

## Capacity Building Programmatic Successes:

### Case Study 1:

#### **Annual Hill Country Dark Sky Conference:**

Each year, the Hill Country Alliance convenes a regional half-day conference for community leaders on the subject of night sky preservation. Participants, which typically number about 70 people from the Hill Country, include elected officials, government staff, economic development personnel, and night sky preservation advocates. The City of Fredericksburg and the Gillespie County Economic Development Corporation are co-hosts and provide support for the event.

The topics covered include local outdoor lighting policy (ordinances and their effective implementation); technical subjects (electronic billboards, for instance); economic development opportunities related to night skies; and updates from important stakeholders, like regional streetlight providers and state parks. Based on exit surveys, informal feedback, and the high number of participants who return each year, we believe that participants find the workshop to be highly instructive and inspirational. Many of these community leaders care about night sky preservation, but rarely have time to learn about or focus on the subject, due to the many other issues they have to attend to day-to-day. Just as important to the content that is covered, the conference serves as an important networking event, where these leaders can see that their counterparts in other communities are also engaged on this issue and they can build useful relationships with those counterparts.

Each year at the end of the conference, participants write down two or three night sky preservation goals for the following year, goals they would like to pursue in their own communities. We collect a copy of these notes and follow up with the leaders after the conference to help them achieve their goals.

As a result of these conferences and our follow-up engagement with community leaders after these conferences, night sky preservation has grown as a priority issue for the region. Participants, mostly elected officials and local government staff, from more than a dozen communities have led successful local efforts to adopt or update outdoor lighting ordinances; five communities have begun to pursue Dark Sky Community designations from the International Dark-Sky Association; important stakeholders like regional street light providers, and the major urban centers (Austin and San Antonio), whose light pollution effects communities throughout the region, have begun to earnestly address the issue; and communities increasingly recognize the tourism value of their dark skies and leverage it in their marketing.

## Case Study 2:

### **Riparian Management Workshop, City of Bandera:**

Every year, HCA's Land Program organizes workshops for landowners and public agency partners to enhance land and river health. In 2017, HCA worked with the Bandera County River Authority & Groundwater District (BCRAGD) and Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) to host a workshop focused on riparian health.

Riparian areas are the transition zone between a creek or river and the drier uplands; these verdant areas are critical for fish and wildlife habitat, flood mitigation, water quality, water quantity, erosion control, and creek bank stability.

During the 2017 half-day workshop held in Bandera, HCA and TPWD highlighted best practices for stewarding healthy riparian areas and controlling non-native, invasive plants such as *Arundo donax* (Giant cane) safely and effectively.

This workshop provided the foundation for expanding the Healthy Creeks Initiative—a public-private, multi-year partnership started in the Pedernales and Blanco River Basins—to the Medina River Basin. Partners have since collaborated to engage dozens of landowners in Bandera County to control *Arundo* and improve riparian health.

The 2017 workshop also created and strengthened relationships with the City of Bandera. Since then, partners have explored a variety of opportunities to improve the city's public park, located along the Medina River. Outcomes to date include the control of *Arundo donax* and creation of educational signage. This year, HCA worked with the City, TPWD, and BCRAGD to develop a more comprehensive set of recommendations to improve riparian health, reduce erosion, and improve public access at the park.

The City Council approved the set of recommendations co-created by HCA and TPWD and is now pursuing funding from the Texas Water Development Board to implement these guidelines.

.