



Protecting the land, water, night skies, and communities of the Texas Hill Country for 20 years.

# 2025 Annual Report

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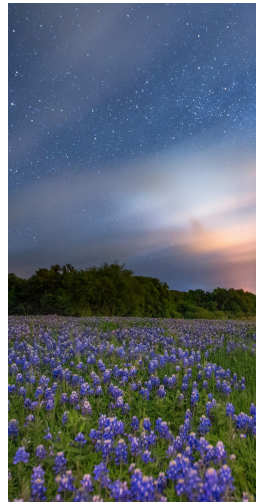
Celebrating 20 Years

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“HCA is a long-time, trusted partner of the Community Foundation, but they showed up in a big way for our communities following the July 4th floods. Beyond the workshops, volunteer days, and seed distribution events, they are movement builders. They know how to build coalitions and consensus, to find common purpose, and align diverse stakeholders around a shared vision. They are a model of the kind of place-based change making that is going to create lasting benefits for our region.”



- Austin Dickson  
CEO, Community Foundation  
of the Texas Hill Country





Photo by Rowdy Winters

# OUR MISSION

The mission of the Hill Country Alliance is to bring together a diverse coalition of partners to preserve the open spaces, starry night skies, clean and abundant waters, and unique character of the Texas Hill Country.

In 2025, Hill Country Alliance celebrated a major milestone—**20 years of conservation leadership in one of Texas’ most treasured landscapes.** Over two decades, HCA has grown into a trusted convener, advocate, and resource for communities across the region. This year, we continued that legacy by responding to historic floods, expanding conservation partnerships, and empowering leaders and land stewards to shape a more resilient future for the Hill Country.



Photo by Casey Morris



Photo by Christopher Keeran



Photo by Albert Garcia



# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Neighbors,

This year reminded us just how interconnected our land, water, night skies, and communities truly are. Our region faced historic flooding, ongoing drought, unprecedented growth pressures, and urgent questions about how to steward our land, water, night skies, and communities for the long term. Through every challenge, the Hill Country Alliance remained rooted in partnership, collaboration, and a shared love for this extraordinary place we call home.

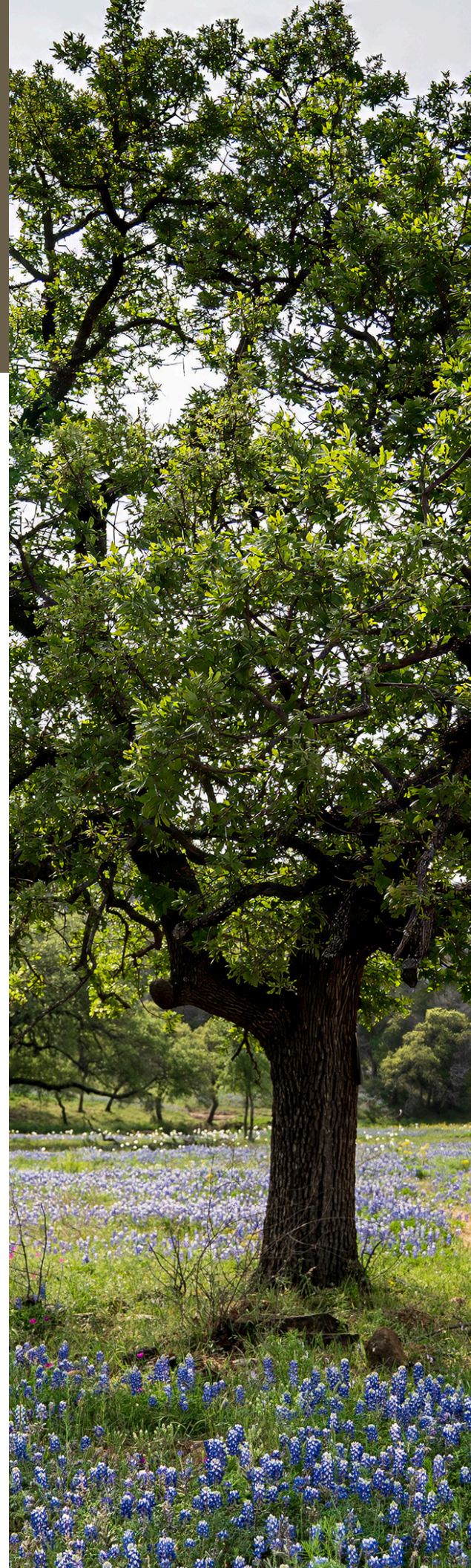
We also wrapped up a year-long celebration of HCA's 20th anniversary with the launch of a new video to describe our work and a joyful celebration full of dancing, music, and neighborly connection at the Knibbe Ranch. Over the past two decades, our work has evolved alongside the Hill Country itself, responding to new pressures while staying true to our mission. In 2025, that commitment took shape through more than 100 convenings and workshops, engagement with thousands of residents and leaders, direct support for landowners recovering from floods, expanded protections for our night skies, and historic investments in local water infrastructure.

None of this work happens in isolation. It is made possible by a community that believes the Hill Country is worth protecting. As we look ahead, the challenges facing the Hill Country are real – but so is the collective will to address them. Thank you for standing with us, for showing up for this place, and for helping shape a future where the Hill Country continues to thrive.

I'm for the Hill Country,



Katherine Romans  
Executive Director



“I couldn’t be more proud to have joined the Hill Country Alliance board this year. During my time on the Hays County Commissioners Court, it was my interactions with groups like HCA- who are rooted in optimism, collaboration, and a creative approach to how we grow wisely in the Hill Country, that brought me the most joy. I’m happy to have a chance to lean into the mission that all residents of the Hill Country should be a part of.”

- **Lon Shell**




*Former Hays County  
Commissioner and Current  
HCA Board Member*



# LAND PROGRAM

HCA's Land Program is dedicated to promoting on-the-ground stewardship that benefits Hill Country lands, creeks, and rivers as well as bolstering conservation strategies to protect ranches, wildlife, and water resources.

In 2025, the Land Program advanced three core goals:

-  Strengthening private land stewardship through outreach and education
-  Growing conservation funding
-  Convening partners to scale collective impact

**2** NEW EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES CREATED FOR FLOOD RECOVERY

**34** EVENTS HOSTED AND PRESENTED AT

**1,130** LAND STEWARDS ENGAGED



## HILLSIDE STEWARDSHIP

HCA hosted two hands-on Hillside Stewardship workshops in Comal County for 53 land stewards to learn new strategies for enhancing water catchment and controlling erosion.

## CAMP BULLIS SENTINEL LANDSCAPE

HCA partnered with Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute to roll out \$8M of USDA funding for private land stewardship & conservation around Joint Base San Antonio-Camp Bullis. In addition, HCA worked with Joint Base San Antonio and San Antonio River Authority to secure \$450,000 for a new flood resilience study of Cibolo Creek to mitigate flood threats on base and in surrounding communities.

## REGIONAL COLLABORATION

HCA convened dozens of partner organizations through the Hill Country Network Land Team and Pedernales Team to enhance coordination and scale project impacts. Projects focused on connecting hundreds of landowners with technical and financial resources for both riparian restoration and land stewardship. HCA also expanded its partnership with the Texas Parks and Wildlife's Healthy Creeks Initiative to include landowner outreach along the Guadalupe River in Kendall County in addition to the Pedernales River basin.



## FLOOD RELIEF & RECOVERY

### RESPONDING TO THE JULY 2025 FLOODS

In July 2025, historic flooding across the Hill Country caused heart breaking loss of life, reshaped landscapes, disrupted communities, and left many Hill Country neighbors reeling. In the days that followed, the Hill Country Alliance witnessed an **extraordinary outpouring of generosity and support from neighbors across the region**. That support made it possible for HCA to respond quickly – and to remain present long after the initial emergency passed.

Within days of the flood, HCA staff were on the ground in affected communities, assisting neighbors with mucking out homes and serving hot meals to individuals and families in need. As immediate emergency response transitioned into recovery, we heard a clear call from the community: **landowners needed practical guidance, trusted information, and support to help their riverbanks and properties heal.**

## RIPARIAN RESTORATION WORKSHOPS

In November, HCA hosted three Riparian Restoration Workshops in Kerr County – in Hunt, Kerrville, and Center Point – for landowners directly affected by the floods. These workshops provided landowners with practical hands-on tools to support the restoration of their riparian areas by working with natural recovery processes rather than against them. **To support landowners with this restoration, HCA distributed:**

**800+**

LIVE-ROOTED PLANTS

**6,400**

POUNDS OF NATIVE SEED

With help from our partners including the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country, the Upper Guadalupe River Authority, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas A&M Forest Service, and many others, more than **100 affected landowners** participated in these workshops.

## LOOKING AHEAD

As we look ahead, HCA is planning additional outreach and restoration events along the Guadalupe River and other flood-impacted riparian areas, including Cow Creek and Big Sandy Creek in Burnet and Travis counties. **Nearly \$200,000 in sedges, grasses, native seed, and other plants** have already been secured to further jumpstart recovery across the region.

While immediate response was critical, the need for ongoing care, restoration, and coordination remains. Our ability to sustain this work was made possible by early donor support, underscoring what is possible when a community comes together – not only to respond to disaster, but to invest in long-term healing and resilience. **We are deeply grateful to be part of a Hill Country community that continues to show up for one another.**



I am very happy that I was able to attend the workshop. The speakers were knowledgeable and engaging, making the event fun. I think it was very important that we were told about other rivers that have recovered quite quickly. It gives us hope. I believe everyone left with a more positive attitude.

- Eileen Brooks-Parsons  
Workshop Attendee and  
Impacted Landowner



# WATER PROGRAM



Photo by Jazzmin Aquayo

HCA's Water Program focuses on assisting grassroots groups that champion thoughtful water stewardship in their communities, advocating for state and local policies that protect groundwater and surface water, and promoting resilient water supplies in Hill Country communities through the advancement of One Water projects.



Photo by Stephanie Saldivar

## ADVANCING ONE WATER & POLICY



City of Blanco, City of Woodcreek, and Hays County adopted One Water resolutions, joining a growing regional network



Hosted a sold-out One Water in the Hill Country Conference with leaders from 20 communities



Published a One Water Building Implementation Checklist, which has been used by several partners across the region to incorporate One Water strategies

## BRIDGING CONVERSATIONS WITH THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

HCA co-hosted its first Building in the Hill Country Conference, convening 90+ leaders from development, engineering, and conservation sectors for a discussion about water-wise development. This momentum sparked the creation of a new developer-focused leadership program launching in 2026.

HCA also published its "Model Language for HOAs" guide, which promotes water-wise landscaping in new and existing developments. Several new and existing developments have incorporated language from the guide.

4

NEW RESOURCES CREATED FOR COMMUNITIES AND GRASSROOTS GROUPS

5

NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND HOAS THAT HAVE INCORPORATED WATER-WISE LANDSCAPING GUIDELINES

6

TOTAL HILL COUNTRY COMMUNITIES WITH ONE WATER RESOLUTIONS

## EXPANDING WATER INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

HCA helped communities pursue funding, including assisting Johnson City's drinking water and wastewater funding applications and supporting Comal County's Clean Water SRF application to protect the Trinity and Edwards aquifers.

HCA also supported the passage of Proposition 4, which will generate \$20 billion over 20 years to invest in water, wastewater, and flood infrastructure.

# NIGHT SKIES PROGRAM

HCA's Night Skies Program helps Hill Country counties and cities minimize the impacts of light pollution through education and outreach, the establishment of outdoor lighting policies, and the recognition and celebration of certified Dark Sky Places in our region.

## NIGHT SKY PRESERVATION FUND

HCA named recipients of our second annual Night Sky Preservation Fund, thanks to the generous support of the Coypu Foundation and individual night sky advocates from around the region. The fund supports regional nonprofit organizations, local governments, and small businesses working to protect the Hill Country's starry night skies. Out of 22 applications, HCA selected 14 organizations and projects to receive funding across 11 counties in the Hill Country, including Bandera, Bexar, Blanco, Burnet, Comal, Hays, Kendall, Lampasas, Real, Travis, and Uvalde.



## HILL COUNTRY DARK SKY CONFERENCE

In 2025, after a five-year absence, HCA brought back the Hill Country Dark Sky Conference, reigniting an annual convening of the night sky movement in the Hill Country, attended by municipal and county leadership, educators, and partners. The event was held in Blanco and co-hosted by the City of Blanco, the Blanco Chamber of Commerce, and the Blanco County Friends of the Night Sky. Guest speakers included city administrators, lighting professionals, military personnel, and dark sky advocates. Over 70 individuals attended, representing four counties, 10 communities, and 24 organizations.

32

EVENTS  
HOSTED



27

NEW NIGHT SKY  
FRIENDLY BUSINESSES



40

NEWS ARTICLES, PRINT,  
AND INTERVIEWS



1,700

PEOPLE ENGAGED THROUGH  
NIGHT SKY EVENTS

# COMMUNITIES PROGRAM

Building connections across county lines, HCA's Communities Program supports rural leaders in their efforts to highlight and protect the unique character of their communities, in city limits and beyond. In 2025, the program expanded its reach and deepened its impact by growing its long-standing collaborations.



## LEADING IN THE RURAL HILL COUNTRY

With more than 80 participants at each of 2025's Rural Roundups, the Leading in the Rural Hill Country project has built a dedicated audience of governmental, non-profit, and small business leaders from seven counties across the western Hill Country. The spring Roundup in Leakey focused on how rural communities can balance heritage and growth, while the fall Roundup in Concan explored the future of water in the western Hill Country. Led by a steering committee of local leaders, and in partnership with the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country, both full-day events featured resource and information sharing, site tours, community discussion, and relationship building.

**160+** RURAL ROUNDUP PARTICIPANTS

**26** SPEAKERS ACROSS TWO FULL-DAY RURAL ROUNDUP EVENTS

**100+** COUNTY-TO-COUNTY COALITION PARTICIPANTS

## COUNTY-TO-COUNTY COALITION

HCA co-hosted three regional workshops that convened more than 100 county commissioners and key staff to share county tools for managing natural resources and development pressures. Responding to participant requests, in 2025 this coalition also began to serve as a conduit to the Texas Legislature by providing bill updates during the 2025 legislative sessions, as well as providing a space for county leaders to brainstorm and select 5 legislative priorities to pursue together at the 2027 session of the Texas Legislature.

## TEXANS FOR RESPONSIBLE AGGREGATE MINING

HCA's work with TRAM in 2025 focused primarily on the Texas Legislature and on setting the now incorporated, 501c3 coalition on a path for future success and independence from HCA. At the legislature, TRAM was proud to have helped preserve the contested case hearing (CCH) for rock crusher permits, as this is the only administrative tool available to neighbors who want to oppose a quarry in their area, or to bring a proposed quarry operator to the negotiation table. TRAM and HCA, working with the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and legislators, also secured a study from the Texas Water Development Board, due in 2026, that will explore the feasibility of water conservation and reuse practices for quarries and associated operations.

# LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

Combining resources and expertise from across HCA's program areas, the Leadership Program engages, empowers, connects, and inspires leading voices and key decision makers dedicated to the long-term vitality of our unique 17-county region. In 2025, HCA hired full-time staff to coordinate this targeted programming through HCA's long-running annual Leadership Summit and our expanding Leadership Institute.

20

ONLINE AND IN-PERSON EVENTS

97

SPEAKERS ACROSS LEADERSHIP PROGRAMMING

400+

PEOPLE ENGAGED AT IN-PERSON EVENTS

## HILL COUNTRY LEADERSHIP SUMMIT

HCA hosted its 13th annual Leadership Summit: Rooted in Resilience, welcoming nearly 300 participants for a day of learning, networking, and being inspired among our region's top community leaders, conservation practitioners, and natural resource managers. In response to a year with devastating widespread flooding, prolonged drought conditions, groundwater shortages, and increased wildfire risk, this year's Summit was focused on how we build resilience into the very fabric of our region. A central message echoed throughout the event - now is the time to work together, to build bridges, and to create a future that balances conservation, growth, and safety.



Photo by Jacob Gonzalez

## HILL COUNTRY LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

The Leadership Institute hosted its third cohort of 15 elected officials and senior staff, delivering ten months of immersive training in land, water, and planning policy. Participants included one county commissioner, three mayors, three councilmembers, and eight key staff from groundwater districts and municipalities across seven counties. The curriculum featured more than 75 subject experts, with topics ranging from water infrastructure funding to transportation and development codes to engaging the Texas Legislature.



# TEXAS HILL COUNTRY CONSERVATION NETWORK

The Texas Hill Country Conservation Network is a diverse coalition of conservation-focused organizations – nonprofit, academic, and government – working together to protect natural resources and solve growth challenges across the Hill Country. Our mission is to maximize protection of the Hill Country’s natural resources through enhanced collaboration.



## NETWORK GOALS

- » Increase land conservation and promote land stewardship practices
- » Ensure adequate spring and river flows
- » Protect water quality
- » Expand night sky preservation
- » Grow awareness and support
- » Increase investment in conservation
- » Build long-term, durable partnerships

8

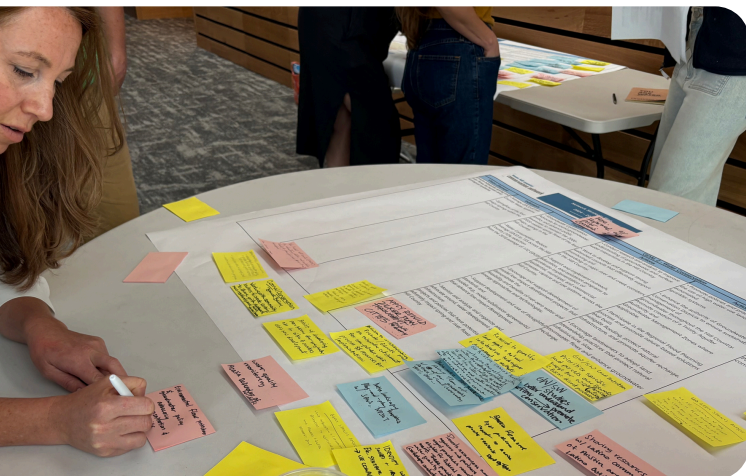
YEARS SINCE THE NETWORK WAS ESTABLISHED

58

NETWORK PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

200+

INDIVIDUAL NETWORK MEMBERS



## HILL COUNTRY CONSERVATION ACCELERATOR PROJECT

In 2025, the Network developed the Conservation Accelerator Project (CAP), a 10-year collaborative initiative focused on rapidly strengthening and expanding the ability of key organizations working in the Hill Country to collectively address the growing pipeline of conservation opportunities and to scale it further. Over the next 10 years, CAP aims to double the conserved acres in the Texas Hill Country, increasing the total to over 1 million acres.

## 2025 Board of Directors

Michelle Whitwell Pokorny, President  
Ben Eldredge, Vice President  
Jeff Harkinson, Treasurer  
Roel Lopez, Secretary  
Judge Bella Rubio  
Karen Bruett  
Ted Flato  
Julie Lewey  
Bill Neiman  
Charles "Tres" Plummer  
Lon Shell  
Kathleen Tobin Krueger  
Leo Tynan

## 2025 Staff

Katherine Romans, Executive Director  
Cliff Kaplan, Program Director  
Daniel Oppenheimer, Land Program Director  
Chanee Carlson, Director of Philanthropy

Cody Ackermann, Texas Hill Country Conservation Network Manager  
Sydney Beckner, Operations Manager and TRAM Coordinator  
Jennifer Berrong, Marketing and Communications Manager  
Marisa Bruno, Water Program Manager  
Leah Cuddeback, Leadership Program Manager  
Dawn Davies, Night Skies Program Manager  
Rebeca Gibson, Regional Engagement Manager  
Grace Gilker, Communities Program Manager  
Sheila Holt, HR and Finance Manager  
Lauro Martinez, Landowner Outreach and Stewardship Manager





# CELEBRATING 20 YEARS

In 2025, Hill Country Alliance marked its 20th anniversary with a special celebration bringing together more than 400 partners, supporters, and friends from across the region. The evening honored two decades of collaboration to protect the Hill Country's land, water, night skies, and communities.

Guests enjoyed live music, shared stories from HCA's journey, and celebrated the collective impact of the people who have helped shape this work over the past two decades. The event also featured a commemorative anniversary poster highlighting the evening's musical guests, along with limited-edition merchandise created to mark the milestone.



As we celebrate the past 20 years, we also look ahead. With continued partnership and community support, HCA is committed to advancing conservation and regional collaboration to protect the Hill Country for the next 20 years and beyond.



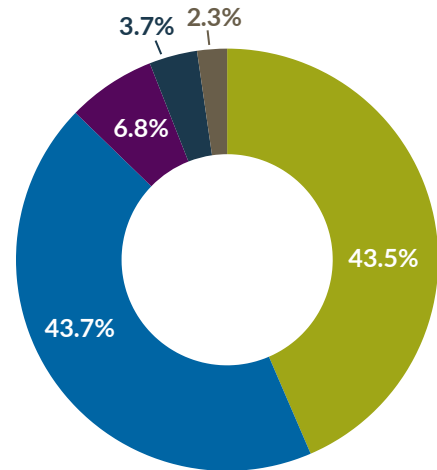
Photos by Jessica Attie



# FUNDRAISING & FINANCIALS

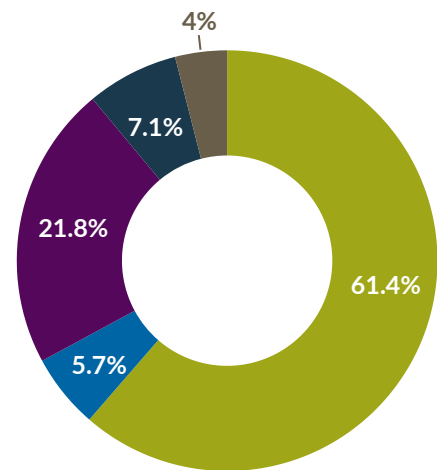
## INCOME

● Foundations	\$1,832,500
● Individuals	\$1,840,725
● Org/Govt	\$285,380
● Other	\$155,230
● Corporations	\$96,160
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$4,209,995</b>



## EXPENSES

● Programs	\$1,306,754
● Network	\$122,041
● Education & Outreach	\$465,114
● Administrative	\$150,404
● Fundraising	\$84,841
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,129,154</b>



\*These represent unaudited year-end financials. For audited financials, please reach out to HCA or consult our annual 990 filings with the IRS.



254

New Donors  
in 2025



62

Supporters Joined Our  
Roots & Reach Initiative



1

Founding Member of  
our Legacy Circle

We are deeply grateful to the many individuals, foundations, businesses, and partners whose generosity makes HCA's work possible. Your support helps protect the land, water, night skies, and communities of the Texas Hill Country for generations to come. If you're inspired to invest in this work, **please consider making a gift using the QR code.** You can also support the future of the Hill Country through Legacy Giving by including HCA in your estate plans and becoming part of our Legacy Circle. To learn more, please reach out to Chanee at Chanee@hillcountryalliance.org.



Scan to donate

# 2025 DONORS

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 Kathy Lewis  
 Kathy Locke  
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 Kelley Cunny  
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