

CHIHUAHUAN DESERT RESEARCH INSTITUTE

# EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS REPORT

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NOVEMBER THROUGH JANUARY, 2012

P.O. BOX 905  
FORT DAVIS, TX 79734

# PLANNING

**Goal: Take a close look at our operations and programs through the planning process to identify strengths, weaknesses, and develop strategies to take CDRI to the next level.**

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## STRATEGIC PLANNING MEETINGS

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Board and staff members were invited to participate in a strategic planning meeting held on November 29, 2011. The meeting was facilitated by Dr. Suzette Ashworth. A draft of the strategic plan was distributed and discussed, revised, and refined by the participants. The ideas from the meeting were incorporated into a second draft that was reviewed at a strategic planning meeting on January 23, 2012. Comments and suggestions from this meeting were incorporated into a third draft that is being distributed to the board and stakeholders for review and comments.

# INFRASTRUCTURE

**Goal: To provide appropriate, safe, attractive facilities for researchers, visitors, staff, collections, and programs.**

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## CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

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### ALVIDREZ ARCHITECTS, INC. CHOSEN TO DESIGN NEW BUILDING

The Facility Subcommittee interviewed four architectural teams about producing a conceptual design for the proposal Education/Science facility at the Nature Center. Alvidrez Architects, Inc. of El Paso were chosen and recommended to the full board at the November board meeting. The board approved the recommendation.

C. Hoyt has been working with the architects, providing preliminary information as requested and helping to put together the open design workshop scheduled for January. An invitation to participate in the workshop was emailed to over 600 people.

### DESIGN WORKSHOP HELD IN JANUARY

Architects from Alvidrez Architects, Inc. and landscape architect Coy Talley, Principal for Talley Associates, conducted a design workshop at the CDRI in mid-January. During the three-day workshop, architects, staff, and stakeholders worked to discuss needs, put together a preliminary design, and decide on a location for the proposed facility. The information gathered was taken back to El Paso where the team will develop conceptual plans and present them at the February board meeting.

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## SPRING CLEANING IN THE WINTER

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CDRI staff took a week in early January, closed the gates, opened up closets and storage buildings, and cleaned. Everything was pulled out and sorted into piles of things to keep, things to put into a garage sale, things to Freecycle,

and things to throw away. In this way, tools and fasteners were consolidated and made accessible; tools were cleaned and stored properly, file boxes were archived in a single, water-tight location, and years worth of trash was cleared out.

We held a garage sale in January (raising about \$300) and advertised everything left over on Freecycle. Almost everything has been cleared out giving us useable storage space in several closets and two storage buildings.

Much of the material was moved to the Maintenance Building where Mark Foreman constructed shelves, installed hanging shelves on the walls, and organized tools and equipment for easy access and efficient storage.

M. Foreman spent much of his winter break from school cleaning up and organizing the area around the maintenance building and greenhouses. He completed spreading gravel around the building to stabilize the soil and reduce dust; disposed of old paint that had corroded through the cans; organized the tool shed and maintenance building, and installed a washer and dryer (donated by C. Hoyt) in the maintenance building for CDRI and on-site volunteers to use.

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### **PROBLEMS WITH THE MAINTENANCE BUILDING**

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A couple of problems persist with the new maintenance building:

- There are two leaks in the roof that haven't been repaired yet. We are working with Herman Acosta to get the leaks repaired.
- We have received two certified letters from a plumbing supplier threatening to put a lien on the maintenance building because Vicks Plumbing has not paid their bills for materials used on our project. We are working with Burton Sandefur (the general contractor) to resolve this situation.

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### **FREEZE DAMAGE CONTROL**

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Winter is here again and we're proactively preparing the gardens and buildings to avoid the damage caused by last year's freezes. Actions taken include:

- All hose bibs in the gardens were insulated.
- Radiator heaters were installed in the two pressure pump houses and the well house. These are turned on when temperatures below freezing are predicted.
- A Pump Saver Plus electronic pump control and protection device was installed between the pump and the holding tank at the Visitors' Center to prevent the pump from every running dry. During the freeze last year, the pump ran dry and completely burned up requiring a \$900+ replacement bill.

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### **CONSTRUCTION, REPAIR, & MAINTENANCE PROJECTS**

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Land and Site Manager Mark Foreman completed a number of pressing repair and construction projects during the last three months. These included:

- Rebuilding and reinsulating the shed around the pressure pump house near the greenhouse.
- Removing the Precision Flow Meter from the well house and replumbing. The diaphragm on the flow meter was cracked during the February, 2011 freeze and had a persistent leak that turned into a non-stop

flow. The company making the flow meter has gone out of business, but Mark is tracking down spare parts from another dealer so that we can repair and replace the flow meter.

- Installing a new automatic chlorine injection pump. The chlorine injection pump failed many months ago and chlorine has been added manually to the holding tank. A bid to replace the system was obtained from a local well company. The bid came in at over \$1200. Mark was able to purchase and replace the pump himself for less than \$300.
- In order to control the afternoon sun and heat, curtains were sewn and installed in Jessica's office.
- The outdoor light at the maintenance building was removed and replaced with a "dark sky" compliant fixture. The old light fixture was reused in the interior of the building.
- The CDRI's table saw, covered with years' worth of oil and dirt, was cleaned, waxed, and the blade sent out for resharpener. The now functional piece of equipment was installed in the maintenance building.
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## EQUIPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

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### NEW COMPUTER PURCHASED FOR POS SYSTEM

The time had come when the computer that operated the Point of Sale system in the gift shop needed to be replaced. Mark Hannon, of Nectar Computers, was able to install the new computer and make it work with the old peripherals (cash drawer, credit card machine, receipt printer etc.). Mark Hannon was also able to transfer the old QuickBooks POS system over to the new computer, thus saving over \$800 for the software upgrade.

### SOFTWARE AND COMPUTER INVENTORY

Office Manager Scott Mays is conducting a software and computer inventory. Upgrades to make all software and equipment compatible will take place in 2012.

### COMPUTER CLEANUP

A significant amount of time was spent this winter cleaning up computers, uninstalling programs, running virus scans, and installing upgrades. A closet full of old computers and electronic equipment was taken to Alpine to be recycled during the electronic recycling event in January.

# PROGRAMS

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## MEMBERSHIP

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**Goal: To recruit new members, retain current members, and provide quality programs and services to all members.**

### SUSAN PENNEY TAKES OVER MEMBERSHIP

Susan Penney has shifted her responsibilities from being head gardener and volunteer coordinator to being the membership and volunteer coordinator. She is currently working on shifting the membership database from the old program to the new Giftworks program and learning how to generate mailings and print labels from the new program.

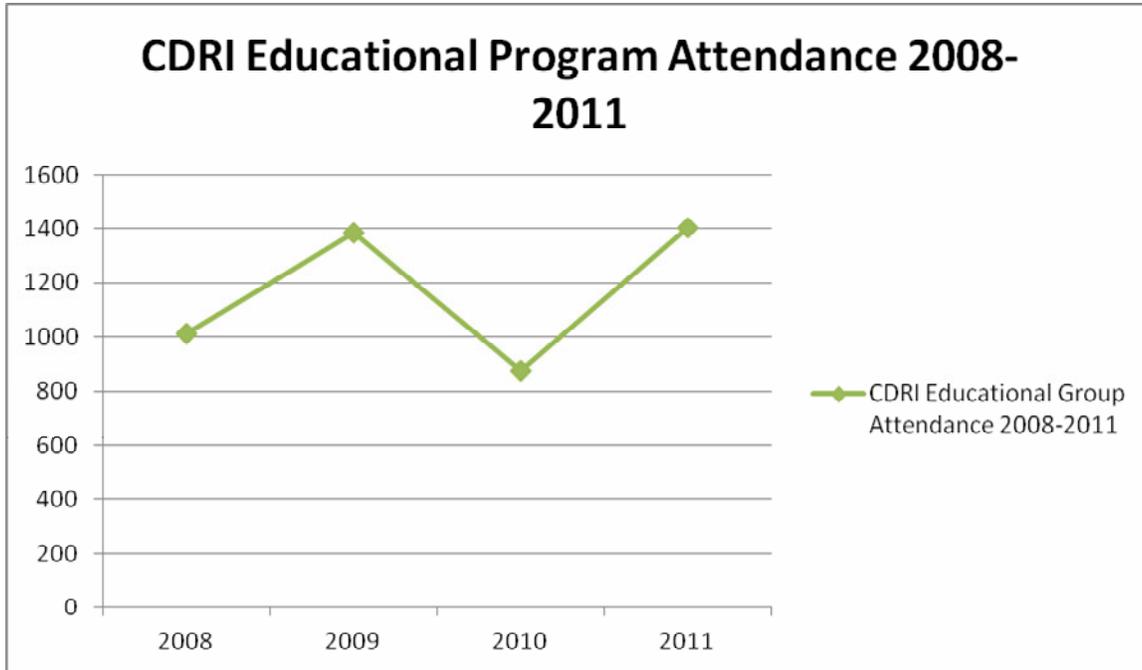
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## EDUCATION

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**Goal: Continue to expand the scope and maintain the high quality of our education programs.**

### EDUCATION PROGRAM ATTENDANCE



*Graph 1: Represents the changes in total attendance of Education Programs for the years 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011. After a decline in 2010 a substantial increase was seen in 2011. This in-part was due to the large attendance rates at The Earth Rocks!!! field day and the newly instated Bugs, Bugs, Bugs field day. Both of these programs were offered free of charge to regional schools through grants, donations, and the generous help of volunteers.*

Looking at the overall changes for the past four years, Education Coordinator Jessica Glasscock believes that we will continue to maintain education group numbers in and around the 1000 range. To advance these numbers she suggests that another field day may need to be considered as well as the possibility of a traveling trunk show to alleviate travel cost for schools and at the same time educate teachers and administration on the value of visiting the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Center.

### GROUPS

Education programs continue to be offered to youth and adult groups statewide. During the period of this report, programs were provided to the following groups:

- 11/11 Marfa Montessori ~ 11 students
- 11/14 Applied Learning Academy, Fort Worth ~ 100 students
- 11/17 Marfa Montessori ~ 11 students
- 10/12 UT Quest Tours ~ 29 Senior Citizens

## LIFE LONG LEARNING

### *Lectures*

Educational lectures, presented by professionals on topics relevant to the Chihuahuan Desert region, continue to be offered to the public free of charge. During the period of this report, the following lectures were presented:

11/10 The Geology of Mexico presented by Dr. Donald McGookey ~ 25 attendees

12/9 The Sparrows of West Texas presented by Kelly Bryan ~ 20 attendees

### *Workshops*

Educational workshops focusing on the flora and fauna of the Chihuahuan Desert continue to be offered throughout the year. During the period of this report, the following workshop was given:

12/10 Sparrow Identification Workshop w/Kelly Bryan ~ 7 attendees.

A two-day workshop was developed for sparrow identification but due to a family emergency, our original presenter was unable to conduct the workshop. Kelly Bryan generously offered to help out and gave a lecture and half-day identification field day.

### *Special Events*

During special events throughout the year CDRI staff and volunteers offer many opportunities to the general public to attend free hikes and walking tours along the CDRI trails. During this reporting period the following tours were offered:

- November 25, CDRI Open House  
Guided Modesta Canyon Tours-a.m. - 10 participants, p.m. - 17 participants
- November 26, CDRI Open House  
Guided Modesta Canyon Tours-a.m. - 11 participants, p.m. - 2 participants

### *Life Long Learning 2012*

Each year CDRI staff produces a Life Long Learning brochure to provide members and the public important information on activities and events offered throughout the year. During the period of this reporting the following activities were completed toward the production of the 2012 brochure:

- Life Long Learning meetings attended by staff to develop fresh and exciting ideas and activities, including lectures, workshops, field trips and many other educational opportunities, to offer to CDRI members, education groups, and the general public in 2012.
- A calendar planning meeting at the Nature Center was attended by representatives of the Nature Conservancy, Texas Master Naturalist, CDRI, and the Native Plant Society.
- All contacts were made in an effort to acquire highly-qualified professionals to be involved in and present programs for CDRI.
- Final dates and CDRI presenters were set and organized and descriptions of event opportunities written.
- Final production design, printing, and mailing of the 2012 Life Long Learning brochure occurred.

## LECTURES

An illustrated presentation on the Rockhouse Fire and its effects on the plant and animal communities of the Nature Center was developed by C. Hoyt and presented to the Senior Circle in Alpine and the Houston Cactus and Succulent Society in Houston.

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## HORTICULTURE PROGRAM

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**Goal: Further develop the Living Plant Collection and gardens so that they are attractive and informative for visitors, accessible to researchers, and meet the standards specified in the CDRI's Plant Collections Policy.**

### VOLUNTEERS IN THE GARDEN

Susan Penney has developed an excellent crew of volunteers to help in the garden. A student with a forestry background removed several large juniper trees in the garden, another volunteer is coming out twice a week to do general weeding and clean-up work, and the Yank and Yak volunteer crew continue to make amazing progress in the gardens each Thursday. They are doing general cleanup and pruning, removing small juniper trees, stacking and loading juniper branches for removal to the recycle center, and weedeating.

### IRRIGATION SYSTEM PROGRESS

As spring approaches, the need for a new irrigation system increases. As part of this project, Susan mapped all the hose bibs and water spigots in the botanical garden and around the Visitors' Center so that we know where our water comes from. We are seeking funding to purchase the supplies needed for this project.

### GARDENER POSITION POSTED

In January, we posted a notice for a part-time gardener. Interviews are being conducted as of the writing of this report. We hope to have someone in place by the end of February.

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## RESEARCH & CONSERVATION

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**Goal: Actively promote, facilitate, and support research in the Chihuahuan Desert region.**

### PROJECTS

A number of research projects are ongoing at the Nature Center:

- Grassland bird study comparing the bird fauna in burned and unburned plots.
- Study of cactus recovery in the burned grasslands. Overall, 53% of the cacti were killed during the Rockhouse fire.
- The third year of the butterfly census began in January.
- The grant-funded investigation of butterfly recovery in the burned grasslands will continue this spring.
- Biomass assessment in burned and unburned plots.

### GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM (GIS)

Mark Foreman is compiling extensive data on the CDRI property to assist in the development of a GIS to be used in mapping, public outreach, and planning.

- Layers include:
  - Fort Davis SE quarter quad
  - Hydrography
  - Hypsography
  - Transportation
  - Trails
  - Transects
  - Geology
  - Satellite imagery
  - Google Earth imagery

#### STUDENT RESEARCH PAPERS

Two research papers were submitted last semester concerning research conducted at the Nature Center:

- “Analysis of Juniper Mortality at the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute”
- “Analysis of Forb and Grass Biomass in Burned and Unburned Plots at the Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute”

#### CITIZEN SCIENCE EVENTS

The CDRI sponsored the Davis Mountains Christmas Bird Count and the Balmorhea Christmas Bird Count again this year. Marty Hansen served as the compiler for the Davis Mountains count and Mark Lockwood of Texas Parks and Wildlife is the compiler for the Balmorhea count. In general counts were done due to the fires, droughts, and general rough conditions in this area.

## PROGRAMS

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### STAFFING AND BENEFITS

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**Goal: To attract and retain qualified paid and volunteer staff for all services and activities.**

#### VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

##### *Volunteer Program Takes Off*

Susan Penney is doing a great job with our volunteer program. She has:

- Revived the annual Volunteer and Donor Appreciation Potluck held in early December. This very successful event saw over 60 people jammed into the atrium of the Visitors’ Center enjoying a holiday feast. As Susan put it: “It was a wonderful, feel-good social gathering of all those who love and help at CDRI. A great success!” A PowerPoint presentation of “The Year in Pictures” was produced by C. Hoyt and shown during the dinner.
- Worked with students from the Applied Learning Academy to reduce the footprint left by the bull-dozed fire breaks.
- Arranged for volunteers to work at the Visitor’s Services desk when the office manager quit without notice.
- Works with the Yank and Yak crew every Thursday in the garden. We’re not sure whether the crew is so loyal because of the thrill of yanking, the chance to yak, or the wonderful home-cooked lunches that Susan prepares for them.
- Found two volunteers to help us redesign and update several brochures and help with general graphics work.

##### *Volunteer of the Year*

Marty Hansen was selected Volunteer of the Year. Of the many fine volunteers that we have, Marty’s name kept coming to the top of our lists. She serves as Vice-President of the Board of Directors, chairperson for several committees, is part of the Yank and Yak crew, volunteers in the gift shop, coordinates the Christmas Bird Count, participates in Citizen Science events, and is always available for folding, labeling, serving, or any other task that needs done. We couldn’t have chosen a better Volunteer of the Year! Thank you, Marty.

#### NEW STAFF

Scott May joined us in January as the office manager after Dianna Lannom quit in November. Scott comes from a professional background, has a BS degree in Meteorology, has long-term roots in the area, and is experienced with numerous local nature-based efforts. Scott’s goals are to increase revenue in the gift shop, enhance the CDRI’s web presence, and improve the visitor experience using graphic and interactive lobby displays.

Mark Foreman accepted the job of land and site manager in January. Mark has worked for the CDRI as a volunteer and student intern for 1.5 years. With his experience in business, construction, and range science he is the ideal candidate to manage the landsite, maintain the infrastructure, and work with staff and volunteers to improve the visitor experience at the Nature Center. Mark is completing his masters degree at Sul Ross State University and will work part-time during the semester and full-time during the summer and long school breaks until he completes his degree.

#### STAFF AND BOARD DEVELOPMENT

##### *West Texas Rural Philanthropy Days Brown Bag Lunches*

Susan Penney continues to attend the brown bag lunches as a representative of the CDRI. In January, the topic of the lunch was the advantages/disadvantages of paper mailings vs email.

##### *Gus T. Canales Lectureship on Prescribed Burning-King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management*

Jessica Glasscock attended the Gus T. Canales Lectureship on Prescribed Burning in January. This lectureship was designed to teach the safe use of fire as a rangeland and wildlife habitat management tool. It provided the formal training necessary to meet qualifications required towards becoming a Certified Prescribed Burn Manager in the state of Texas.

##### *Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow (CLFT)-Welder Wildlife Foundation*

Jessica was invited to participate in the Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow (CLFT) workshop in January. The program is a professional development program designed for student and professional leaders within the natural resource sciences. CLFT focuses on conservation education and hunting awareness among academic programs and government agencies. CLFT consists of 4-day workshops that blend interactive classroom discussion with field experiences. Workshop participants engage with leading natural resource professionals and conservationists in a highly interactive educational setting.

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## RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

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**Goal: To acquire stable, broad-based financial and non-financial resources to support the programs and growth envisioned in the strategic plan.**

#### ANNUAL APPEAL MATCH

An anonymous donor gave us a challenge gift in late fall. She would match contributions dollar for dollar, up to \$10,000. News of the challenge gift was distributed to the membership and friends of the CDRI through the annual appeal letter, the website, and Facebook. By mid-January \$17,900 in contributions were received in addition to the original \$10,000 gift.

#### GRANTS RECEIVED

##### *Dixon Water Foundation Challenge*

In response to the deficit in program funding for 2012, the Dixon Water Foundation is providing a \$25,000 challenge grant to the CDRI. They will match dollar for dollar, gifts of over \$1,000 made to the CDRI for program support. The purpose of the challenge is to not only support CDRI programs, but also to encourage us to start cultivating donors at higher levels in preparation for the capital campaign. The challenge grant will be discussed in more detail at the board meeting.

## PROPOSALS SUBMITTED

### *Summerlee Foundation*

A proposal was submitted in late November to the Summerlee Foundation requesting \$5,000 in support of the Chihuahuan Desert Mining Heritage Exhibit. If successful, the funding would be used to hire an intern to assist with the research, development, and writing of the exhibit panels.

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## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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**Goal: To develop and maintain an effective, active, informed Board of Directors whose governance and support roles promote the achievement of the CDRI mission.**

## MEETINGS

### *Board Meetings*

- November 5 Board Meeting
- Executive Committee Meeting January 13
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### *Planning Meetings*

- Strategic Planning Committee meeting November 9
- Strategic Planning Committee November 29
- Strategic Planning January 23

### *Committee Meetings*

- Board Governance Committee November 4
- Development Committee November 4
- Botanical Garden Committee November 4
- Permanent Endowment Committee November 4
- Collections Committee November 4
- Governance Committee January 6
- Finance Committee January 20

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## ADMINISTRATION

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## INVENTORY

The end of the year inventory in the shop was conducted in early January. Numerous problems related to incorrect entering of inventory were encountered and corrected. Scott May, the new officer manager, is standardizing office procedures and streamlining the ordering, receiving, and distribution processes so that this problem won't occur again.

## BUDGETS AND END OF YEAR REPORTS

Many hours were spent on preparing the 2012 budget and compiling the end of year budgets for 2011.

## INSURANCE AUDIT

Met with Randy Reed of Talley Reed Insurance to review our insurance policies and request a quote for Directors and Officers Insurance. Randy discussed several options for bringing our insurance costs down. He will attend the Finance Committee meeting on February 17<sup>th</sup> to present the options to the committee members so that they can make a recommendation to the full board.

#### 2011 AUDIT

A request for a proposal was sent to Ron Kirby for the 2011 audit. His proposal will be presented at the board meeting in February.

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### PUBLIC RELATIONS/MARKETING

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#### PUBLICITY

##### *Article in Austin American Statesman*

Pam LeBlanc, a journalist with the Austin American Statesman, stopped by in December for a visit to the Nature Center and to interview C. Hoyt. The resulting article—Nature Center Offers Up-Close Glimpse of the Desert—was published on December 22.

Beth Nobles of the Texas Mountain Trails Region is responsible for sending the reporter our way. Beth is an enthusiastic supporter and promoter of the CDRI. We greatly appreciate all the plugs that she gives us in her blogs and her presentations across the state.

#### PUBLIC OUTREACH

##### *Alpine Middle School Science Fair*

An opportunity to “give back” to the surrounding communities is an important part of the education program. In mid-November, Jessica Glasscock did just that when she served as a judge for the Alpine Middle School Science Fair. Approximately 300 students participated in the event.

##### *Green Fire Showing*

The Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute co-hosted a showing of the Aldo Leopold documentary *Green Fire* with the Conservation Biology Club at Sul Ross State University.

##### *Press Releases and Marketing*

- We continue to use My Emma, an email marketing service, to send out newsletters to our members, friends, and to the board of directors. We currently have 559 people signed up for our Desert NewsFlash email newsletter.
- Press releases are sent out for each event.
- Susan Penney designed a flyer promoting our Open House event in November. This flyer was distributed to the hotels, motels, and B&Bs in Alpine and Fort Davis. Many places expressed appreciation at receiving the flyers and were interested in promoting the event.