

Dixon Water Foundation

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

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ABOUT US

The Dixon Water Foundation promotes healthy watersheds through regenerative land management so that future generations of Texas will have the water resources that they need.

Through our <u>ranches</u>, <u>grants</u>, <u>education</u> <u>programs</u>, and <u>research partnerships</u>, we hope to ultimately impact how Texans protect the great environmental resources of our state.

We work in two eco-regions of Texas

Our research and demonstration ranches are the keystone of our Foundation's opeartions. With Texas being around 97% privately owned, and with much of that private land devoted to livestock grazing, our primary goal is to use cattle as a tool to responsibly manage the land and impact watershed health.

Our ranches are located in the tallgrass prairies of the Cross Timbers Eco-region, which receives between 30-40" of annual rainfall, and in the Trans-Pecos, which receives less than 15" of rain per year.



Picture 1. Eco-Regions o Texas (Gould, F. W. 1975 and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department 2004)

On our ranches, we demonstrate adaptive multi-paddock grazing management practices while also hosting traditional, continuously grazed areas, as well as areas excluded from grazing. We host educational workshops, field trips, and invite researchers out to study the natural resources between the different grazing regimes.

Ultimately, we believe that grasslands are adapted to large animal disturbance and that they can work in harmony to promote healthy native prairie ecosystems which function as a sponge to build a healthy water cycle.





Picture 2. Wildflowers in the tall-grass prairie

5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

This plan was outlined in 2022 for the subsequent 5-Year period (2023-2027). The year 2023 was the first year of the current plan.

GOALS

1. Operate the Foundation's ranches (Ranches) as model ranches for watershed and grazing land health using adaptive multi-paddock (AMP) grazing.

2. Conduct and host monitoring and research on the Ranches to understand the changing conditions of the Ranches and the role of management in influencing those changes.

3. Share information about the management and changing conditions of the Ranches as well as the benefits of AMP grazing to land managers and the general public through direct communications and through education events with the Foundation's partners at the Ranches.

4. Develop and implement an annual apprenticeship program to train future ranch managers in the techniques and benefits of AMP grazing.

5. Develop and support partnerships with other organizations to encourage the implementation of good watershed and grazing land management practices beyond the Ranches.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Dixon Water Foundation has continued to help improve watershed health in the state of Texas throughout 2024. We have encouraged regenerative land management through educational events, funding partners, research, and demonstration on the Foundation's ranches. Our amazing Board of Directors continues to guide the organization despite the retirement of a valued member, Jerry Addison. Jerry, a long time Dixon Board member and good friend will be stepping away this year. Jerry has been an excellent rancher and land manager. He has been a great resource on the board and was someone I used as a reference when I initially applied with the Foundation in 2010. We are all sad to see Jerry leaving but wish him all the best. On the other hand, the Dixon Water Foundation is excited to welcome Will Juett to our Board of Directors. I met Will not long after I came to work at the Foundation's Mimms Unit in Marfa. Will was working with the NRCS at that time and now manages the expansive 02 Ranch, one of the largest in the Big Bend region of Texas. We are thrilled to have his expertise on our Board, and we are looking forward to working with him.

2024 brought catastrophic drought to Dixon's West TX Mimms Unit. After years of below average rainfall and an especially poor year in 2024 we made the difficult decision to destock completely. The ranch staff were able to select the top performing cows and move them to the Leo Unit in North TX. The cows and calves made the trip in great shape and are doing well at Leo, where we had abundant rainfall in 2024. I have worked with our Ranch Managers and together we have developed a plan to run stocker and grass finisher cattle from North in West TX annually, after recovering from the drought. This new business model will give us the flexibility needed to deal with frequent drought cycles in West TX.

All in all, the Dixon Water Foundation has had a tremendous 2024. The staff continues to do an outstanding job in operations, education, outreach, grants, and research. We have been able to share our message of the importance of watershed health with a larger state and national audience. There is an ever-growing interest in regenerative land management, and we are able to lend our years of data and experience to the conversation. We also have some great things in store for 2025 that will continue to keep Dixon Water Foundation at the forefront of land and water management. Sincerely,

Casey Wade, President / CEO



51

VISITORS IN WEST TEXAS

2024 OUTREACH EVENTS





Pictures 3 and 4. Jake McNamara speaks to a visiting group in North Texas (top) and Quivira Coalition present a soil amendments workshop in West Texas (bottom)

Our educational programming included hosting over 630 visitors to our research and demonstration ranches in 2024. The ranches are the cornerstone of the work that we do and hosting events is a large part of engaging others as we pursue our mission.

2024 PRECIPITATION TOTALS: LEO



The Leo Unit received 37.17" of preciptation in 2024, with the highest monthly totals coming in May (10.51"). The highest mean temperature (left axis) was in the month of August, which had the second lowest monthly total rainfall (0.21", right axis) The 2024 annual precipitation total is close to the annual average for this region.

2024 PRECIPITATION TOTALS: MIMMS



The Mimms Unit received 3.06" of precipitation in 2024. This is total is far below the annual average (around 15") for the region and has forced the Foundation to inact drought management efforts for the Mimms Unit.



LETTER FROM RANCH MANAGERS

As 2024 has ended and faded into 2025, we have all taken a moment to breathe and evaluate where we are and the context and conditions that got us here. For the Leo and Mimms ranches so much happened in 2024. To say that 2024 was a year of transitions honestly seems to be quite an understatement and a bit cliché but that's exactly what it was. Between severe drought conditions out West and adequate rainfall in the North, perhaps a bit too much at times, left us all with an abundance of difficult decisions to make. At times throughout the year, it seemed that every decision would lead us down a path we had no interest in walking. Adversity presented itself many times in 2024 and through that adversity growth and development was found.

At Leo, Jake McNamara is putting his knowledge to work and staying plenty busy. He received great rainfall this year and warmer temperatures which resulted in his winter feeding, which was already minimal, being reduced even further. That's a great indicator of healthy pastures and livestock. Later in the year, Jake was injured while working and had to take some time to heal and recover. All of us came together to keep Leo running while he took some time off. But Jake made quick work of said recovery and is back at it. Further challenges came to Leo in the form of a tornado which absolutely ravaged infrastructure all throughout the Leo bottom. From miles of fencing to essential working pens, so much damaged was caused. However, through this destruction, the opportunity for positive change presented itself. Fences and infrastructure will be rebuilt to better suit the needs of our grazing operations and Leo will be back up and running better than before.

The Mimms ranch had a historically difficult year. Several years of poor rainfall has driven not just the Mimms, but many other ranches in the Trans-Pecos, to the brink with terrible drought conditions. Early in the Spring, Casey and I conducted forage estimates across the Mimms ranch, and it was made quite plain to us that we needed to be prepared to destock the ranch if rain or signs of rain had not presented itself by early summer. That trigger point came and went as dry as it had been for years past, and our drought contingency plan was initiated. I carefully built a grazing plan to carry the herd through until time to ship the cow/calf pairs to Jake at Leo. I was impressed with our coordination and communication over the months prior to shipping. Jake ensured he utilized his North Texas properties in the best possible way to receive the cow herd from Marfa. The transition went better than anybody could have hoped. Jake worked endlessly to ensure all cows stayed healthy and happy as they learned to live in an entirely new environment.

Jake and I are grateful for what 2025 will bring to us. Both ranches are postured for success. Out west, the Mimms ranch is completely destocked and ready to receive rain in the growing season. There is much to be done on the ranch with the lack of a cow herd to manage. I have now shifted focus on erosion control work across the Mimms ranch and can give much needed attention to infrastructure to make the ranch the best it can be. We manage these systems under conditions we simply cannot control. However, we can control how we manage the conditions we are given. Though it may be challenging at times, I am proud of how we have done just that in 2024. Sincerely,

Zach Vaughn & Jake McNamara, West and North Texas Ranch Managers



BIOLOGICAL MONITORING

Each year we survey several fixed monitoring points on our ranches to document the condition of ground cover and plant communities on the land. The process involves throwing 100 darts around each point, documenting what ground cover class was struck (bare ground. litter, or the base of a plant) and what the closet plant was to the dart, identified by successional plant community (low seral, mid seral, high seral). The Foundation began measuring infiltration rates at each monitoring point in 2023.



North Texas Ranches

Picture 5. VP of Operations Hilary Knight tallies monitoring notes as they are called out by Dixon staff.

The Foundation's North Texas ranches are located in Cooke and Wise Counties in North-Central Texas. The Leo property contains 11 monitoring points, some of which have been monitored since the late 1980s. This ranch is largely dedicated to multi-species (sheep and cattle) grazing in an adaptive multi-paddock design. In 2022, one pasture was dedicated to continuous grazing so that researchers would have a comparison plot. The Leo Unit is comprised of the Leo Ranch and several other properties that were added including the Block, Crandall, Forman, Heard, and Knight. Monitoring points were added to the Forman and Heard Units at the time of purchase by the Foundation. In 2024, one of the Forman points (03, West) was eliminated in favor of setting up a new monitoring point on the continuously grazed pasture on the Knight property.

The Foundation's Pittman Unit is located about 7 miles north of the Leo Unit. It has been under a holistic, multi-paddock grazing with sheep and cattle and monitored since the 1990s. There are 5 monitoring points on the Pittman. In 2023, 1 of the monitoring points could not be located as it had been knocked over by cattle and then buried by overgrown vegetation. This point was relocated in 2024 and surveyed at that time.

Monitoring took place in mid-November for 2024. The North Texas ranches have two growing seasons with the primary growing season being in the spring, and a secondary season coming in the cool season of the autumn after the hottest months of the year have passed. Most of the predominant tall-grass prairie grasses grow in the spring season and other grasses, such as winter rye, may be seen in the cooler growing season.



BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: LEO UNIT



Map showing the Leo Unit paddock boundaries marked in orange and the monitoring point locations marked in yellow. In 2024 a point was moved from the Forman 03N location to the K2 pasture to the east and marked in green.





This chart shows the average percent of bare ground cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season for all 5 Leo Unit monitoring points from 1989 - 2024. The solid blue line indicates the percent documented each year, while the dotted blue line shows the overall trend in the data. There has been a decrease in bare ground, and in turn an increase in litter and plant cover, over the decades.



BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: LEO UNIT - PLANT COMMUNITIES



This chart shows the average percent of each successional plant community for all 5 Leo Unit monitoring points from 1989 - 2024. The solid lines indicate the percent documented each year, while the dotted lines shows the overall trend in the data. The communities are color-coded red for low, yellow for mid, and green for high successional communities. There has been a decreasing trend in low and mid successional plant communities and an increasing trend in high successional plant communities.



BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: HEARD UNIT - BARE GROUND



This chart (left) shows the average percent of bare ground cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season for all 3 Heard Unit monitoring points from 2015 - 2024. The solid blue line indicates the percent documented each year, while the dotted blue line shows the overall trend in the data.

This chart (right) shows the percent of bare ground cover documented for Heard Unit monitoring point 3 from 2015 - 2024. There has been an increasing trend of bare ground at this site. Foundation staff noticed this during the monitoring process in 2023 and ranch management staff fed hay bales on this site in 2024. resulting in a reduction of bare ground in that year. Previously, this site had been a utility easement on a gravelly hill and there was a loss of top soil due to the topography and disturbance. Feeding hay bales, which were made from grass grown on the ranch, helped introduce organic matter back to the site.





BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: HEARD UNIT - PLANT COMMUNITIES



This chart shows the average percent of each successional plant community for all 3 Heard Unit monitoring points from 2015 - 2024. The solid lines indicate the percent documented each year, while the dotted lines shows the overall trend in the data. The communities are color-coded red for low, yellow for mid, and green for high successional communities. There has been a decreasing trend in low seral plant communities and an increasing trend in high successional plant communities. Mid seral plant communities are showing a slightly decreasing trend, but ultimately have a dominant presence. This is due to the persistence of large pastures of resilient introduced grasses, such as B Dahl bluestem, that were planted before the Foundation purchased the property in 2015. The Foundation hopes try to shift some of these communities towards native prairie grasses through high stock density grazing over the coming years.



BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: FORMAN UNIT



This chart (left) shows the average percent of bare ground cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season for all 3 Forman Unit monitoring points from 2015 - 2024. The solid blue line indicates the percent documented each year, while the dotted blue line shows the overall trend in the data. Bare ground presence on the Forman is minimal. Forman point 03 was removed in 2024 and replaced with a new point on the Knight property, which will monitor a continuously grazed treatment.

This chart (right) shows the average percent of seral plant community cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season for all 3 Forman Unit monitoring points from 2015 -2024. The solid lines indicate the percent documented each vear, while the dotted lines show the overall trend in the data. The data shows an increase in high and low seral communities and a decrease in mid seral communites. Low seral communites sometimes include annual forbs and grasses, which are often the first to respond to precipitation or when sites are being recovered.



BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: PITTMAN UNIT



Map showing the Pittman Unit paddock boundaries marked in orange and the monitoring point locations marked in yellow.







This chart shows the average percent of bare ground cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season for all 5 Pittman Unit monitoring points from 1999 - 2024. The solid blue line indicates the percent documented each year, while the dotted blue line shows the overall trend in the data. There has been a decrease in bare ground, and minimal bare ground, and in turn an increase in litter and plant cover, over the decades.





BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: PITTMAN UNIT - PLANT COMMUNITIES



This chart shows the average percent of each successional plant community for all 5 Pittman Unit monitoring points from 1999 - 2024. The solid lines indicate the percent documented each year, while the dotted lines shows the overall trend in the data. The communities are color-coded red for low, yellow for mid, and green for high successional communities. There has been a decreasing trend in low and mid successional plant communities and an increasing trend in high successional plant communities.



BIOLOGICAL MONITORING

Each year we survey several fixed monitoring points on our ranches to document the condition of ground cover and plant communities on the land. The process involves throwing 100 darts around each point, documenting what ground cover class was struck (bare ground. litter, or the base of a plant) and what the closet plant was to the dart, identified by successional plant community (low seral, mid seral, high seral). The Foundation began measuring infiltration rates at each monitoring point in 2023.

West Texas Ranches

The Foundation's West Texas ranches are located in Presidio County, in the Trans-Pecos region Texas. The Mimms Unit was purchased by the Foundation in 2008. The Foundation has monitored this ranch since 2010. In 2019, the Foundation purchased the adjoining George property to the Northwest. The Foundation also grazes and monitors a neighboring ranch, the Hip-O East.

The Mimms Unit is 16,000 acres and was set up with an intentional design to feature both adaptive multi-paddock grazing and continuous grazing treatments since the early days of the Foundation's ownership of the ranch. Researchers are invited to study and compare the different grazing treatments to evaluate their impact on the natural resources on the landscape.



Picture 6. President/CEO Casey Wade and West Texas Ranch Manager Zach Vaughn visually appraise the landscape on the Mimms Unit during the annual biological monitoring process.

There are 6 monitoring points on the Mimms Unit and 2 on the Hip-O East.

The Mimms Unit features 4 points in the adaptive multi-paddock grazing portion of the ranch and 2 in the continuously-grazed portion of the ranch. Additionally, there are 2 points on the George Property. The George property is moderately rotationally-grazed, with more infrastructure development to come.

The Mimms Unit also features 19 1-acre grazing exlosures, but these are not surveyed during the annual biological monitoring process.

BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: MIMMS UNIT



A map showing Mimms Unit is located about on the outskirts of the town of Marfa, Texas. It has been under a holistic, multi-paddock grazing with cattle and monitored since the 2010. There are 6 monitoring points on the Mimms, with 4 located in a rotationally-grazed portion of the ranch (shown in yellow) and 2 located in a continuously grazed portion of the ranch (marked by red). In 2019, the George Property was added in the Northwest region of the ranch. Two additional monitoring points were added there at that time.





This chart shows the average percent of bare ground cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season for all 6 Mimms Unit monitoring points, averaged, from 2010 - 2024. The solid blue line indicates the percent documented each year, while the dotted blue line shows the overall trend in the data. There has been a decreasing trend in bare ground, and in turn an increase in litter and plant cover, over the decades.



This chart shows the average percent of bare ground cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season for the 2 Mimms Unit continuouslygrazed treatment monitoring points, averaged, from 2010 - 2024. The solid blue line indicates the percent documented each year, while the dotted blue line shows the overall trend in the data. There has been a decreasing trend in bare ground, and in turn an increase in litter and plant cover, over the decades.



This chart shows the average percent of bare ground cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season for the 4 Mimms Unit rotationallygrazed treatment monitoring points, averaged, from 2010 - 2024. The solid blue line indicates the percent documented each year, while the dotted blue line shows the overall trend in the data. There has been a decreasing trend in bare ground, and in turn an increase in litter and plant cover, over the decades.



This chart shows the average percent of bare ground cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season for the 2 continuously-grazed monitoring points, averaged, (in blue) compared to the 4 rotationally-grazed points, averaged (in orange). The dotted lines represent the overall trend. There has been a decreasing trend in bare ground for both treatments, with the rotationally-grazed pastures showing a lower overall average of bare ground.



This chart shows another format (loess) of displaying the average percent of bare ground cover documented during each annual biological monitoring season. For the 2 continuously-grazed monitoring points, averaged, (in blue) compared to the 4 rotationally-grazed monitoring points, averaged (in orange), there is an overlap of the two treatments, indicating that there may be no significant difference in bare ground for the treatments, though there is a smaller overlap during some years than others.

BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: MIMMS UNIT - PLANT COMMUNITIES



This chart shows the average percent of each successional plant community for all 6 Mimms Unit monitoring points from 2010 - 2024. The solid lines indicate the percent documented each year, while the dotted lines shows the overall trend in the data. The communities are color-coded red for low, yellow for mid, and green for high successional communities. There has been a decreasing trend in low successional communities, while mid successional plant communities are nearly steady. There is an increasing trend in high successional plant communities.





BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: MIMMS UNIT - PLANT COMMUNITIES



This chart shows the average percent of each successional plant community for the 2 Mimms Unit continuously-grazed monitoring points from 2010 - 2024. The solid lines indicate the percent documented each year, while the dotted lines shows the overall trend in the data. The communities are color-coded red for low, yellow for mid, and green for high successional communities. There has been a decreasing trend in high successional plant communities and an increasing trend in low and mid successional plant communities.

BIOLOGICAL MONITORING: MIMMS UNIT - PLANT COMMUNITIES



This chart shows the average percent of each successional plant community for all 4 Mimms Unit rotationally-grazed monitoring points from 2010 - 2024. The solid lines indicate the percent documented each year, while the dotted lines shows the overall trend in the data. The communities are color-coded red for low, yellow for mid, and green for high successional communities. There has been a decreasing trend in low and mid successional plant communities and an increasing trend in high successional plant communities.

MARFA RAINFALL

Over the course of this report, we've described how little our Marfa, TX, ranch, the Mimms Unit, received in 2024 (3.06"). When discussing average rainfall, average can be skewed by particularly good years or particularly bad years, so one way to consider how one year compares to another is to ask: "How often over a given time has a certain amount of precipitation fallen?"

By compiling long-term rainfall data from gauge on the Mimms Unit and data available from the Marfa Municipal Airport, and other historic stations accessed through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, we were able to compile a 44-year data set reaching back to the 1960s to get an idea of what 'normal' rainfall means in Marfa, TX.



This chart shows the frequency of times during that 44-year period that 5" annual precipitation ranges were measured for the area around the Mimms Unit. This chart shows that over 93% of the time (41 out of 44 years), at least 6" of precipitation was measured. So, less than 7% of years (3 out of 44 years) have seen less than 6" of precipitation. This drives home just how dry conditions were in 2024 at the Mimms Unit.



2024 RESEARCH ACTIVITIES



B RESEARCH PROJECTS UNDERWAY ON DIXON RANCHES

Picture 7. University of North Texas pollinator researchers visit the Leo

NORTH TEXAS

- Noble Institute 3M: Metrics, Management, and Monitoring (Leo and Pittman Units)
- Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Cover-Cropping Study (Pittman Unit)
- University of North Texas Linking Ranch Management to Pollinator Conservation (Leo and Pittman Unit)
- University of North Texas Nutrient Cycling Study (Leo Unit)

WEST TEXAS

- BCarbon/ExxonMobil- Nature-based Carbon Sequestration Potential of Soils
- Sul Ross State University Livestock Grazing Systems Within A Desert Ecosystem: Ecological & Economic Implications (Mimms Unit)
- Sul Ross State University Livestock Tanks for Migratory and Wintering Grassland Birds in the Trans-Pecos (Mimms Unit)
- Texas Tech University Zone-Tailed Hawk Migration Study (Alamito Creek Preserve)
- Yale University Global Change Effects on Soil Greenhouse Gas Exchange Along a Temperature Gradient in the North American Central Grasslands (Mimms Unit)

In addition to these research projects, there are on-going monitoring projects such as over-wintering grassland bird surveys on the Mimms Unit with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies and Sul Ross State University and riparian bird surveys on the Alamito Creek Preserve with the Rio Grande Joint Venture and Sul Ross State University.

Dixon Water Foundation

PROPERTY UPDATE:



Picture 8. The Alamito Creek Preserve in fall.

Alamito Creek Preserve

The Foundation's Alamito Creek Preserve is located 30 miles southeast of the Mimms Unit in Presidio County. The ranch is 6600 ac and sits roughly 1000 ft. lower in elevation to the Mimms, featuring a 3.5 mile stretch of Alamito Creek, which begins just north of the Mimms Unit as water sheds off of the Davis Mountains.

The Foundation grazed its steers at the Preserve in early 2024. This is a common practice during dry periods on the Mimms in order to reduce grazing pressure on the Marfa ranch when there has been little forage production. The Preserved recorded 6.44" of precipitation in 2024.

Trail cameras captured photos of elk, mule deer, bobcats, gray foxes, badgers, mountain lions, coyotes, javelina and other wildlife species. The Preserve has also been involved in plans for creek restoration projects as part of the Alamito Creek Conservation Initiative with Borderlands Research Institute and the Rio Grande Joint Venture.

Members of the Tierra Grande Master Naturalists helped install loose-rock structures in tributary channels to help slow water and increase sediment retention. In late 2024, a transducer was put in place in an out-of-service well adjacent to the creek to monitor ground water levels in the riparian aquifer and a gauge for nearby springs. More nature-based in-stream structures are set to be installed in early 2025 to slow water and increase its residency time in the creek channel, with hopes of promoting more groundwater recharge.

Dixon Water Foundation Annual Report 2024



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2024 GRANTS & SPONSORSHIPS \$400,591 GRANTS

Borderlands Research Institute at Sul Ross State University Devils River Conservancy Hill Country Alliance Holistic Management International National Audubon Society Native Prairies Association of Texas The Nature Conservancy Sand County Foundation Texas Agricultural Land Trust Texas Land Conservancy University of North Texas



Picture 9. Attendees at the Far West Texas 101 Symposium in the Marfa USO building. This seminar co-produced and sponsored by Dixon Water Foundation in August 2024



SPONSORSHIPS

Alamito Foundation (Far West Texas 101 Symposium) Alpine Wildlife Weekend Big Bend Ranch Rodeo Funders for Regenerative Agriculture The Nature Conservancy in Texas Quivira Coalition Texas Grazing Lands Coalition Texas Land Trust Council Conference Texas Wildlife Association Texas Society for Range Management

Staff and Board of Directors

Staff:

•Casey Wade - President and CEO •Philip Boyd - Vice President of Science and Research •Rachel Vasquez - Vice President of Grants •Hilary Knight - Vice President of Operations

Ranch Managers:

•Jake McNamara – North Texas Ranch Manager •Zach Vaughn – West Texas Ranch Manager

Board of Directors:

•Robert Potts - Chairman of the Board ·Jerry Addison ·Hugh Aljoe ·Melissa Bookhout ·Robert Potts ·Leslie C. Rauscher ·Kathy Smyth ·Dr. Richard Teague ·Laura Whiting

Advisory Board Members:

Clint Josey
Dr. Bonnie Warnock

2024 changes in Board of Directors and Staff:

Jerry Addison resigned from the board at the end of the 2024 year after a long term of service. The Foundation is endlessly grateful for his contributions over the years.



2024

Annual Report written and compiled by Philip Boyd, VP Science and Research Mimms grasses photo by Sarah Vasquez