



Sky Lewey: New Hill Country Alliance Board President

A lifetime of caring for natural resources, especially the rivers

Austin (March 1, 2011) – Sky Lewey, new board president of Hill Country Alliance grew up on the banks of the Nueces River. Today Lewey and her family live on the Open V Ranch, near Uvalde. She is the director of Resource Protection and Education with the Nueces River Authority.

Lewey left Uvalde to attend school at Drury University in Missouri. Her family has been going to school there since its founding in 1873. Lewey’s daughter, Julie Ann Lewey, continues the family tradition at Drury University as a pre-vet student at the school. Her son, Jefferson Davis Lewey, is an architecture student at The University of Texas in San Antonio.



Lewey was early on the environmental scene with a degree in Environmental Science as well as a BA in Chemistry. At age 20, she found herself working in the petrochemical industry in Illinois for Northern Petrochemical on environmental issues, such as air emissions from chemical plants and hazardous waste reuse/recycle programs. It was 1979, a time when industry’s big polluters were interested in influencing the direction of regulations and how they would be implemented.

“Everything was new. It was a very exciting time,” Lewey recalls. “We were just starting to address environmental issues on a national level.” Lewey was involved in rule-making for the Resource Conservation Recovery Act for solid waste, and for portions the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act.

In the early 1980s with a new U.S. government administration, things changed drastically. “We were going great guns with fuel conservation and waste recovery,” Lewey says. “Then corporate funding was cut and everything went to zero.” In February in Illinois even the weather was below zero. That was enough to send Lewey packing back to her home town and roots in the cattle business, and her beloved Nueces River. Back in Texas, she worked for regional government on environmental impact and assessment of infrastructure projects such as landfills, wastewater treatment plants and international bridges. She also worked with agricultural commodity groups on developing markets in Asia and Europe.

“Back in 1979 there was little awareness of the environmental work needed along the river. Today, we know there is plenty of work to be done,” Lewey says. As destiny would have it, issues emerged around vehicle recreation in stream beds. Lewey joined the Nueces River Authority to work on the issue. “At that time, there was no consciousness about driving, dumping or digging in the river,” Lewey recalls. “People did not see the river as a living resource. They only saw rock and water or the absence of water.” She says she has spent the last ten years working to change that paradigm and save some of the last pristine rivers in Texas.

Lewey designed education programs to connect the resource to people’s behavior. “We didn’t have any money, so we had to be creative,” Lewey says. The program has three targets: 1) schools and institutions; 2) recreation-ists; and 3) riparian landowners.

In 2004, Lewey received a national award from the Environmental Law Institute for her work in educating the public and the Texas legislature about the damage being done by off road vehicles recreating in the stream beds of the Nueces basin. In 2008, Lewey’s efforts resulted in the Nueces River Authority’s Headwaters Stewardship education program winning a Texas Environmental Excellence Award.

According to Lewey, the Hill Country is faced with some big resource issues. “The things we value about the Hill Country are produced by a functioning landscape,” she says. “People need to know about the production of these values so they can make better decisions.”

Lewey says this is a big project year for HCA . Her 2011 intention for the organization is to “lead and catalyze information projects that use art, photo images, poetry and science to cultivate love, appreciation and wise intentions for the natural systems that produce the values we treasure.”

The Hill Country Alliance is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support around the need to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country. To learn more about Hill Country Alliance initiatives, please visit the HCA website (www.hillcountryalliance.org).