



Issue: Conservation Easements and Working with Land Trusts

Brushy Top Ranch, Blanco County, Photo By: Texas Land Conservancy



HCA is a passionate community caring for the unique features, spring-fed streams, heritage ranch lands, spectacular beauty and vibrant culture of the Texas Hill Country for the benefit of future generations.

The Hill Country is blessed with a rich natural and historical heritage. For many landowners, land is much more than an economic asset; it is their legacy and their family history. Unfortunately, passing on the family farm or ranch, once a time-honored Texas tradition, is becoming less feasible due to personal and financial issues, including the cost of land management and the pressures of encroaching development.

Conservation easements are one of the most flexible and effective means to protect private property. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that ensures a property will forever be conserved according to the landowner's wishes. Each individual agreement is unique, reflecting the special qualities of the land and the conservation goals of the landowner. This agreement is negotiated between the landowner and the land trust organization (Hill Country land trusts are profiled on pages 2 – 3) which is responsible for monitoring and enforcing the terms of the conservation easement.

Many rights and responsibilities come with owning property, including the rights to manage resources, change use, subdivide, or develop. With a conservation easement, a landowner decides to limit or restrict one or more of these property rights. For example, a landowner donating a conservation easement could choose to limit the right to develop a property, but keep the rights to build a house, raise cattle and grow crops. The landowner may continue his or her current use of the property, provided the resources the conservation easement is intended to protect are sustained. Often

easements are donated by the landowner who may then enjoy considerable tax relief based on an appraisal and the development restrictions placed on the land by the owner. However, with public funding sources there can be far more opportunities for significant land conservation in the Hill Country and the Hill Country Alliance is helping develop these resources. Federal funds do exist and are used effectively in other parts of the county, but local matching dollars are necessary to take advantage of these kinds of programs.

Cities and counties in central Texas, including Austin, San Antonio, Hays County, Bexar County and Travis County have passed bond measures to generate public funding to preserve natural and historical areas, and protect water supply. Contact HCA for more information about these opportunities and how to get involved in such initiatives.

The Texas Land Trust Council offers an excellent 40-page handbook, *Conservation Easements: A Guide for Texas Landowners*, covering everything from the financial and legal aspects to working examples of conservation easements.



hill country alliance

*"I can think of
no finer gift that we
can leave our children
than clean water, open
spaces to wander and
explore, a safe haven for
native plants and wildlife,
and a lasting connection
to our rural heritage."*

— Robert A. Ayres
Shield Ranch



Photo By: Karen Bruett

Get to Know Your Hill Country Land Trusts



Cibolo Conservancy (CC)

The Cibolo Conservancy, based in Boerne, was formed in 1998 as a sister organization of the Cibolo Nature Center, a community educational center founded ten years earlier. Their focus is the preservation and conservation of the cultural and natural resources of the Cibolo Creek Watershed and surrounding areas in the Texas Hill Country. The Cibolo Conservancy now holds conservation easements on over 20 square miles of the Hill Country.

www.ciboloconservancy.org



Colorado River Land Trust (CRLT)

The Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA) created the Colorado River Land Trust (CRLT) to help preserve land and water quality along the 862-mile Colorado River basin. The trust, which is based in Austin, will purchase land and negotiate private, voluntary conservation easements to limit future land use. The Colorado River Land Trust, a 501(c)(3), was formed to preserve both the natural beauty and cultural history of the Colorado River basin. The nonprofit organization promotes voluntary land conservation and assists in preserving land for agricultural uses, natural resources, wildlife habitat, water quality, and scenic, historical or open space value.

www.coloradoriverlandtrust.org



Green Spaces Alliance of South Texas (GSA)

Green Spaces Alliance of South Texas (formerly Bexar Land Trust) was founded in 1998 and focuses on land conservation in the Southern Edwards Aquifer region and the San Antonio and Nueces River basins. Their mission is to sustain the natural environment and enhance urban spaces through land conservation, community engagement, and education. In San Antonio, they foster community gardens and a youth nature photography program. GSA's landowner relationships emphasize available options to achieve long-term goals for ecologically healthy properties and management of natural resources, preserving family heritage, and potential economic benefits. GSA is part of a team that has negotiated conservation easements through the City of San Antonio's Edwards Aquifer Protection Program, with the goal of protecting critical acreage over the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone.

www.greensatx.org



Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (GBRT)

The Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust, headquartered in Seguin, works throughout the watersheds of the Guadalupe and Blanco Rivers stretching from the springs and canyons of the Texas Hill Country to the marine environment of the Gulf Coast wetlands and San Antonio Bay. This service area encompasses Kerr, Blanco, Kendall, Comal, Hays, Caldwell, Guadalupe, Gonzales, DeWitt, Goliad, Victoria, Calhoun and Refugio counties. The mission of GBRT is to preserve the unique natural heritage of the Guadalupe watershed for future generations by protecting open landscapes, working farms and ranches and wildlife habitat through conservation easements, education and outreach that connects people to the water and the land.

www.gbrtrust.org

Hill Country Conservancy (HCC)

The Hill Country Conservancy, was founded in 1999 to preserve large strategic natural areas, working farms and ranches that help conserve communities' drinking water and critical water features, preserve wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities, and help maintain the Hill Country's unique quality of life. HCC works on a variety of land conservation projects including innovative partnerships with cities and counties that leverage federal funding. HCC's focus area includes Travis, Hays, Blanco, Burnet, Llano and San Saba counties.

www.hillcountryconservancy.org



Hill Country Land Trust (HCLT)

The Hill Country Land Trust (HCLT) is a grassroots land trust founded in 1998 with a mission to conserve and protect the agricultural lands, wildlife habitat, scenic beauty and watersheds of the Texas Hill Country for present and future generations. Based in Fredericksburg, HCLT was formed by a passionate group of neighbors and landowners concerned by the ever-increasing rate of fragmentation and development happening across the region. The HCLT Board brings decades of experience working with landowners to achieve their land stewardship goals. HCLT offers that expertise to each of its conservation easement donors. HCLT work across 19 Hill Country counties, with a particular focus on the area around Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, the Pedernales River basin, and the land surrounding the Balcones Canyonlands.

www.hillcountrylandtrust.org



Texas Land Conservancy (TLC)

Texas Land Conservancy's mission is to conserve natural areas in Texas and to protect the integrity of wildlife habitat, native plant communities, and scenic landscapes. TLC, which is based in Austin, focuses on projects that are ecologically representative of that eco-region, and places the highest priority on projects which protect water and/or riparian habitats, areas with critical habitat for rare species, and those areas being most heavily fragmented by development. TLC created a strategic plan, the Land for Water Initiative, which focuses on the protection of six key watersheds most threatened by development; Llano, Pedernales, Medina, Lower Brazos, Lower Trinity, and Neches.

www.texaslandconservancy.org



Wimberley Valley Watershed Association (WWVA)

Clean groundwater, available in sufficient quantities to sustain the entire ecosystem of the Cypress Creek basin, is essential to Wimberley Valley's ongoing cultural and commercial prosperity. The Association, which is headquartered in Wimberley, has a mission specifically developed to ensure communities are aware of their connection and responsibilities to the watershed and are capable of implementing water policies that will ensure water quality and availability for future generations.

www.wimberleywatershed.org



State and National Land Trusts and Land Conservation Organizations

The Nature Conservancy (TNC)

The Nature Conservancy works across the Lone Star State to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. To date TNC has protected more than 878,000 acres in Texas and have more than 100 conservation easements in place with private landowners. Thousands of those acres are in the Texas Hill Country, where much of the original savanna has been lost to urbanization and invasive species.

www.nature.org

The Trust for Public Land (TPL)

The Trust for Public Land is a national, non-profit land conservation organization, which works with communities, land trusts and public agencies to improve and create parks, protect watersheds and water resources, provide for healthy recreation/ education opportunities, provide strategic analysis/ planning tools (greenprints), support and create sources of public funding, and works with land trusts and public agency partners to purchase and protect land.

www.tpl.org

Texas Land Trust Council (TLTC)

A great way to learn about land trusts working in the Hill Country and throughout Texas is to connect with the Texas Land Trust Council. TLTC encourages excellence in the Texas land trust community through collaboration, education, and outreach. TLTC hosts the annual gathering of conservationists at the statewide Texas Land Conservation Conference and maintains a current database of land trusts and permanently conserved lands in the state.

www.texaslandtrustcouncil.org

Native Prairies Association of Texas (NPAT)

The Native Prairies Association of Texas, based in San Marcos, is a non-profit membership organization and land trust dedicated to the conservation, restoration, and appreciation of native prairies, savannas, and other grasslands. NPAT's geographic service area is state-wide.

www.texasprairie.org

Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT)

The Texas Agricultural Land Trust is a statewide land trust which works to conserve the Texas heritage of privately-owned agricultural and working lands. Additionally, TALT works to communicate the many public benefits – such as drinking water, native wildlife habitats, and open space – provided by the stewardship of those private working lands.

www.txaglandtrust.org

The Conservation Fund (CF)

Through CF's partnership-driven approach, the Fund works with corporations, governments and communities to protect wildlife habitat, working forests and farms, parks, battlefields and other historic sites and more. CF helps communities plan for growth, support sustainable small business development and train the next generation of conservation leaders.

www.conservationfund.org

The Land Trust Alliance (LTA)

The Land Trust Alliance is a national conservation organization that works to save the places people love by strengthening land conservation across America. LTA focuses on three strategic goals; accelerating the pace, improving the quality, and ensuring the permanence of conservation by building highly effective and well-governed land trusts that protect lands with the highest conservation values and ensure their protection in perpetuity. The Alliance is based in Washington, D.C., and has several regional offices.

www.landtrustalliance.org

Bruce and Bernice Jordan

In the 1990's Bruce and Bernice Jordan contacted the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to inquire how they could protect the wildlife, open spaces and unique character of their ranch, just east of Fredericksburg. The letter they sent to TPWD described their concerns about encroaching development along Highway 290, and their fear that this activity was threatening the "critters" on their ranch. They also reached out to the Hill Country Land Trust (HCLT), then in its early years. In 2001 the Jordans' 132-acre property became HCLT's first conservation easement, and a true partnership was established. The conservation easement turned out to be the tool that answered the Jordans' wish to protect their treasured land forever. Although Bruce and Bernice have since passed away, HCLT continues to work with their heir to steward the land. The Jordans' foresight and passion for the natural resources of their ranch will provide public benefit forever.



Photo By: Katherine Peake



What is HCA?

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 Central Texas Hill Country.

We create resources, conversations and forums for landowners, neighbors, elected officials and all concerned citizens. Interested in staying connected to this and other land, water and scenic beauty issues in the Hill Country?

Please visit www.hillcountryalliance.org and click "subscribe" to receive our weekly newsletter with news, events and updates.

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