

*For Immediate Release*

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## **Hill Country Alliance Adds New Staff to Focus on Water Policy and Landowner Outreach Programs**

(May 6, 2014)—The Hill Country Alliance is pleased to welcome two new full-time staff members, Charlie Flatten and Katherine Romans, who will respectively manage the organization’s water policy and landowner outreach programs.

The Hill Country Alliance (HCA) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to bring together an ever-expanding alliance of groups throughout a multi-county region of Central Texas with the long-term objective of preserving open spaces, water supply, water quality, and the unique character of the Texas Hill Country.



As manager of the HCA’s water policy program, Flatten will expand and maintain relationships with the various federal, state and local agencies responsible for setting water policy in Central Texas and with landowners, planners, and stakeholders—a particularly crucial undertaking given the drought conditions and mushrooming development that have characterized the area in recent years.

“The great thing about the ‘water world’ is that everybody in it, from the state to the local level, is engaged, smart and passionate,” says Flatten. “Stakeholders don’t always agree on every point, but we recognize the value in bringing all sides to the table and working toward a common good.”

“A major challenge in water policy, management, and planning is public awareness,” Flatten continues. “But, due to the prolonged drought, water conservation is considerably higher on the public radar. So the HCA focuses on long-term

objectives for conservation, to change our water culture and sustain water resources and watershed systems for future generations.”

Flatten was born in New Braunfels and raised in Beaumont, coming to Austin 30 years ago to attend UT. Working part-time and studying full time, he almost completed an undergraduate architecture

degree before running out of money. So Flatten took a job in the mailroom of a local bicycle shop and eventually worked his way up to ownership.

Eventually, Flatten left the bike business and headed back to school, recently earning a master's degree in applied geography from Texas State University in San Marcos. His thesis was on the desalination of brackish/saline groundwater.

Flatten, his wife and seven-year-old son live in Austin's upper Boggy Creek watershed. "After you have children, nihilism becomes an unacceptable attitude. I swim with my son at Barton Springs just as my father and grandfather swam with me, and I want to make sure it's still around for generations to come."

As manager of the HCA's landowner outreach program, Katherine Romans is working primarily with landowners in the Pedernales River basin, raising awareness of their common concerns, sharing best management practices and resources, and connecting them with the Landowner Incentive Program, run by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

"I see myself not as the land management expert, but as the person who can connect landowners, practitioners, stakeholders and experts to share information and knowledge," says Romans. "Folks have been really receptive. They seem eager to learn and network."

Romans is originally from Fairfax, Virginia, and earned an undergraduate degree in history and U.S. government from the University of Virginia. She went on to earn a master's degree in environmental management from the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies. During graduate school, she interned at both local and national environmental nonprofits based in New Haven, Connecticut. She has also worked as an aide to the Committee on Natural Resources of the U.S. House of Representatives.



Romans brings an adventurous and enthusiastic presence to the HCA. Beginning in late 2010, she and a friend spent six months traveling in South America. They began in Tierra del Fuego and worked their way up the west coast of the continent. They were volunteers for WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) on three different goat farms, so Romans feels right at home in the Hill Country where goat ranching has been big business since the 1880s. Eventually she found her way to Texas and joined the HCA in 2013.

As someone who has held both nonprofit and government jobs, Romans says "I feel that nonprofits are unique in that they have to work hard, be creative, and show proven results to secure funding. They really have to tell a compelling story and be dynamic. When you work for a nonprofit," she says, "you're dependent on successfully convincing others of the merits of your work. You can't sit idly by."

You have to be innovative and inspirational—something I saw immediately in HCA.” That fact, she believes, energizes nonprofit staff and imbues their efforts with a real sense of urgency.

And with more than 95 percent of Texas lands held by private ownership, Romans appreciates the importance of building networks of responsible stewards of the land to protect natural resources for future generations.

“The beauty and fragility of Texas Hill Country are both its greatest asset and its greatest weakness. As more people move to this amazing place, it becomes more important that we share the knowledge that has been built over generations—knowledge of how to maintain scenic vistas, flowing springs, clean rivers and vibrant plant, animal and human communities.”

*The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to raise public awareness and build community support around the need to preserve the natural resources and heritage of the Texas Hill Country. Visit us at [www.hillcountryalliance.org](http://www.hillcountryalliance.org).*

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