

Environmental Exchange

A publication of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition

September 2004
News
Perspectives
Book Review

The Houston-Galveston area's most comprehensive coverage of environmental news and events.

Trans-Texas Corridor funding, impact raise more questions

Part two of a two-part look at what the project means for Texas

By Jason Gaskamp

The proposed Trans-Texas Corridor, a 4,000-mile statewide project of highways and rail lines that will crisscross Texas, is facing a wave of criticism. It is estimated that the corridor will consume roughly half a million acres of land, mostly in rural areas, and be 1,000 to 1,200-feet wide.

Most of the harshest criticism of the Trans-Texas Corridor has come from residents in the rural areas of Texas – those who will be directly affected by construction and operation of the project – but opponents stress that the direct and indirect consequences of the plan will affect those

equally who reside in urban areas.

Traditionally, construction of new highways is supported by a combination of state and federal funds. In Texas, most funding for city projects and development of new freeways comes from such dedicated taxes as the gas tax and from vehicle emissions testing and vehicle registration. The method by which the Trans-Texas Corridor will raise funds, however, could change the current system, calling on private investors as well as taxpayers. Local and state toll authorities could play a large part, too, in funding the project.

Critics say the new method represents a form of double taxation. A regional representative of the Houston Group of the Sierra Club, Christine Sagstetter, described the plan

as a means of charging taxpayers twice for the use of toll roads. "The original set-up was for [TxDOT] to accrue the money to construct the road, and then they would charge [citizens] to use it. Now [citizens] help pay to build it, and then they pay to use it."

In a recent telephone interview, Texas Department of Transportation commissioner Ric Williamson explained the new system: The state buys rights-of-way and the toll system finances most of the actual construction. Williamson explained that, of the funding presently proposed, roughly 20 percent will come from motor vehicle registration fees, 10 percent will be from miscellaneous fees and taxes, and 38 percent will be federal money that was reimbursed from

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The challenge facing communities of color

By Catherine Santamaria

A relatively high percentage of minority and low-income communities live in heavily polluted areas, near refineries, superfund



East Harris County residence alongside petrochemical storage tanks.

Baylor College of Medicine Environmental Health Section

sites, or toxic incinerators, bearing most of the burden of the country's pollution. According to research by the California Lung Association, these communities are likely to be located in urban areas where pollution is greater due to a concentration of commerce and people, and where there are rising temperatures.

According to a Sierra Club report, *Latino Communities at Risk*, three out of every five Latinos live near uncontrolled waste sites. A recent study by Harvard University found that the rate of asthma is increasing in children, with the highest rate of increases among African-American and low-income children. A 1983 study found that in Houston the black community made up only 20 percent of the population, while 82 percent of the city's waste management fa-

cilities were located in predominantly black neighborhoods. This landmark study by Bob Bullard was one of the first to tackle the issue, and though the study is old, the medical community feels that the findings continue to be relevant today.

In an interview with the *Texas Observer*, community activist Hilton Kelley outlines the unbalanced relationship that exists between community and industry in his hometown of Port Arthur, Texas. When a community is petitioned as a site for a new refinery or plant, local officials are often promised jobs for residents in exchange for support for local projects. Specific areas, however, may be targeted for unsavory reasons: perceived lack of broad-based opposition to the project, a town in dire need of

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Environmental Exchange

The Environmental Exchange is published by the Citizens' Environmental Coalition (CEC), an information clearing-house and communications network for environmental issues in the Houston-Galveston area. The CEC mission is to improve the quality of life and health in the region through education, dialogue, and collaboration. CEC serves the general public by bringing many diverse groups together to build awareness and stimulate discussion about environmental issues in the region. Programs include forums that give a balanced perspective on environmental issues, and information vehicles that enhance understanding.

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Perspectives

Environment pays price for free trade

By Lesley Nicole Ramsey

On August 9, representatives from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua were in Houston to promote the Central American free trade agreement (CAFTA) to Texans as part of the US Chamber of Commerce's "2004 U.S. Central America and Dominican Republic Ambassadorial Tour and Conference Series." As was to be expected, attendees heard lots of predictions about how CAFTA will be beneficial to all those involved and mark a new era in free trade. CAFTA boosters rallied their audience to come to the aid of the struggling agreement, which they said would not pass if voted on in Congress today.

But if CAFTA is going to be so great for everyone, why is it that a majority of members of Congress don't support it? In fact, most people who learn anything about it don't support it. Based on NAFTA, the North American free trade agreement, the only thing CAFTA can truly promise is more of the same.

Every major national environmental organization has voiced strong opposition to CAFTA, including the Center for International Environmental Law, Defenders of Wildlife, Earthjustice, Friends of the Earth, League of Conservation Voters, National Environmental Trust, Natural Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation, the Sierra Club, and US PIRG. The reasons are many.

Modeled after NAFTA, CAFTA will extend the shortcomings and utter failings of NAFTA to five struggling Latin American countries (Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Costa Rica) and the Dominican Republic. Like NAFTA, CAFTA poses its greatest threat to the environment through a combination of insufficient enforcement for basic environmental protections, coupled with NAFTA's unprecedented corporate rights provisions.

Central America faces serious environmental challenges that vary from country to country, all resulting in severe impacts on the region's efforts to achieve sustainable development. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, 75 percent of Central America's population already lives in conditions where pollution of both air and water, and depletion of water, have resulted in increased violence and diminishing public

health standards. Unfortunately, CAFTA does not require member countries to adopt a set of basic standards for environmental quality and protection. What's more, the agreement does not even ensure that member countries enforce their existing domestic environmental laws.

CAFTA's investor rules would undermine US and Central American environmental standards by allowing foreign investors to challenge legitimate laws and regulations before international tribunals, bypassing domestic courts. In bringing these cases, foreign investors can demand monetary compensation for the implementing of legitimate environmental protections. For developing Central American countries, the simple threat of costly investor challenges could freeze adoption of environmental standards.

In Costa Rica, for example, the government has been able to fend off Texas company Harken Energy in its attempt to sue that government for environmental regulations intended to protect the coastline from offshore drilling and open pit mining. Harken wants \$57 billion for the law's impact on potential lost profits. Costa Rica's annual gross domestic product is only around \$17 billion, and the government's entire annual budget around \$5 billion. So far, Costa Rica has been able to defend its protective rules through its domestic court system. Under CAFTA, Harken will be able to bypass that system and take its claim to a secret tribunal where trade lawyers will evaluate Costa Rican law only in terms of its burden on business.

And therein lies the fundamental flaw underlying CAFTA and other so-called free trade agreements. They are designed to subject all kinds of domestic policy to the forces of the free market, seeking only to protect the interests of the big corporations that supposedly drive that market. After ten years of NAFTA, we know that the free market does not take care of human needs or support life-sustaining environmental protections. We must reject CAFTA and any free trade agreement that promotes corporate profit above all other concerns.

For more information about CAFTA, visit www.texasfairtrade.org, or email Lesley@Texasfairtrade.org.

Lesley Nicole Ramsey is director of the Texas Fair Trade Coalition.

Green Reading

Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update

Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers, Dennis Meadows (Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2004)

By Chuck Wright

In 1972, *The Limits to Growth* delivered perhaps the most important possible message to modern humans:

- physical growth of the human population and our industrial output cannot continue indefinitely,
- the limits are not too far off, probably closer than a century,
- there is a strong possibility that, following a period of overstressing Earth's systems (overshoot), the quality of human existence will decline significantly (collapse),
- choices could be made to avoid this future.

Meadows, Randers, and Meadows based their conclusions on a systems model that described in mathematical terms such factors as population growth, industrial output, agricultural production, and pollution, and how they relate to each other. In essence they created a tool kit for studying how world systems, the systems in which we live, behave.

The original book, with its computer simulations of possible futures, created quite a stir, rising onto the bestseller lists. It also inspired a generation of researchers to study how we humans relate to Earth.

Yet it appears that most people who read

the book misunderstood it, taking its computer simulations as predictions of a doomsday future. In fact, the point was not to predict the future, but to present new ways of thinking about our interaction with the Earth, and some tools for analyzing it, in the hope that they would be used to chart a sustainable future.

In the intervening 30 years, the world has proceeded in a way not too different from the standard run from the 1972 *LTG*. The dominant belief in perpetual growth as necessary and beneficial has, if anything, strengthened. The central message of *LTG* has been dismissed by many economists as simply wrong.

Fortunately, Meadows, Randers, and Meadows have not heeded the claim that their effort was wasted. They continued to be driven by facts, evidence, and analysis. And they have believed that their message was too important to die.

The 30-year update of the original (there was also a 1992 update entitled *Beyond the Limits*) presents the same essential message as in 1972. Minor tweaks have been made to the computer model, but its essential operation is about the same. Charts and tables have been updated, and the authors have made an extra effort to be clear in two spe-

cific areas where they feel they were misunderstood before.

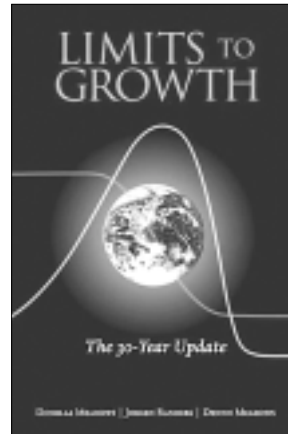
The first is in explaining what system modeling is all about, why it is a useful tool for understanding world systems, and inviting the reader to consider seriously how the modeling might be right or wrong. The second is in explaining the notions of overshoot and collapse, and trying to convince readers that these are very real possibilities for our world system.

We now have many fewer choices than we had 30 years ago. What was possibility then is reality now. We are now in a genuine state of overshoot, living beyond the Earth's capacity. If we seriously work on it, we might avoid damaging Earth's support systems so deeply that a collapse results. The difficult

part is that the necessary changes require a complete rethinking of the most basic assumptions of the world economy.

The authors' conclusions will probably frighten the thoughtful reader, but if you find their conclusions plausible, the question immediately becomes, what can you do to help reverse overshoot and create worldwide sustainability?

Chuck Wright is a renewable energy consultant who has served on the board of the Texas Solar Energy Society, <http://txses.org>.



Trans-Texas

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previous highway projects.

Williamson rejected the charge of double taxation, calling it a weak and illogical argument. Williamson focused instead on the aspect of continuous development and expansion, in which tax money would pay for the first phases of construction and additional revenues taken in through tolls and investments would be used to further that construction.

Corridorwatch.org, a nonprofit organization challenging the claims and benefits of the Trans-Texas Corridor, holds that "private investment will involve bonds and bondholders, who naturally want to protect their money and will insist on terms and conditions that will be contrary to the public good."

Williamson said some sections of the cor-

ridor are desperately needed now, giving as an example the proposed corridor paralleling I-35 from San Antonio to Dallas. Toll revenue coupled with taxes would be used to build such currently needed roadways, while future highway needs will be determined, for the most part, by investors as part of an equity ownership system.

Another issue of concern to metropolitan areas is the impact the project will *not* have on congestion, air quality, and the concentration of transportation. Corridorwatch claims the Trans-Texas Corridor will provide little, if any relief for large metropolitan areas, such as Houston, that suffer most from traffic problems. Instead, cities will be left to find their own solutions to congestion and pollution but – having no direct link to the corridor project – without receiving additional funding to implement those solutions.

The *Lone Star Report's* coverage of the Trans-Texas Corridor in 2002 projected that state population growth will increase by 41.6 percent, the number of registered vehicles will go up by 41.3 percent, and daily vehicle miles traveled will increase 83.7 percent by the year 2025. The same report stated that these increases will be concentrated in the large urban centers and not distributed evenly around the state.

"We must prepare for growth in a way that compensates for pollution, congestion, and other current problems so future generations don't have the same problems. We're looking at what makes sense from a long-term perspective, which is a key focus of the project," said Williamson.

The prediction among most state politicians and agencies, according to Williamson,

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Pollution

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lowering its unemployment rates, a system that favors industry over society.

In Houston's East End, "there are so many strange smells, you know something is wrong," said resident Henry Garcia. There are a number of industrial facilities in this heavily Latino area, where all 15 miles of Freeway Texas 225 are lined with refineries, chemical plants, and tank farms. "The people who run the plants change, the technology changes, but the rules stay the same," he continued, referring to a grandfather clause in Texas environmental law that applies to plants over a certain age.

It is often difficult for those monitoring pollution in an industrial area to trace pollution back to one particular plant or one particular source – and in Houston difficult to demonstrate a causal connection between pollution and illness. Various organizations and institutions (such as the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, Harvard University, Galveston-Houston Association for Smog Prevention, and Baylor University) have conducted studies they believe show clear links between so-called smoke-stack pollutants and illnesses in the surrounding communities. But it is just as easy to claim that the occurrence of these diseases in communities near the plants is due

to cigarette smoking, diet, living conditions, or proximity to vehicular pollution, as shown in research by the California Lung Association and University of Texas School of Public Health at Houston.

There are also no rules governing how long a company can wait after purchasing land and obtaining a permit before deciding to build an industry facility, said Juan Parras of Texas Southern University's Environmental Law and Justice Center. "[Companies wanting to build a plant] can buy the land, get the permit, and then sit on it until local resistance has died down," he said. "If there is any opposition to the project, it is strong at first, but then, once people realize that the process could take many years, they give up. They get burnt out by the system, the long court process, the bureaucracy." Parras and his colleagues at TSU are pressing state legislators to limit permit validity and to prompt developers to begin building within a certain time frame.

It was not until 1994 that the US EPA's Office of Environmental Justice was established in order to address misrepresentation of environmental concerns in low-income communities and communities of color. But ten years after its inception, the OEJ has not been fulfilling its promise to the people it was designed to protect. In an evaluation report published in March 2004, the EPA inspector general noted that the EPA has

neither fully implemented nor "consistently integrated environmental justice into its day-to-day operations," because it has not identified minority and low-income populations that need protection.

While, on the one hand, the federal government has not identified communities that need protection under Environmental Justice rules, on the other, the communities, themselves, are sometimes slow to identify and act on the environmental threats in their neighborhoods. In some of the communities most affected by pollution, there is simply a lack of awareness of the problem. Latino communities (especially those with a high percentage of new arrivals) face numerous challenges that may prevent them from taking a more active role in defending the environment: many members' immigration status or inherent mistrust of government; a population with many under the voting age or otherwise ineligible to vote.

There is a catch-22 facing the communities that co-exist with plants that pollute – in standing up to industry and forcing them to clean up their act, there is the threat that industry will retaliate by transferring jobs (decreasing the tax base) or even by preventing new jobs from being created. Plants and refineries frequently contribute to the well-being of the town or neighboring community by donating money to education and cultural events and including residents on advisory panels.

The US House of Representatives recently passed legislation that, if approved by the Senate, will allow refineries located in areas of high unemployment to circumvent federal and state environmental regulations. While this may rejuvenate some local economies, there will undoubtedly be a trade-off, perhaps not visible in the short-term.

There is pressure on government agencies by grassroots environmental groups for restored air quality monitoring. Seven environmental organizations filed a lawsuit in response to the EPA's 2004 rule change. Activist groups are teaching their neighbors how to have an impact on local politics and the decisions that directly affect them, and more studies are being done to show a link between the amount and type of particulate matter released into the air and the health problems that residents of low-income areas have.

Catherine Santamaria works for the Houston World Affairs Council, an educational nonprofit.



Galveston-Houston Association for Smog Prevention

Houston's refineries and plants are often surrounded by residential neighborhoods where homes and schools rest in the haze of dangerous pollutants.

ATVs destroy natural habitat

By Jennifer Lorenz

Anyone working to conserve land in the Houston area has management issues with which they have to contend. Among the issues that rise to the top are *feral hogs* and their three litters per female per year, which destroy wetland areas, and *tallow trees*, the highly invasive tree that won't be tamed except by time-intensive manual labor.

Issues quickly rising to the level of high concern are *trespassing* and *all-terrain vehicle use*. What began as a minor hindrance has in just the past few years ballooned into a major ecological problem. Hundreds and, on weekends, thousands of ATVers ride their large, knobby tires over sensitive areas on almost any open piece of land in or around Houston.

But what is of critical and immediate concern is the increase of these ATVers who "go muddin'" with their vehicles in area streams and rivers. In the Houston area, pristine is not a word that people often use to describe the ribbons of usually brown water flowing through our bayou wilderness area.

But just to the north of downtown Houston flows the beautiful liquid border of Spring Creek, which separates Harris and Montgomery County. On a good day, you can canoe down this creek and see deer, eagles circling overhead, fish jumping out of the clear (yes, clear) water and be amazed that so close to a thriving metropolis there still exists a wilderness area that contains 250-year-old trees.

But that's on a good day, and there are not many good days anymore on Spring Creek. The region, particularly from I-45 going east to the San Jacinto River, has been taken over by ATVers who daily trespass with their vehicles onto this formerly pristine area, damaging the ecosystem and ruining the calm and quiet so many others go there to seek out. Just a few months ago, Paddlesports, a low-impact recreational business located in Spring, opted to end their weekend canoe and kayak tours, citing not just the ATV noise but actual fear for their lives with the aggressive nature of some of the drivers and their ever-increasing numbers. Landowners and officials say along the creek they have seen ATVers carrying guns and chainsaws. Evidence of alcohol consumption is often left behind.



Spring Creek ATV Park

Hummer Parade along sensitive sugar-sand banks of Spring Creek.

The National Park Service says that ATVs are one of their primary concerns now, and state parks throughout the country are racing to fund biology studies to see whether they can verify that increased ATV use is affecting wildlife habitats in a significant manner. Biologists point out that the unnatural depressions and ruts being formed in the landscape by these vehicles are impeding the movement of a whole host of animals. Some soil scientists currently estimate that the natural recovery time for highly used ATV areas should be measured in lifetimes, not years.

What we know about Spring Creek is that the multitude of mammals, birds, and other animals that live there can only move up and down the creek in a fairly narrow floodway area. Farther north or south they encounter intense development. ATV noise and traffic along the creek certainly disturbs them. Biologists fear decreased numbers due to stress because many of the young of these animals sleep during the day.

The newly created 4-wheel corridors further fragment the forested creek area by inhibiting animals' access to the creek. This negative impact does not bode well for the rare Swainson's warbler, which brings ecotourism dollars to these understory-filled woods as people from around the world fly in for a sighting of the small pink-legged avian for their bird lists.

The impact to animals is further intensified by the ensuing loss of plant life. Much

of the area along Spring Creek includes wetlands. These eons-old special soil areas function as kidneys for the water system, naturally filtering out impurities before the water flows down into Lake Houston - Houston's primary water source. The wetland areas are characterized by special plants. Unlike the long root systems of tall grass prairie areas, wetland plants have shallow root systems. When these are churned up by 4-wheelers, they are gone forever.

Besides filtering our water, these sensitive wetland areas are home to highly specific plant communities needed by specific animals. Birds feed on butterflies and other insects that need these host plants (generally just one plant species). Destroy the plants and the circle of life is broken.

But besides ruining habitat areas, the 4-wheelers are causing more extensive damage to the community as a whole by eroding the stream beds at a faster than natural pace. Spring Creek provides a critical flood buffer zone for hundreds of thousands of people who live in its watershed area. The unnatural gullies and trenches being formed are not allowing the area to perform its natural function of holding water back and slowing it down.

And for people who like to fish, the loss of aquatic habitat caused by the 4-wheelers running in the middle of the creek is extreme. Their tires cause higher turbidity in the water, having a negative impact on fish

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Eco Notes

Bush administration lightens pesticide reviews for endangered species

The *Associated Press* reported that a new Bush administration rule allows the Environmental Protection Agency to approve pesticides without consulting wildlife agencies to determine if the chemical might harm plants and animals protected by the Endangered Species Act.

The *AP* reported that under the Endangered Species Act, EPA has been required to consult with Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service and Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service before it licenses a new pesticide. But officials noted that this process has been side-stepped in most cases in the past decade.

"The heads of the two wildlife services will presume EPA's review work is adequate in cases where EPA doesn't seek a consultation," the *AP* reported.

Proposed toll road for Texas Highway 249

The Texas Department of Transportation is considering converting Texas 249 into a toll road from Beltway 8 to FM 1774.

This proposed toll road would run through northwest Harris County and Montgomery County, covering a 19-mile area that could affect many residents including those in Spring Cypress, Pinehurst, and Tomball.

The driving force behind the conversion

is simply funding, according to TxDOT. The funds generated from the tolls would be used to pay for improvements and proposed expansions for Texas 249, which, according to TxDOT, could be constructed much faster with toll revenue than if the department had to wait for other funding. Though estimates have not been completed, TxDOT is projecting that the drivers will pay 10 to 12 cents per mile for tolls.

This new proposal is part of a wave of new toll road projects popping up across Texas, the most recent in Austin, where many Austinites voiced their disapproval to no avail. Many of these projects result from Texas House Bill 3588, which allows free roads to be turned into toll roads.

The House bill and the 249 project are being challenged as double taxation; tax dollars are used to build the road and, later, citizens are charged to use the road.

About 500 people attended a Texas Department of Transportation public meeting in August. Some attendees mentioned other projects, including I-69 and Grand Parkway, and expressed concern that there was a larger vision that was not being disclosed.

More information can be found at www.SH249tollroad.com.

Natural gas prices force some chemical plants to close

A Louisiana newspaper, the *Times Picayune*, recently reported that a series of Louisiana chemical plants have been shut down, claiming that the high price of natural gas is causing them to go under.

These plants, including Cytec Industries'

ammonia and methanol facilities, rely on natural gas to produce the chemicals.

According to the article, some industry spokespeople are pointing to environmentalists, claiming that they are blocking access to many natural gas sources – for example, the Rocky Mountains, where industry leaders have tried to gain access to tap the natural gas available there, but Congress approved a moratorium on drilling in the area.

The article stated that, since 1999, about 4,000 chemical-making jobs have been lost in Louisiana and that economists estimate at least 1,800 more will be lost this year and next.

A far-reaching fire makes a point about pollution

A recent *New York Times* article discussed new scientific findings that confirmed that local pollution doesn't remain local for long.

According to the article, two NASA satellites, Terra and Aqua, tracked ash and soot from the Alaskan black spruce forest fires, finding it dispersed over coastal Louisiana and beyond.

The *New York Times* reported that the satellites later tracked the Alaskan smoke north through New York City and New England, "where local weather forecasters noted a milky haze." Smoke veils from the fires even later were recorded heading toward Greenland, carried by Arctic air currents.

Such studies are helping to prove that local pollution has global effects. For instance, the article says scientists are predicting that, by 2010, a third of California's ozone will originate in Asia.

Trans-Texas

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is that people will move to Texas, regardless, if there is an elaborate, attractive infrastructure in place, because of what Texas has to offer, mainly no state income tax and scant regulation of business.

Jason Gaskamp is a student at the University of Houston who has written for the Daily Cougar.



Terry Little, Katy Prairie Conservancy

The Trans-Texas Corridor could consume more than one-half million acres of land, some of which will cut through the sensitive Katy Prairie.

Coalition Notes

Flooding In Houston

Metropolitan Area free seminar

A free seminar, "Flooding in Houston Metropolitan Area, Past-Present-Future," will be offered as part of the Houston in the 21st Century program recently created to educate the public concerning technical issues that affect the Houston metropolitan community.

The seminar comprises five sessions covering the many flooding issues facing Houston. Sessions will tackle the connections between Houston's flooding history and present flooding experiences, as well as flood insurance programs, regulations, technical challenges, and more. A variety of qualified flood control experts will conduct the sessions, including representatives from the Harris County Flood Control District, the Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition, and Dodson and Associates Hydrologists and Civil Engineers.

The seminar is sponsored by the Engineering, Science & Technology Council of Houston and the Harris County Flood Control District and will be held Saturday, September 11, at Cy-Fair College, Building 5 (College Center Auditorium), 9191 Barker Cypress Road. The seminar will run from 9 am to 3 pm. For more information, call Dick Smith at (281) 469-5161.

Urban Harvest announces opening of Bayou City Farmers' Market

After months of planning and anticipation, Urban Harvest is pleased to announce the opening of The Bayou City Farmers' Market. The market will be open September 18 from 8 am until noon in the back parking lot of 3000 Richmond Ave. The market will be open year round each Saturday, providing a variety of wonderful, locally grown, farm-fresh produce.

Urban Harvest is encouraging everyone to come out and enjoy the many benefits that a farmers' market can provide. They are emphasizing the health benefits of farmers' markets for the consumers of the produce, and the financial benefits to local growers and the local community, saying that locally grown fruits and vegetables taste better because they are fresher and need not be

squash-proof or rot-proof shipping varieties. The group also points out that the unusual varieties offered for eating in season can excite restaurant chefs and home cooks.

The site for the market is capable of handling significant numbers of vendors and customers. For more updates and volunteer or vendor information, visit the Urban Harvest Web site at www.urbanharvest.org, or call (713) 880-5540.

Native Plant Society of Texas Wildscapes workshop

The Houston chapter of the Native Plant Society of Texas and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department is holding their seventh annual Wildscapes Workshop and Plant Sale: "Landscaping with native plants to attract wildlife." The event will be held Saturday, September 11, from 9 am to 3 pm and will include a book sale, a plant sale (with hard to find plants), exhibits, door prizes, and more. There will also be several lectures including discussions of the botanical heritage of Texas, native plants in your landscape, wildflowers, and question and answer sessions. The sale will be held at the University of Houston, main campus. For more information or to register, contact Glenn Olson at www.houston@npsot.org or (281) 345-4151.

East Texas Herpetological Society annual conference and expo

The East Texas Herpetological Society's big event is fast approaching. The annual conference, breeder expo, and educational exhibit will be held from Friday, September 10, to Sunday, September 12, and will feature a keynote presentation, banquet, auction, and breeder expo and sale. This year's event will be at the Crowne Plaza and will feature several guest speakers covering a range of topics from updates on the Timber Rattlesnakes in the Northeast, to herpetological discoveries in the Mosquito Coast, to caring for fresh water turtles, and much more. For more information, contact Buzz Jehle at (713) 464-6023, or dxer@oxr.com or visit www.eths.org.

2004 Bay Day Festival

The Galveston Bay Foundation will hold the 2004 Bay Day Festival on Saturday, September 18, from 9 am to 4 pm, at Sylvan Beach in La Porte, Texas. This event will feature a variety of bay activities including hands-on exhibits, activities, and demonstrations, as well as live music, food courts, and arts and crafts. Some activities and demonstrations include water, canoe, scull, and kayak demonstrations, wetlands exhibits, and a fishing tournament. Bay Day is focused on developing public awareness of the diverse resources and multiple uses of the Galveston Bay system and is free and open to the public. For more information, visit www.galvbay.org, or call (281) 332-3381. Ext. 207.

Synergy Award winners announced

The 2004 Synergy Award recipients have been selected. For the past eight years, the Citizens' Environmental Coalition has recognized outstanding environmental excellence in several categories. This year's recipients are:

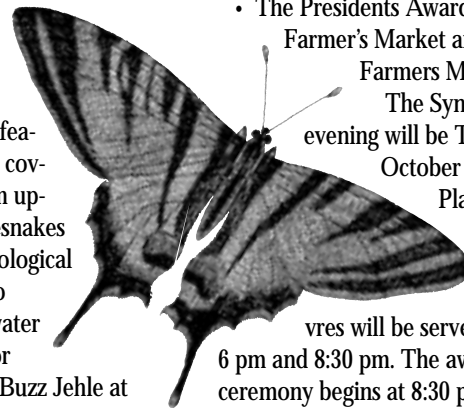
- Army and Sarah Emmett Environmental Conservation award: Chris Sagstetter.
- Community Activist Awards: John Wilson of GHASP, and the Houston-Galveston Citizen Air Monitoring Project.
- Media Award: Josh Harkinson
- Corporate Awareness Award: Wabash Antique and Feed Store
- Environmental Education Award: Kathleen Ownby
- Government Award: Issa Dadoush of the City of Houston
- Sustainable Planning Awards: US Green Building Council and to Central Houston/Downtown District
- Founders' Award: Ann Lents
- The Presidents Award: Houston

Farmer's Market and the Midtown Farmers Market.

The Synergy Awards evening will be Tuesday,

October 12, at the Crowne Plaza-Downtown, 1700 Smith Street. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres will be served between

6 pm and 8:30 pm. The awards ceremony begins at 8:30 pm. Tickets are \$50 per person, tables of six are available for \$500. Dress is business casual. Contact CEC at synergy@cechouston.org or (713) 524-4232.



ATVs

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populations. Where they drive on the creek beds, the 4-wheelers severely compact the soil on tree roots, also affecting fish populations. Compacting their soil leads over time to the demise of trees. Trees shade the creek, lowering the temperature of the water; the higher the temperature, the less dissolved oxygen, the fewer fish.

Many ATVers are not aware of Senate Bill 155, which went into effect in January 2004. It is now illegal to ride wheeled vehi-

cles in navigable waters. The new law was specifically designed to lessen the above-listed ecological damage associated with ATV use. What's important to note is that Spring Creek, from Panther Branch just west of I-45 in Spring, is where navigable waters begin, and they continue all the way downstream to the San Jacinto River.

ATVs arrived on the scene about 20 years ago and have matured into playthings more than work horses. The high torque that their engines/transmissions generate enables them to chew up the ground really well. In the wet areas where their drivers like to

take them, damaging soil and vegetation is unavoidable. At www.springcreekatv-park.com you can find hundreds of individuals living out this vision of no-holds-barred creek access. Also viewable are Hummer Parades, with these 3-ton machines driving along the sugar

sands of Spring Creek, which took millions of years to reach their natural resting destination from granite farther north.

The Spring Creek Greenway Project is a newly-formed and unique combination of Harris and Montgomery County agencies and environmental non-profits, including Legacy Land Trust, working together to protect a shared precious natural resource. Focusing as it does on this liquid boundary and its floodways and floodplains, the project's preservation goal is put in jeopardy with the continued rampant use of these vehicles.

Spring Creek belongs to the people of the state of Texas but foremost it is home to multitudes of plants and animals whose sensitive ecosystem is now under constant attack. Let's not forget that our society should be remembered not just by what we build but by what we refuse to destroy.

Jennifer Lorenz is executive director of the Legacy Land Trust.



Tree root damage caused by ATVs along Spring Creek in area slated to be Legacy Land Trust Preserve.

Citizens' Environmental Coalition

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