

Katy Prairie Pothole Restoration

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The Katy Prairie lies in the Texas Coastal Plain, and encompasses over a thousand square miles, bounded by the Brazos River on the southwest, pine-hardwood forest on the north, and the city of Houston on the east. Historically, the Katy Prairie was characterized as a poorly drained tall-grass prairie subject to periodic fires and containing a considerable amount of wetland areas.

Within the last 100 years, most of the Katy Prairie, including the wetlands, has been impacted by various forms of agriculture including rice, corn, and cattle grazing. A majority of depressional wetlands were drained for dry-land farming or filled during land-leveling operations for rice production. Few examples of undisturbed Katy Prairie depressional wetlands or their surrounding native grassland communities exist today.

In addition, urban development demands spreading west from the City of Houston have claimed more than half of the Katy Prairie's open space. Much of that development occurred within the last 20 years. In short, the entire Katy Prairie, its associated wetlands, and their functions and values have been and continue to be under significant pressure. Therefore, projects that preserve, restore, or create native upland and wetland habitats within the remaining Katy Prairie help maintain very important ecological functions in western Harris County.

SWCA Environmental Consultants and the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD) embarked on a wetland restoration project, a 5-acre prairie pothole creation and restoration effort on a divide between the Cypress Creek and Addicks Reservoir watershed, near the intersection of House Hahl and Katy-Hockley roads in Waller, Texas.

In order to recapture the land's natural contours, the project's landscape design is based upon aerial photos of the region from the 1930s. The technique has recently come into

use by the Texas Department of Parks and Wildlife (TPWD), which has been working in conjunction with HCFCD.

Restoration efforts will restore and preserve wetland functions and values that have been, and continue to be, lost on the Katy Prairie. These functions and values (i.e. floodwater storage, particulate retention, wildlife habitat, etc.) directly benefit the communities of western Harris County, including the City of Houston.