

South Belt-Ellington Leader

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BSTF signs preserve to LLT



On Friday, 144 acres of property south of Dixie Farm Road near the south side of the Brio Superfund Site was transferred as a Clear Creek Preserve conservation easement. The land is not open for public visitation and is designed to be preserved for natural habitat. The BSTF retains ownership while Legacy Land Trust holds the acreage as an easement. Present at the signing were, from left to right, site manager of Brio John Danna; LLT board member Cliff Meinhardt; Brio former site manager Larry Engle; LLT chairman Bill Turner; LLT board member Tom Roche; publisher and owner of the *South Belt-Ellington Leader* newspaper and chair of the Brio Community Assistance Group Marie Flickinger; and BSTF attorney Brad Raffle. The transaction has been approximately 10 years in the making and is the settlement of a legal agreement between the state of Texas and the BSTF. BSTF was required to donate the land which is near the superfund site but does not include any of the designated superfund project.

Photo by Jennifer Lorenz of Legacy

BSTF transfers land easement to be permanently preserved

Papers have now been signed officially completing plans for a 144-acre easement tract to become part of the conservation project mitigation plan for the Brio Superfund Task Force. The action was mandated by the consent decree placed upon the BSTF trustees. Despite the fact this was mandated, it's a positive preservation project, said Legacy Land Trust Chairman Bill Turner. "This permanent land preservation agreement between our organization and BSTF, ensures this property will forever remain in its natural state. Any portion of Clear Creek which can be preserved is a great, green step forward."

Before the agreement could be signed, LLT performed a thorough flora and fauna baseline inventory of the property. Done in May of 2005, the property was found to be host to 29 different tree species, 12 shrub species, 78 different flowering plant species, 25 different bird species and numerous other animals including reptiles and amphibians. Of special note were numerous "ladies-tresses" orchids, (*spiranthes vernalis*) which is a rare orchid species.

Besides maintaining the habitat for these animal and plant species, the property will also be managed for invasives. "Keeping down the numbers of Chinese tallow trees and deep-root-

ed sedge is an important aspect of this agreement," said LLT Executive Director Jennifer Lorenz. "If invasives are allowed to expand, they will take over the native plants and give them no room. Just leaving a property alone is not enough due to invasive plant and animal species. A property has to be managed to maintain its conservation values." While there were cows grazing on the property before, because the property is mostly sensitive forested wetlands, the cattle had to be taken off the property.

The property has a created wetland which will be planted with native wetland tree and plant species next year. It should become habitat for wood ducks. One resident alligator has found a home there already.

The property is located on the south side of Dixie Farm Road, near the Brio South and DOP south superfund sites and Mud Gully.

The conservation easement, a permanent legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust, will preserve the tract. Conservation easements are in perpetuity set aside for preservation. LLT holds 21 conservation easements protecting more than 4,000 acres in the Houston area. For more information on LLT, visit www.llt.org or call at 713-524-2100.