



# TEXAS ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE AWARDS 2013

*Collaboration results in successful problem solving for this year's winners*

**L**andowners band together to address bacterial impairments to a common waterway, volunteers rally around an energetic 11-year-old to clean up their community, and college students work together to turn a plant pest into a profit. These are just a few examples of how this year's Texas Environmental Excellence Award winners show how working together can solve problems.

These awards recognize outstanding, innovative, environmental programs in nine categories. This year there were a total of ten awards given, with one category garnering two awards.

## Civic/Community Lake Conroe Habitat Improvement Project Coalition



Lake Conroe has struggled with invasive plant species, principally hydrilla, since it was first impounded in the 1970s. The original solution to the hydrilla problem was the introduction of a quarter million grass carp into the lake. The grass carp did a great job of removing hydrilla but it also made the lake inhospitable to native species. To make matters worse, once the carp died off, the hydrilla returned.

In 2006, individuals, businesses, and both public and private organizations

banded together to promote a variety of restoration projects, including a native-plant nursery below the dam. These "founder colonies" began to provide food and protection for juvenile fish—a big step toward restoration. Since 2010, five miles of shoreline have been restored, resulting in significant increases in fish and other wildlife.

## Youth Oscar Medina IV



What can one motivated 11-year-old do? Ask Oscar Medina IV. When, in 2011, Medina showed an interest in helping Keep Laredo Beautiful, his parents helped him create a nonprofit organization called Oscar's Clean Up Club. As president, Medina rallies members of the community to volunteer on projects promoting recycling, picking up trash, planting trees and gardens, and sharing information at local festivals. In 2012, Medina and volunteers conducted cleanups, tire collections, tree and wildflower plantings; planted a vegetable garden for a preschool; and created a butterfly garden.

This young dynamo doesn't let visual and physical impairments stop him. And his work has not gone unnoticed. Last year he received two awards: the Ruthe Jackson Youth Leadership Award from Keep Texas Beautiful and the Jacqueline Kennedy

Onassis Award for Outstanding Service Benefitting Local Communities from the Jefferson Awards for Public Service. Medina was one of only five recipients of this prestigious national award. Medina also served as keynote speaker for the [Laredo Environmental Summit](#).

## Education Texas State University's Bobcat Blend



Students at Texas State University effectively showed that water hyacinth, an invasive plant species, can be used to make nutrient-rich feedstock for compost they have named "Bobcat Blend." One research project combined the plant material, wood chips, and campus food wastes to produce 90 cubic yards of compost worth \$2,500. The compost serves as a model for research that the university is conducting on other invasive species, such as wild taro from the San Marcos River and brown seaweed from the Texas Gulf Coast.

The students created teams to educate their fellows on how to sort waste in the cafeteria so that organic wastes could be used in composting. They even posted "referees" to blow the whistle on students who put trash in the composting bins! Last year they took the show on the road, starting a composting program at San Marcos High School.



## Water Conservation (two winners!) Fort Bliss National Cemetery



The final resting place for 50,000 of America's veteran's had brown spots because turf grass is not well suited to the desert

climate at Fort Bliss, near El Paso. It took more than a year of work—with a team of experts, veterans, and groundkeepers—for a drought-resistant landscape design to be completed.

The plan was then put into action in phases, over a six-year period. Irrigation systems were changed to drip or bubbler systems. And turf grass was replaced with native plants and decomposed granite. As a result, water and energy use were drastically reduced, and the cemetery is now easier to maintain, and is a more attractive and fitting tribute to our fallen heroes.

Fort Bliss National Cemetery now boasts one of the largest water-conserving landscape projects ever completed. The program is so successful that it was replicated at the Bakersfield National Cemetery in California and is being studied by trade associations in the funeral and golf-course industries.

## Dow Chemical Company, Texas Operations



The Dow Chemical Company's Freeport plant sits at land's end between the Brazos River and the Gulf of Mexico. The company

needs considerable amounts of both fresh and salt water to operate. In 2011, a statewide drought, coupled with the company's water needs, led Dow to focus even more resources on water conservation and usage.

Several Dow sites brainstormed ways to increase water supply. Personnel from the Freeport site met with area municipalities, the local water authority, and other local industries to discuss water-conservation strategies. They even held a contest among employees to generate ideas.

An array of encouraging strategies has been put into practice. These include water recycling, a seawater cooling system, reservoir improvements, and reusing treated wastewater from the City of Lake Jackson.

## Agriculture Texas Water Resources Institute, Buck Creek Watershed Partnership



In 2000, the TCEQ added Buck Creek, in the Texas Panhandle, to the federal list of impaired waters because it did not

support contact recreational uses. In 2004, researchers from Texas A&M AgriLife began a project to identify and address the *E. coli* impairment. Over a two-year period, the researchers monitored the creek and found that the *E. coli* levels were periodically elevated. The Buck Creek Watershed Protection Plan Development Project began in 2006, using computer modeling that applied stakeholder feedback to data on actual watershed conditions to identify possible sources.

Stakeholders met with researchers to come up with effective goals and management plans. Landowners took the information and implemented management plans that included prescribed grazing and feral-hog removal. Their efforts reduced bacterial levels by almost 90 percent and the creek has now been removed from the list of impaired water bodies.

Addressing impairments to a water body takes time but—with enough planning and cooperation—watersheds can be restored.

## Individual Mary Jo Bogatto



In 1995, Mary Jo Bogatto had a dream to reestablish native habitat on her Cactus Creek Ranch and turn it into an international learning center. The next year, working with the Texas Nature Conservancy,

Bogatto began to restore plant diversity by adding native plants throughout the ranch. She also added ponds and wetlands to encourage and sustain hospitable habitats for native plant and animal species.

Bogatto is no stranger to conservation. She serves as the president of the Friends of Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge and played a key role in that group's acquisition of 27,000 acres of South Padre Island. As a master naturalist, she is also regularly called on to share her knowledge with others and she frequently hosts groups at the ranch to learn, often using an activity book that she herself developed, *Conservation in the Curriculum*.

The restoration efforts have been so successful that the ranch has been added to the Great Texas Coastal Birding Trail. Bogatto was recently honored with the Lone Star Land Steward Award from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

## Technology Valero's McKee Refinery



Harnessing the wind to provide energy is nothing new in Texas. The Panhandle and Plains still feature the occasional old-style windmill used to pump well water before rural electrification. Now, turbines are a common sight in that part of the world. What is new is how they are being used.

Facing increased future demand, Valero wanted to diversify energy sources and have a positive impact on the environment. So, between December 2008 and August 2009, Valero installed 33 wind turbines to supply electricity to their McKee Refinery.

With community support and the cooperation of local landowners, Valero is integrating its wind farm into the community. It uses the electricity generated by the turbines to not only operate some refinery processes, but also to contribute electricity to the local distribution grid. This serves to mitigate peak demand without increasing air emissions and water usage.

## Innovative Operations Texas Westmoreland Coal Company



When you picture a spent coal mine, a native landscape alive with wildlife and a flowing stream is not the first thing

that comes to mind. However, that is the outcome Texas Westmoreland Coal Company is trying to create in their Jewett Mine restoration project.

Working with the Office of Surface Mining and local landowners, the company began to use new computer software to design a more natural streamflow. New GPS technology on bulldozers allows the operator to precisely cut and fill elevations. This helps manage suitable soils for vegetation. In addition, the company developed a seed mix of site-specific native grasses. By marshaling the expertise of employees, academia, regulators, consultants, and landowners, the company can design and implement safer conditions for employees and neighbors and foster better habitat for wildlife.

## Pollution Prevention Associated Air Center, LP



Associated Air Center in Dallas finishes out custom airplanes and, until recently, used corrosion-inhibiting chemicals that gener-

ated a significant amount of hazardous waste. Due to the constraints of federal regulations, they thought they had no alternatives. However, in consultation with a number of companies and local agencies, they devised new methods that eliminated the use of chromic acid baths. In addition, by switching to a low-VOC epoxy primer for non-structural materials, they met the requirements of federal law and reduced waste-paint output by 400 pounds.

While they pursue changes in federal regulation that would facilitate a complete switch to the low-VOC primer, the company has been able to reduce hazardous-waste output to the point that they are now considered a small-quantity generator rather than a large-quantity generator, and they have a safer working environment for their employees. ♻️

## A Few Facts About This Year's Accomplishments

- Native aquatic plants produced and transferred in Lake Conroe since restoration began: **3,000**
- Reduction in harmful exotic aquatic vegetation in Lake Conroe: **more than 2,000 acres**
- Number of events Oscar's Clean Up Club conducted in 2012: **28**
- Number of trees planted by Oscar's Clean Up Club volunteers: **450**
- Amount of food waste collected last year at Texas State University: **57 tons**
- Reduction in water use at the Fort Bliss National Cemetery due to drought-tolerant landscaping: **90 percent**
- Water saved by conservation strategies at Dow's Freeport plant: **more than 9,000 gallons per minute**
- Air emissions offset by wind power at the McKee Refinery in 2011: **1,200 tons** 🌿



## About the Texas Environmental Excellence Awards

Since 1993, the Governor of Texas and the TCEQ commissioners have been presenting annual awards that spotlight the state's highest achievements in environmental preservation and protection. TEEA honorees are recommended by the governor's blue-ribbon committee every spring. The awards recognize outstanding, innovative, environmental programs in nine categories. This year's awards were presented on May 1 at a banquet in Austin. 🌿



View videos of the award winners on our YouTube site: [youtube.com/user/TCEQNews](https://youtube.com/user/TCEQNews)

For more on the awards, visit: [teea.org](http://teea.org)



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