



Texas Land Trusts and Texas Landowners . . . Writing the Greatest Conservation Success Story You May Have Never Heard

We all know that the population of Texas continues to grow. The projection is that by 2060 there will be 46 million Texans, almost double our current population. During this same period, an unprecedented transfer of rural land will occur. Much of our state will be passed from one generation with a strong connection to the land, to another that has fewer opportunities and less time to connect to the land. While this may seem to forecast a bleak future for the land, water and wildlife that make Texas so special, Texas landowners and Texas land trusts are working hard to ensure that our innately Texan landscape is preserved in perpetuity.

One of the greatest conservation success stories that you may never have heard is how Texas' land trusts have assisted Texans in permanently protecting over 1.4 million acres of farms, ranches, wetlands, forests, watersheds, coastlines and river corridors. This success story has been quietly accomplished through voluntary agreements between land trusts and landowners that provide both land and water conservation for the common good, as well as potential financial benefits for the landowner.

A land trust is a local, state or regional nonprofit conservation organization that protects land for its natural, recreational, scenic, historical, agricultural, open space or educational value. These trusts actively work to conserve land through outright purchase or use of a legal tool called a conservation easement that limits the future development potential on a given property. Land trusts are working throughout Texas to assist landowners with their long-term conservation goals. They vary greatly in scope and scale, but they all share the common mission of working cooperatively with landowners who are committed to the perpetual conservation of their land.

Land trusts conserve lands by accepting donations of land, making outright purchase of land, and by negotiating private, voluntary conservation agreements on land (termed conservation easements). The land trust then has the obligation and responsibility to steward those easements it holds in perpetuity. Most land trusts are connected to local communities and are very familiar with local issues and needs. They are eager to partner with landowners to identify lands that are worthy of protection for natural, cultural, agricultural, recreational or other conservation values.

Conservation easements are being used by San Antonio and Austin as well as numerous land trusts to

preserve the Edwards Aquifer. River authorities and land trusts are protecting key parts of river watersheds across the state, which is critical for preserving the quantity and quality of our water supply, as well as wildlife habitat. Indeed, the establishment of the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program at the General Land Office has created a state program for preserving our rich cultural heritage of farming and ranching.

[The Texas Land Trust Council](#) (TLTC) works to promote and sustain the conservation efforts of Texas land trusts. Led by Executive Director Lori Olson, the mission of TLTC is to encourage excellence in the Texas land trust community through collaboration, educational, and outreach. By growing strong and healthy land trusts, TLTC ensures that land trusts are better prepared to serve as long term protectors and stewards of the conservation easements and lands they hold in perpetuity.

At the core of TLTC's mission is providing education and training for the land conservation community. One of the ways TLTC delivers these services is through the Statewide Land Conservation Conference, an annual three-day event that will be held in Austin, February 22nd through 24th, 2012. It will provide Texas-specific training on a variety of land conservation issues. The conference brings in experts from around the country, and provides unparalleled networking and education opportunities. This year the conference will feature over 50 different speakers and presenters on a number of topics that include: conservation easement and stewardship issues; organizational development; sophisticated conservation tools and partnerships; impacts of the drought; fire management; federal policy and farm bill issues; fundraising; and stewardship of conservation easements. Our major conference sponsors are The Nature Conservancy, ExxonMobil, and the Lower Colorado River Authority. We have dozens of additional statewide and local sponsors. This year our keynote speakers include Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples, State Representative Lyle Larson, and The Nature Conservancy State Director Laura Huffman.

Finally, at a time when few issues enjoy bi-partisan support in Congress, Congressmen Jim Gerlach (R-PA) and Mike Thompson (D-CA) have been successful in securing nearly 300 House co-sponsors (including majorities from both parties . . . more support than any other piece of tax legislation) who have pledged their support for H.R. 1964, legislation that makes the enhanced income tax incentive for conservation easements permanent. Currently, 20 of 32 members of the Texas congressional delegation are cosponsoring this federal tax incentive. Should this legislation pass, the greatest conservation success story that you may have never heard will become the model for cooperative conservation in Texas.

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