



# Issue: Conservation Easements and working with Land Trusts

Photo By: Herb Smith



I'M FOR THE  
**Hill Country**

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

The Hill Country is blessed with rich natural 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 and less feasible due to many 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 while providing tax relief. A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement that ensures a property will forever be managed 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.

Many rights come with owning property, including the rights to manage resources, change use, subdivide, or develop. With a conservation easement, a landowner limits one or more of these 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.

*"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*

Often easements are donated by the landowner who may then enjoy considerable tax relief. However, with public funding sources there can be far more opportunities for significant land conservation in the Hill Country. The Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program, created in 2005 by the Texas Legislature, is a Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program that pays property owners who volunteer to conserve their land. Unfortunately this program has never been funded. 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 elections to generate public funding to preserve natural 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 covering everything from the financials and legal aspects to working examples of conservation easements.



**hill country alliance**

# Get to know your Hill Country Land Trusts

## 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 began in partnership with Texas Parks and Wildlife and is now an independent 501c3 that “encourages excellence in the Texas land trust community through collaboration, education, and outreach”. TLTC hosts the annual Texas Statewide Land Conservation Conference. They also maintain the most current database of land trusts in the state. [www.texaslandtrustcouncil.org](http://www.texaslandtrustcouncil.org)

## Cibolo Conservancy

The Cibolo Conservancy was formed in 1998 as a sister organization of the Cibolo Nature Center, a community-based educational center which was 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. [www.ciboloconservancy.org](http://www.ciboloconservancy.org)

## Green Spaces Alliance of South Texas

Green Spaces Alliance of South Texas, (Bexar Land Trust), was founded in 1998 and focuses its land conservation activities 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. They also foster community gardens and a youth nature photography program. [www.greensatx.org](http://www.greensatx.org)

## Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (GBRT)

The Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust was established in 2001 and serves the Guadalupe River basin. The mission of the Trust 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](http://www.gbrtrust.org)

## Hill Country Conservancy (HCC)

The Hill Country Conservancy was founded in 1999 to preserve large strategic natural areas and working farms and ranches that conserve critical water features, preserve 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 primary focus is the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer region outside of Austin. [www.hillcountryconservancy.org](http://www.hillcountryconservancy.org)

## Hill Country Land Trust (HCLT)

The Hill Country Land Trust was organized in 1998 by a volunteer group of area landowners concerned that increasingly intense development pressure throughout the Hill Country threatened to destroy its very nature. Based in Fredericksburg, the still all-volunteer land trust serves a nineteen county region to protect and preserve the agricultural lands, wildlife habitat and watersheds for present and future generations. [www.hillcountrylandtrust.org](http://www.hillcountrylandtrust.org)

## Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT)

Founded by leaders from the Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers, Texas Farm Bureau, and Texas Wildlife Association, the Texas Agricultural Land Trust promotes the conservation of open space, native wildlife habitats, and natural resources on Texas' private working lands. Created by farmers and ranchers for farmers and ranchers, TALT is unique in its focus on agricultural lands and legacy ranches. [www.txaglandtrust.org](http://www.txaglandtrust.org)

## Native Prairies Association of Texas (NPAT)

The Native Prairies Association of Texas is a non-profit land trust dedicated to the conservation, restoration, and appreciation of native prairies, savannas, and other grasslands in Texas. Texas was once 3/4 prairie and savanna. The Tallgrass Prairie extended from southern Canada through Fort Worth-Dallas south to San Antonio including Texas' Blackland Prairies and Grand Prairie. [www.texasprairie.org](http://www.texasprairie.org)

## The Texas Land Conservancy (TLC)

The mission of Texas Land Conservancy is to conserve natural areas in Texas and to protect the physical and ecological integrity of their wildlife habitat, native plant communities, and scenic landscapes for the benefit of present and future generations. TLC works throughout Texas, however, they have identified three important Hill Country watersheds as high priorities - the Pedernales, Llano and Medina River Basins. [www.texaslandconservancy.org](http://www.texaslandconservancy.org)

## The Nature Conservancy (TNC)

The Nature Conservancy is a global land trust working to “conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends”. They achieve success through sound science, collaboration with many partners, and the support of over 1 million members worldwide. Here in the Hill Country they are focused on lands surrounding the many TNC Preserves and Project Areas. [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)

## Trust for Public Land (TPL)

TPL is a national, non-profit land conservation organization. They work closely with, and have helped found, hundreds of land trusts coast-to-coast. While they do help craft conservation easements, unlike a traditional land trust, they do not own or steward lands. TPL is also a leader in creating local initiatives that fund public investments in strategic land conservation projects. [www.tpl.org](http://www.tpl.org)

## Wimberley Valley Watershed Association (WVWA)

Clean groundwater, available in sufficient quantities to sustain the entire ecosystem, is essential to Wimberley Valley's ongoing cultural and commercial prosperity. The Association's mission was 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. <http://www.wimberleywatershed.org/>



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