

Issues and Actions: County Planning Tools

It won't last forever. Since ancient times the rolling hills, endless green vistas, and sparkling cool waters of the Texas Hill Country have been special. Man has flourished here for centuries, drawn to this land of beauty and life-giving resources. Our recent history is steeped in a ranching and agricultural heritage. Outdoor recreation and wildlife habitat are dependent on the plentiful spring and creek water flows. The Central Texas region is now recognized nationally as a major tourist destination, a favorite retirement location, a perfect second home site, an easy commute to a nearby metropolis—and the lure continues like a siren's song. The attraction grows, but the hill country land we have loved so well for so long, is now in jeopardy of being loved into obscurity.



Hill Country Alliance is a non-profit 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.

The cost of sprawl. Rampant, unplanned and unmanaged growth threatens the long-term economic health of the Texas Hill Country. Sprawling development brings an inefficient use of land that takes its toll straight from the taxpayers' pocket. Increased costs for community services and infrastructure – police/sheriff/

Join us by asking our legislature and local elected officials to grant and use County authority specific to the Texas Hill Country to:

- Preserve the rights of farmers, ranchers, hunters, anglers and other longtime residents.
- Prevent industrial and commercial uses from devaluing neighboring property.
- Protect our watersheds from pollution, construction erosion, urban runoff and illegal dumping.
- Assure sustainability of water supplies in PGMA's, in cooperation with existing groundwater conservation districts.
- Promote conservation development through incentive-based subdivision guidelines using free market exchange of property rights.
- Preserve agricultural lands through purchase of development rights and other strategies that support farming and ranching activities.
- Coordinate transportation planning, growth corridors and open space policies to reduce costs and lower taxes with more efficient government.
- Initiate policies that require growth to pay for itself.
- Impose impact fees on new development activity to offset the cost of infrastructure and help fund the purchase of development rights.
- Clarify intent of existing Grandfathering rules.

fire protection, emergency medical services, schools, roads, water, wastewater—coupled with increased taxes and other negative economic impacts of sprawl are well documented, as are its adverse environmental effects. In some areas, groundwater is being pumped and used faster

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than it can be replenished. Whether through paying for new sewer systems and new schools, or for time wasted stuck in traffic, sprawl has direct and quantifiable costs to our economy and significant impacts on the quality of our lives.

Who can save it? Hill Country communities and local governments need to be able to plan and manage growth without jeopardizing property rights. To truly “grow smart” the Hill Country community must be empowered by the Texas Legislature to plan and implement a coordinated approach to transportation, surface water, groundwater, open space, conservation development, environmental and agricultural protection, and Hill Country-sustainable economic development initiatives. Because much of this region’s undeveloped lands are not within incorporated cities or towns, county governments—limited by road building and permitting powers—are the only entities with the territorial breadth and jurisdiction suitable for actively and rationally managing growth within our open countryside.

Hill Country counties need new planning tools. Our Hill Country counties desperately need new tools to create and implement their own comprehensive regional plans for a sustainable economy and environment. The Texas Legislature has considered measures to give county governments better tools to respond to new problems brought on by rapid population growth. While statewide bills seeking local option elections to grant counties additional planning authority have not won approval, the citizens and leadership in Hill Country counties are now desperately seeking tools to protect property values and natural resources.