly to at least the major urban chapters in the state, and rotate visits to smaller chapters.

- The Chapter Liaison will start writing a regular column in the NPSOT newsletter about chapter news and developments, providing perspective on the various ways chapters can grow in relationship to their communities.
- 2. Provide reliable information about NPSOT-recommended chapter activities, and encourage NPSOT chapters to continue being very engaged in their own development and growth.**
- The State office will provide resources for selected handbook activities through establishing a chapter program fund and soliciting corporate and foundation support for that fund.
 - Designate a person for chapter members to call as a resource for leadership guidance.
- 3. Strengthen the capacity of each chapter to engage in education, outreach and example**
- Each chapter should hold at least three events per year and develop audiences for them through local publicity efforts.
 - The state level will encourage chapters to continue to bring in speakers, and consider creating a speaker's bureau that will be available to the chapters.
 - Likewise, the state level will encourage the chapters to communicate with one another throughout the year regarding program and other activities to share ideas and experiences.
 - The Board will strive to give chapters feedback in the form of annual reporting.
 - Each chapter will utilize these objectives, as well, to encourage and build membership participation.
- 4. Encourage activities for building membership growth to 2200 by 2011**
- The Chapter Liaison will encourage chapter-level fund raising/membership building events, including native plant sales, musical events, parties with food and music.
 - The organization will model such activities upon successful events already established by exemplary groups around the state—e.g. Annual Mostly Native Plant Sale held by the Friends of the Cibolo Nature Center.

III. State-Level Organizational Goals and Objectives

All of the goals and objectives set forth in the planning process presuppose a considerable development in the capacity of NPSOT to undertake the work it desires to do. The most significant goal in that regard, of course, is the hiring of an executive director, which was discussed in some detail. The organization will need to address and build its fund raising capacity if it is to be able to accomplish these goals, as membership revenues and income from the annual Symposium are inherently limited. The organization is well-poised, however, to undertake such work.

In the process of going through this section, leading members of the organization continually focused and re-focused their attention on key points, getting down to the most important elements of what they believed is doable at this time.

A. Collaborations

1. Cultivate active partnerships over the next three years that would further our goals, such as with the following seven key organizations:

Agrilife

Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center

Native Plant Project

Native Prairies Association of Texas

Society for Ecological Restoration

Texas Parks & Wildlife

US Fish & Wildlife

- Establish direct communication between each organization's president and the NPSOT president and the Environmental Liaison through mail or email correspondence, broaching the question of how best to collaborate with each one.

- Pursue a dialog with each agency to establish at least one program collaboration with each agency within three years' time. "Program collaboration" means a joint service activity of benefit to the public that fits both organizations' missions.
- Create a database with updated information on the leadership of these organizations, addresses, etc., and including the organizations under #2 below, as well.

2. Create complimentary annual newsletter subscription, delivered with letter from the NPSOT president and environmental liaison to the presidents of each of the following organizations, to establish potential collaborations in the future.

Keep Texas Beautiful
 Texas Wildlife Association
 National Audubon Society in Texas
 National Forest Service in Texas
 Texas Forest Service
 Texas Association of Counties
 Texas Land Conservancy
 Texas Land Trust Council
 Texas Education Association
 Texas Science Teachers Association
 Texas Nature Conservancy
 Botanical Research Institute of Texas
 Trust for Public Land
 Conservation Fund
 World Wildlife Fund
 American Farmland Trust
 Chihuahuan Desert Research institute
 National Park Service
 Cibolo Nature Center
 USDA

3. Re-invigorate the work of the Environmental Liaison and create a new Environmental Committee

- Give primary responsibility to Environmental Liaison and the Environmental Committee for developing collaborative work with the agencies listed above, and for maintaining communication with them throughout each year.
- This Environmental Liaison and Environmental Committee will report to the leadership and membership of the NPSOT organization on their activities, once yearly, through an article in the state newsletter.

4. Explore institutional relationships with youth groups, such as Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, and develop program services to families with children.

- NPSOT President, the VP Education or the Past President will contact Girl Scouts CEO Kimberly Karl who has expressed a desire to get scouts interested in learning about native plants.
- NPSOT President, the VP Education or the Past President will make contact with the Texas Boy Scouts President to inform him of the chapters in each region and their availability for scout programs, and will obtain assistance in making more contacts at local levels.
- Develop a model program for family/child program service which can be replicated around the state. The “Leave No Child Inside: Nature Smart Family Program” currently being developed by the Austin chapter may supply such a model. Currently, the program is providing nature education for children and their parents at three parks, two of which are in low-income areas of Austin. The program is being run by Master Naturalists.

B. Organizational Capacity-Building Goals

1. Hire full time executive director within three years to develop organizational capacity

- The present objective is to have one or two people as coordinator(s) for FY 2009 and add a full-time executive director in 2010 if the organization can raise sufficient funds to cover two years of salaries, medical benefits and other expenses.
- ED will be charged with being the public face of the organization, and its chief fund raiser, and will keep track of goals and keep people on target.
- Organization later will add administrative assistant as revenues grow.
- Organization will begin immediate fund raising appeals to obtain grant support and develop revenue base for staff.

2. Improve effectiveness of Board of Directors

- Change bylaws to establish an executive committee composed of the president, president elect, all the vice presidents and the immediate past president with the power to make executive decisions for the board of directors and present them to the full board for approval. Hold executive committee meetings monthly by telephone/email.
- Establish Finance Committee under VP of Finance.
- Take current membership of Audit Committee and fold into what will be the new Finance Committee plus up to one additional member.
- Provide authority to Finance committee to review all financial transactions of the organization and to engage in financial and fund raising planning for years to come.
- Establish Education Committee under VP of Education.
- VP of Education will work with President to select up to three members of this committee, who will work to implement chapter-level education initiatives as indicated in the strategic plan and to support and enhance existing education programs by the chapters.
- Strengthen Publications Committee, by the following actions:

- create new standard Board-approved format and design for newsletter that is only changed when the Board sees a need;
- invite articles from a wide variety of sources;
- create liaisons with universities to obtain new writers;
- proof read, edit, etc. with proficiency; and
- specifically publish articles on the following subjects: how native plants can help reduce global warming through carbon sequestration, promotion of less water usage, habitat preservation and restoration, and native wildlife.

3. Establish the NPSOT Development Board to increase fund raising ability and public profile

- The dual mission of the Development Board will be to help increase donated income to the organization through building NPSOT's fund raising capacity and through building its prestige as an organization associated with distinguished civic leaders, educators and scientists.
- The President will appoint, in consultation with the Nominating Committee (which will assume this additional duty), the members of the Development Board, not to exceed twelve.
- The President and Nominating Committee will seek a wide range of representatives from potential corporate and foundation donors.
- The President and Nominating Committee will identify distinguished plant scientists or advocates for native plants in the educational community and invite them to be members of the board.
- The Development Board will meet twice a year: once during the Symposium, and once at another time together with the regular Board.
- The leadership of the organization will continually seek distinguished citizens to serve on the Development Board.
- The Development Board will work closely with the Executive Board to accomplish the goals of this strategic plan. Members will be chosen on their willingness to bring in

either cash contributions through their fundraising activity, or in-kind donations and donations of useful services or other contacts.

4. Undertake fund raising and grant writing to support organizational development

- Create fund raising plan for 2009-2012.
- Create special emphasis on gaining more corporate underwriting for the annual Symposium, year by year.
- Create prospect lists for that event from donors to other environmental organizations such as the Texas Nature Conservancy and Sierra Club.
- Start soliciting support to be distributed to chapter level programs (in coordination with chapters) such as NICE and No Child Left Inside through requests to small family foundations and Texas corporations.
- Solicit Dixon Water Foundation, Brown Foundation and Meadows Foundation for startup support for executive director position—seek pledges and gifts of \$200,000 to fund position for at least two years, including benefits.
- State office will conduct fund raising training for the chapter leaders to focus on coordinating grant applications between local and state levels, the Annual Fund (see below), membership development, and legacy gifts.
- State office will stimulate more giving from members by instituting once-yearly, Spring, Annual Fund appeal, which will be separate and apart from membership contributions. It will be a direct mail campaign supported by articles in the newsletter and on the website, as well as by e-mail.
- Stimulate giving of legacy gifts through occasional articles in newsletter and on website, reviewing variety of ways to make planned gifts, and urging members to “Remember NPSOT in your will.”
- Prepare to create an endowment fund in 2012 after building fund raising capacity.

5. Promote better use of the website

- Give people concrete ideas of ways they can be of service through the website and a contact person who can respond to their inquiries by e-mail.
- Develop better mailing, e-mailing lists for newsletter and membership solicitation.
- Consider posting a blog to the website—but also direct people to the discussion list between Native Prairies Association of Texas (NPAT) and NPSOT.
- Designate a blog monitor for the website.
- Develop ability to receive donations via the website.

6 Encourage activities for building membership growth to 2200 by 2011

- Support chapters in their activities to build membership growth at the local level by
 - providing information on membership development (examples of successful events, direct mail promotions, publicity campaigns) and by
 - providing financial resources to reimburse struggling chapters for mailing and related promotional expenses on a board approved basis.
- Develop an active campaign with well-publicized resources for starting new chapters in areas where none now exists. This task will be supervised by the Chapter Liaison.