

TIM JONES

Environmental Advocate

Earth First! 1988-2003

City of Austin Environmental Board 1990-2003



“

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I discovered Barton Creek in 1963. I had come to Austin to attend the University of Texas. At that time Barton Creek above the Springs was a wild place, no houses, no sewer lines or crowds or dogs for years to come. On days too windy to skydive, a friend and I went to Campbell’s Hole and cliff-dived off the rimrock above the creek.

Twenty years later lower Barton Creek was surrounded by houses, condos and apartments hovering over the greenbelt. I wrote a satire proposing someone build a giant sling and lofted balloons of brown and green paint and sticks and twigs to hide the houses above Campbell’s Hole. A friend read the story and suggested that if I was that committed I look up some folks called Earth First!.

Earth First! is a movement, a set of radical environmental organizations with different ideas for how to accomplish environmental protection. “No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth” is its creed. Much of Earth First! activity was based on the writings of Edward Abbey. A way of life was born. At first we were preoccupied with saving the endangered species around Austin, the cave bugs, the Black-capped Vireo and the Golden-cheeked Warbler.



Sewage spill and resulting algae bloom in Barton Creek

Exploring Barton Creek one day in 1989 I discovered an algae bloom below a growing development called Barton Creek Properties. The development disposed of its sewage by spray-irrigating treated effluent on a golf course drained by a tributary of Barton Creek. I took the photos to Austin’s Planning Commission to expose the consequences of building golf courses next to the creek.

Earth First! hit the streets, the antipathy toward polluting development above our sacred springs grew into a major effort. The Save Our Springs movement was born and the SOS ordinance became the law of the land.

We were the tip of the activist spear, so to speak. Around Austin we made the Sierra Club and Save Barton Creek Association and SOS look less radical. Even so, Earth First! activists in Austin were known as “policy wonks.”. We organized demonstrations and presentations and direct action to draw attention to how we were losing the natural world, endangered species and endangered places. We helped get species listed as endangered and places they lived set aside from development. The Balcones Canyonlands Conservation Plan, the BCCP, was precipitated by our work.

TIM JONES CONT'D

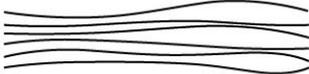
I mostly “ground-truthed” what developers were doing to influence city council and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. I recorded what I found photographically and on videotape, eventually producing educational TV shows. Unlike the early days, Earth First! is mostly disbanded now after being branded an eco-terrorist organization. The Earth First! Journal still exists to spread news of activist happenings. <https://earthfirstjournal.org/newswire/>

In 1990 I was appointed to the Environmental Board for the City of Austin. Earth First! was now both inside government as well as outside, and I spent the ensuing years investigating Austin’s creeks, helping stop the pollution of our waterways and strengthening the environmental criteria for land development. I was on the COA Environmental Board for thirteen years.

I did field work to expose threats to the Barton Springs Salamander. Along with Save Our Springs lawyers and a host of others, the Barton Springs Salamander was listed as by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service as endangered. My best buddy outside Earth First! was Matt Lechner with the. Matt Lechner and Austin’s Environmental Department used the force of law to help all kinds of builders keep the environment in mind.

I had been videotaping my “ground-truthing” circa 1991- 92. An Austin Community TV producer, Jenny Clark produced a video series of my work on Barton Creek called Ground Truth Investigations. The series of sixteen video programs ran for five years then re-ran for another five years on ACTV. The tapes now reside in the Austin History Center.

My work with Austin faded in 2003 as I left the Environmental Board. I now live on a Hill Country nature preserve doing wildlife photography.

BARTON CREEK

TIME STREAM