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[BUSINESS](#)
[FEATURES](#)
[OUR TOWN](#)
[WEEKEND](#)
[OPINION](#)
[CLASSIFIEDS](#)

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## Consultant Want To Develop Sanctuary

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By Skip Descant  
The Morning News

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FAYETTEVILLE - Bruce Shackleford hates Poison Hemlock.

It's an invasive non-native herbaceous plant growing in the Woolsey Wet Prairie Sanctuary. When he saw one on a drive through the sanctuary Thursday morning, he abruptly stopped his Toyota FJ Cruiser, got out, and yanked the plant up, roots and all.

But the plant he really hates - and this one's even more invasive - is Tall Fescue, a non-native grass covering nearly half the 28-acre sanctuary area. Much of the Fescue and other non-natives have been culled through burning or a careful application of herbicides applied at just the right time in the year so not to damage the native plants.

This is all part of the ongoing vegetative management in the Woolsey wetland sanctuary next to Fayetteville's new Westside Wastewater Treatment Plant. The area was set aside as a mitigation site when the treatment plant was planned.

Shackleford, an environmental consultant and president of Environmental Consulting Operations, wants to grow the sanctuary to nearly 70 acres by including surrounding city-owned land, part of which is a natural savannah region. Shackleford says his next step is to set up a foundation to raise money for the wetland prairie preserve and eventually open the site to the public.

"This is a very ambitious undertaking, but I will not be afraid to think 'big' or to ask everyone from the average citizen of Fayetteville, including the mayor and city council, to large corporations to provide financial sponsorships," said Shackleford of his plan to establish a public-private partnership foundation to raise the money needed for park features like trails, kiosks and an observation tower.

"I'm going to go to the public. I'm going to go to Tyson. I'm going to go to Wal-Mart. And I'll say, if you build this kiosk, then it'll be your company's logo that we put on it," he explained. The plan to expand the area has the green light from Fayetteville wastewater and sewer committee and will eventually need the blessing from other groups like the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Fayetteville City Council.

But the idea was met with a solid round of approval at Thursday's meeting of the Fayetteville Council of Neighborhoods.

"I think it's a great idea," said JoAnn Kvamme. "We should be doing this in other parts of town."

And other residents commented on the particular nature of public park space going to wetland prairie preservation, since this is somewhat an anomaly.

"We've got some," said Bob Caulk, of lands set aside for natural preservation. "But they tend to be the tree-covered hillsides. And that's great. But we need more of this type of thing."

Other residents have wondered about odors coming from the nearby sewerage treatment plant. But with its modern high-tech design, the plant is all but odorless.

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"Do you smell anything," Shackleford offered on a walk through the area Thursday morning. "And we're downwind."

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"It's almost miraculous how this has evolved," remarked David Jergens, Fayetteville's wastewater treatment plant director, remarking on the development of the wetland prairie. "It shows that Mother Nature is a whole lot smarter than all of us combined."

Some residents wonder if even the image of sewer treatment plant in the background might work as a hindrance.

"My only concern is how that wastewater treatment plant nearby will affect things, from a visual perspective," said resident Susan Jenkins.

"But I do think it's a great idea," she added.

When the wetland sanctuary was begun three years ago, researchers were able to name about 50 native species. Today, 294 plant species have been identified. One of the latest to be awakened from generations of lying dormant is the Arkansas Sedge, a native grass.

"I gathered seeds and then started them at home," said Shackleford who has seeds wrapped in moist tissue paper in his refrigerator at home. He plans to germinate them and plant the grass around other parts of the sanctuary.

Also, shore birds, song birds and migratory birds, along with deer, cotton rats - too many frogs to mention - and dozens of other animals now call the sanctuary home.

"Now right over there," said Shackleford, stopping his Toyota on a drive through the wetland and pointing to a marshy area where two ducks were gliding by, "are a couple of mallards, a hen and a drake. They've probably got a nest out here."

Preserving these landscapes is not just about preserving the plant and animal habitats residing in them. It's also about preserving a slice of Arkansas heritage, says Shackleford. He notes prairies and savannahs - which are somewhat like prairies, but with small clumpings of trees and slight mounds - are disappearing with encroaching development. But through preservation and proper management, these landscapes can return in a relative short time.

"It'll be in five years," said Shackleford, when asked how much longer it would take to have the Woolsey area returned to the state it was in during the early 1800s.

"We've just got to keep tweaking it, keep managing it," he remarked. "I have tremendous passion in this project and just have a great vision of what this can be."

## Wetland Prairies

Wetland prairies are grasslands "pimpled" with slight mounds that create areas of varying degrees of wetness during different times of the year. This hydrological pattern establishes an ecosystem known for its rich plant and animal life.

Source: Bruce Shackleford, environmental consultant with Environmental Consulting Operations.

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