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University of Texas at Austin  
Student Government

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TITLE: In Support of the Brackenridge Field Lab

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## I. Introduction

WHEREAS the Brackenridge Field Laboratory is a premier biological research facility and a biodiversity haven in an increasingly urban environment,

WHEREAS the report of the Brackenridge Tract Task Force questions if the Brackenridge Field Lab should be relocated or reduced in area,<sup>1</sup>

WHEREAS the Brackenridge tract was given to the University by Colonel Brackenridge on the conditions that it “be used for educational purposes for all generations of students to come,”<sup>1</sup>

WHEREAS “the mission of The University of Texas at Austin is to achieve excellence in the interrelated areas of undergraduate education, graduate education, research and public service,”<sup>2</sup>

WHEREAS “the University must involve itself constructively with the significant and challenging issues facing society now and in the future,”<sup>2</sup>

WHEREAS “the University must recruit and maintain a faculty of the highest scholarly distinction,”<sup>2</sup>

WHEREAS according to President Powers for The University of Texas at Austin “to be the very best public university in the country we also need the very best graduate students,”<sup>3</sup>

## II. Research and Education

WHEREAS many faculty members credit the field lab as a major factor in the Ecology, Evolution and Behavior graduate program’s top ten national ranking by US News and World Report,<sup>4,5</sup>

WHEREAS workspace at BFL is frequently included in recruitment packages to faculty members,<sup>6</sup>

WHEREAS Stanford University has refused offers to buy their biology field lab located within Silicon Valley, where property values exceed those on the Brackenridge tract,<sup>6,7</sup>

WHEREAS BFL's urban location provides unique research opportunities for the University,<sup>8</sup>

WHEREAS its access to Lake Austin allows for aquatic research,<sup>6</sup>

WHEREAS since its inception in 1967 the presence and abundance of flora and fauna at the Brackenridge Field Lab has been monitored,

WHEREAS Dr. Gilbert, Director of the Brackenridge Field Lab, acknowledged the long history of data collection on the site by stating "if we were to be relocated, we'd be back to where we are 40 years from now,"<sup>9</sup>

WHEREAS Dean Rankin of the College of Natural Sciences said in a report in response to the Brackenridge Tract Task Force report "our stupidity will be nationally known and celebrated because many of our best faculty will immediately begin to consider their options for positions elsewhere,"<sup>9</sup>

WHEREAS on average 15 faculty members and over 20 graduate students conduct research at BFL every year,<sup>10</sup>

WHEREAS 200 to 300 undergraduates visit BFL every year,<sup>10</sup>

WHEREAS the proximity of BFL to the main campus makes graduate and undergraduate field trips more practical,<sup>11</sup>

WHEREAS Dr. Gilbert stated "reducing the size of BFL would certainly diminish the opportunities for field courses to coexist with research,"<sup>12</sup>

WHEREAS UT faculty teach the following courses at BFL: Laboratory Studies in Field Ecology, Applied Aquatic Entomology, Animal Communication, Entomology, Field Ecology, Native Plants, Vertebrate Natural History and Problems in Modern Biology,<sup>11</sup>

WHEREAS the main laboratory building provides indoor research facilities, classroom and computer lab space,<sup>13</sup>

WHEREAS the main building also houses the UT entomology collection as well as the Fire Ant Lab, Insect Biodiversity and Systematics lab, and Chemical Ecology Lab,<sup>13</sup>

### III. Ecology and Public Service

WHEREAS between 1990 and 2000 the city of Austin grew by 41%, the fastest growth rate of the thirty largest cities in the United States,<sup>14</sup>

WHEREAS “greenspace” in urban environments has proven environmental, economic and health benefits,<sup>15</sup>

WHEREAS BFL hosts field trips for not only UT students but also students from other colleges and high schools,<sup>11</sup>

WHEREAS BFL hosts entomology workshops for teachers and researchers,<sup>11</sup>

WHEREAS Dr. Gilbert said “[reducing the size of BFL] would... diminish the overall biotic diversity of the site,”<sup>12</sup>

WHEREAS the Brackenridge Field Laboratory is home to thousands of species including at least 163 species of birds, 19 mammals including bobcats, 377 species of plants, 60 species of ants, and 1200 species of moths and butterflies,<sup>10</sup>

WHEREAS 31 new state records, 5 new host records and 14 new species of insect have been discovered on the site,<sup>16</sup>

WHEREAS the 21 *Cerceris* (a genera of Digger Wasps) species at BFL make it the worldwide center for *Cerceris* diversity,<sup>16</sup>

WHEREAS research at BFL frequently relates to serious environmental problems including climate change, coral bleaching and urbanization,

WHEREAS fire ants are an invasive species which posse a significant threat to the native species of Texas and BFL is one of two labs in the United States researching the use of phorid flies to control fire ant populations,<sup>10</sup>

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Student Government of ~~the~~ <sup>The</sup> University of Texas supports the current location of Brackenridge Field Lab and believes that it should not be reduced in size,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED <sup>that the student government believes</sup> the Brackenridge Field Lab meets the mission and strategic goals of the University and the requests of Colonel Brackenridge by conducting research, educating, attracting quality students and faculty members, facing serious and challenging issues of society and public service in the form of improving the environment, economy and health of Austin,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED <sup>that the student government believes</sup> relocating or reducing the size of BFL would impair its educational, research and public service roles,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED <sup>that the student government</sup> ~~the student body~~ of The University of Texas at Austin commends the Brackenridge Field Lab for its forty years of service to the University,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that an official copy of this resolution be printed and distributed to the Board of Regents, the President of the University, the members of the

Brackenridge Tract Task Force, the Executive Vice President <sup>and Provost</sup> for ~~Academic Affairs~~, the Vice President for Research, the Dean of Graduate Studies, the Dean of the College of Natural Sciences and the Director of the Brackenridge Field Lab.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.utsystem.edu/bor/bracktract/report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/administration/strategicplan/#UNIVERSITY%20MISSION>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/opa/news/2006/09/powers29.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://media.www.dailytexanonline.com/media/storage/paper410/news/2007/10/30/TopStories/City-Council.Seeks.Say.In.Brackenridge-3064579-page2.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.biosci.utexas.edu/graduate/eeb/>

<sup>6</sup> Paraphrased Comments by Dean Rankin at Student Government Meeting 1/15/08

<sup>7</sup> San Mateo County, CA has the highest median housing value in the country

([http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/american\\_community\\_survey\\_acs/004974.html](http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/american_community_survey_acs/004974.html))

<sup>8</sup> [http://cns.utexas.edu/communications/2007/05/fo\\_bfl.asp](http://cns.utexas.edu/communications/2007/05/fo_bfl.asp)

<sup>9</sup> <http://media.www.dailytexanonline.com/media/storage/paper410/news/2007/12/10/TopStories/Future.Of.Field.Lab.Research.Uncertain-3140423.shtml>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/research/bfl/About%20BFL/About%20BFL.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/research/bfl/Education/Education.html>

<sup>12</sup> Personal communication

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/research/bfl/Facilities/Facilities.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/census/images/citysizes.xls>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.green-space.org.uk/awareness/Downloads/YourParks-Minimised.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu/research/bfl/Species/speciesindex.html>