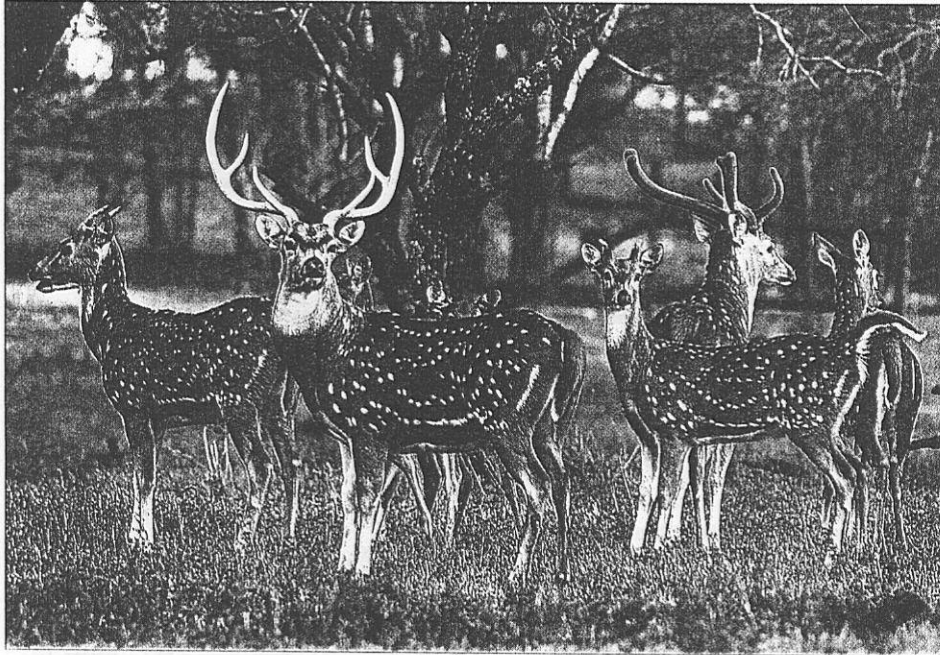


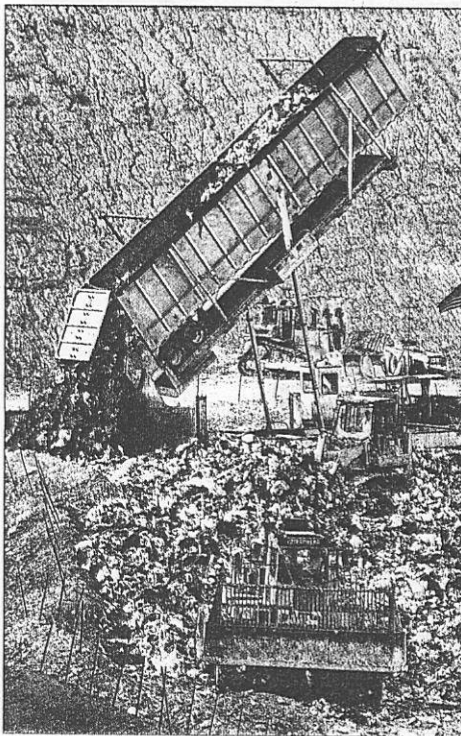
Landfill sports a clean image



Larry Kolvoord photos AMERICAN STATESMAN

Axis deer are among about 30 species of exotic animals that live on property owned by Texas Disposal Systems adjacent to its

341-acre landfill in southeastern Travis County. About 15,000 people visited the game park and events pavilion last year.



A waste hauler dumps a load of refuse into the Texas Disposal Systems landfill. The company receives about 3,000 tons of garbage daily from Austin, San Antonio and other cities. Its operations, however, draw few complaints from its neighbors about odors or stray trash.

Owners don't want to run a trashy facility

Company's efforts to be good neighbor win praise

By Kate Alexander
AMERICAN STATESMAN STAFF

CREEDMOOR—Landfills, with their heaps of garbage and the attendant stench, do not typically attract eager visitors.

But almost 15,000 people have passed through the gates of the Texas Disposal Systems Landfill in the past year with no intention of leaving bags of trash or unwanted washing machines.

They have come instead to enjoy swank events, such as the recent wedding of White House press secretary Scott McClellan, or to see antelope, bison and ostriches graze in the company's game park.

Decommissioned landfills have long been converted to lush golf courses or parks, but few working landfills



Jimmy Gregory
Co-owner of landfill company with his brother, Bob.



Bob Gregory
Said company is living up to promise to recycle, reuse.

double as recreation destinations. The events pavilion and game park, both of which sit in the path of the prevailing wind from the 341-acre landfill in southeastern Travis County, are part of Texas Disposal Systems'

See **LANDFILL, B3**

LANDFILL: Company puts old junk to new use

Continued from B1

effort to show that a working landfill can be a responsible neighbor.

"The attitude that . . . landfills have to stink is just not an acceptable attitude," said Bob Gregory, who owns Texas Disposal Systems with his brother, Jimmy. The privately held company includes the landfill, a hauling company and several other waste operations.

But Gregory added, "If you don't bring people, they'll never know. To them, a dump is a dump."

At a time when other area landfills are drawing criticism, the Gregorys' approach to managing waste has earned them many supporters who say the Texas Disposal operation is an example of how waste disposal can be done with both the community and the environment in mind.

"I don't want to sound like a commercial for them, but what they have done is so different," said Robin Schneider, executive director of the Texas Campaign for the Environment.

Schneider said the difference goes far beyond the fancy dances and unusual animals. She points to the company's efforts to divert waste from the landfill as the hallmark of its distinction.

The company keeps about 150,000 tons of materials out of the landfill each year through reuse and recycling efforts. By comparison, Austin residents generated more than 167,000 tons of trash, recyclables and yard trimmings last year.

Workers stand watch over the public drop-off area, looking for hazardous items that cannot go into the landfill. At the same time, they cull through the incoming cast-asides and collect anything with potential for reuse or resale. Those materials include everything from car batteries and scrap metal to children's toys and defunct computers. The reclaimed items are either recycled or sold at the on-site secondhand store.

The vast majority of the redirected waste goes to the composting operation. Steam rises from the rich rows of compost as a flurry of microorganisms rapidly breaks down the yard clippings, cardboard, phone books and dead animals to their most basic elements. The resulting humus is blended with local materials to become Garden-Ville garden soil, sold at six retail outlets.

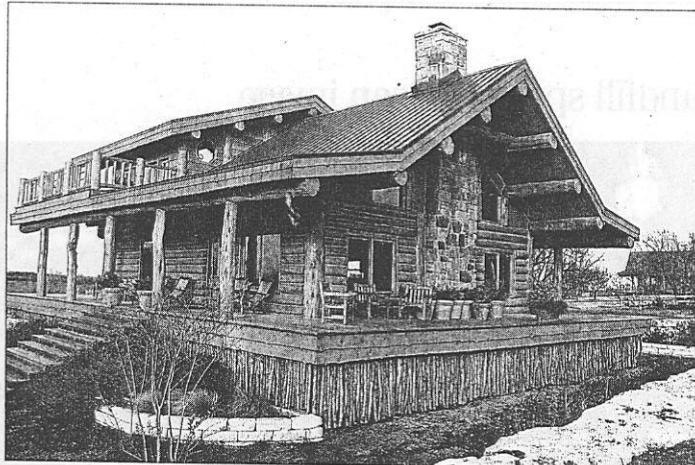
With up to 3,000 tons of garbage coming into the landfill each day from Austin, San Antonio and other communities, the amount of diverted waste is a drop in the bucket. It is also labor intensive and costly to run the two operations.

But Gregory said he has stuck with the reuse and recycling efforts because they were part of the promise he made to the environmental groups and Austin city leaders who supported his landfill permit in 1988. The landfill opened in 1991.

"We took that support very seriously," Gregory said.

One of those supporters was Gail Vittori, who served as the first chairwoman of Austin's Solid Waste Advisory Commission. The commission was created after a successful fight to kill the city's plans to build an incinerator.

Austin needed an alternative to incineration, and Gregory's plan was seen as an enlightened approach to the trash issue, said Vittori, who is also co-director of



Larry Kolvoord AMERICAN STATESMAN

In addition to the events pavilion and game park, the Texas Disposal Systems site has two log cabins. The landfill has been praised by environmental officials as well as some of its neighbors.

The attitude that . . . landfills have to stink is just not an acceptable attitude.

Bob Gregory
Texas Disposal Systems

the Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems in Austin.

"To this day, I have never been disappointed," Vittori said. The company has lived up to the promise to compost, recycle, reuse and salvage what it could, she said.

The landfill has also operated with a relatively clean environmental record. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality reports that the company has not prompted a citizen complaint since 1998 and was last cited by the state in 1993.

The competing landfills northeast of Austin, run by Browning-Ferris Industries and Waste Management Inc., have together generated more than 750 citizen complaints since 2001. Those complaints have declined significantly in the past year after the companies implemented new practices in the wake of the neighbors' pressure.

Steve Jacobs, landfill manager for the Waste Management site, lauded the Gregorys for running an "excellent" facility. He said Texas Disposal has the benefit of a large buffer from the neighbors and may begin seeing the same kind of resident uproar that has plagued the Waste Management operation as more people move near the site.

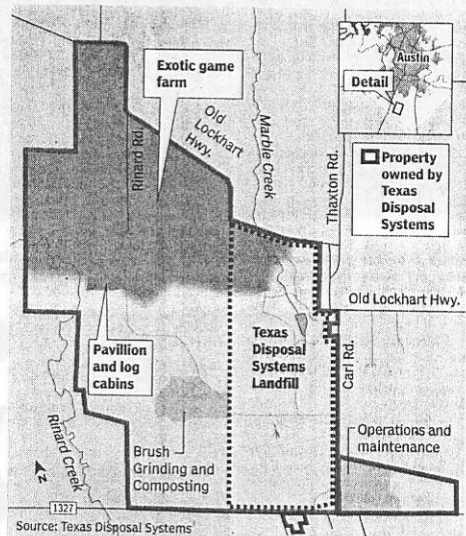
Texas Disposal gets mixed reviews from the neighbors that are there now.

Georgia Young moved to her rural, 1-acre plot just as the landfill was getting started. She now complains of the dust and odor that waft with the breeze.

"I do not see it as good," Young said. "The only thing that the landfill does is make promises."

She was part of a class action lawsuit in the early 1990s that

Landfill/game farm in Travis County



Robert Calzada AMERICAN STATESMAN

claimed the landfill lowered home values. Texas Disposal prevailed in that case. As the company acquires more land around her, Young worries that she will have to leave.

"This is my home, and I could never find anything like this again," she said.

Other neighbors report few problems. Hazel England, who lives on Carl Road abutting the landfill, said the company controls the odor well and is very quick to collect blown litter.

"We really haven't had any problems at all," England said.

Two of Bob Gregory's daughters also live adjacent to the landfill.

If Gregory has his way, more Texans will become neighbors of a Texas Disposal landfill. He would like to build new facilities throughout Texas and do "the things that we do now and operate other facilities like we have done here."

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