

September 27, 2011

**Is Our Rural Heritage at Risk?
Conversation among Rural Landowners Helps Develop Strategies
to Cope with the Impacts of Drought, Development Pressures,
and Other Challenges**

2011 Farm & Range Forum Scheduled October 14-15 in Uvalde

How we conserve our rural heritage is a concern not only of people who live in rural areas of Texas, but also of urban dwellers. Many Texans cherish their family roots in farming and ranching communities and want to ensure the character of Texas continues to include values that spring from a love of the land and a sense of stewardship for our natural resources, including the wildlife that defines our south central Texas region.

“Conserving Our Rural Heritage” is the theme of this year’s Farm & Range Forum to be held in Uvalde on October 14 and 15. Friday afternoon’s program is a field trip to a working ranch, and the Saturday forum is on the campus of Southwest Texas Junior College.

As farmers and ranchers struggle to make a living on the land, there are many practices, programs, and exercises in planning that can make a difference between success and failure. At the Farm & Range Forum, we will examine topics such as conservation easements that can generate income or tax relief in exchange for a pledge to keep land out of development. To get the greatest benefit from such programs, we will see how a landowner can maximize the conservation values of the land. For many landowners, diversifying income streams by adding hunting or nature tourism to the mix can help sustain profitability. It is important, too, to understand how many ways conserving open space contributes to the public benefit. We will learn how estate planning can help conserve land and resources into the next generation.

Another topic of importance to everyone in south central Texas is water. Our afternoon session is dedicated to learning more about our water resources and how we can best manage them for the long run. New scientific discoveries, management plans for the Edwards Aquifer, and ways we hope to enhance productivity are all topics for discussion, as is the state of our western rivers. We will also hear how the recent legislative session affected land and landowners.

As much as livestock and crops suffer from these hot, dry conditions, wildlife, too, are being stretched to their limits to stay alive. Water is scarce, and foraging for food requires more and more energy for less and less success. Whether landowners or not, these circumstances affect us all and the health of our region for the long term. When our rainfall totals are this far below normal, how can we help wildlife survive, and what happens when many animals die?

“The solutions to surviving are ones we will discover together,” commented Susan Hughes, one of the Forum planners. “The Farm & Range Forum is a place for sharing concerns and frustrations, as well as ideas and plans to get through these difficult times.”

Friday afternoon, at the ranch, specialists will lead small groups in discussing range management practices, riparian values and protection, and rangeland plant diversity, as well as income diversification. Dinner at the ranch will be followed by a roundtable conversation.

If you are a rangeland manager or a Master Naturalist or have a pesticide applicator license, your participation can earn valuable Continuing Education Units.

The Farm & Range Forum was developed in 2000 to foster dialog between rural landowners and urban dwellers on natural resource conservation issues. This year’s forum is being planned by the Bexar Audubon Society, Edwards Region Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative*, Green Spaces Alliance of South Texas, Hill Country Alliance, Nueces River Authority*, San Antonio Conservation Society, Texas Agricultural Land Trust, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Texas Department of Agriculture, Texas Wildlife Association, and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service*. (*denotes sponsorship as well) Additional sponsors to date include Capital Farm Credit (Uvalde Credit Office), the Edwards Aquifer Authority, Bud Light/Silver Eagle Distributors, Fall Creek Vineyard, Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust, Plateau Land and Wildlife Management, and Save the Laja, Inc.

Additional sponsors and exhibitors are welcome. Contact Courtney Brittain at <mailto:cbrittain@texas-wildlife.org> or Helen Holdsworth at <mailto:hholdsworth@texas-wildlife.org>. Phone 800-TEX-WILD (800-839-9453).

Advance registration encouraged: Friday/Saturday - \$85; Friday only - \$40; Saturday only - \$65; students – ½ price. Fees include meals and breaks. Registration forms are available at the following websites: <http://www.greensatx.org>, <http://www.texas-wildlife.org>, <http://www.hillcountryalliance.org>, and www.bexaraudubon.org, or register by phone at 800-TEX-WILD.

A block of rooms is being held at the Uvalde Holiday Inn Express: (830) 278-7300. Ask for the “Farm & Range Forum” rate.

2011 Farm & Range Forum Schedule*

Conserving Our Rural Heritage

Friday

- 12:00 noon Field trip to a working Uvalde ranch
Meet in Uvalde to caravan and/or carpool — additional instructions to follow
- 12:30pm Field trip begins promptly at 12:30 at Harris Ranch, followed by dinner & campfire
Riparian Assessment: Sky Lewey, Steve Nelle
Rangeland Plants: Patty Pasztor, Bill Neiman, Rose Cooper
Range Management Practices: Phillip Wright, Kason Haby
"Happy Hour" discussion
Dinner
Roundtable discussion with Rep. Tracy King

Saturday

- 7:30am Breakfast at Southwest Texas Junior College
Hill Country Alliance video
- 8:00am Optional Session on Pesticide Laws & Regulations (for CEUs) — Daniel Jackson,
Texas Department of Agriculture
- 9:00am Welcome, Recap of Friday's Program & Preview — Helen Holdsworth, Texas
Wildlife Association
- 9:30am Moderator: Peggy Sechrist, Hill Country Alliance
Public Benefits of Private Lands — Steve Jester, Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust
Land Fragmentation & Implications for Range Management Practices — Roel
Lopez, Texas A&M Institute for Renewable Natural Resources
Maximizing Conservation Values of Rural Lands — Claude Ross, USDA-NRCS
- 10:40am Break
- 11:00am Moderator: Greg Pasztor, Bexar Audubon Society
Estate Planning & Tax Update — Charles Granstaff
Legislative Update — Rep. Doug Miller
Conserving Family Lands: Landowners with conservation easements
- 12:00 noon Introduction: Bryan Davis, Texas AgriLife Extension Service
Agritourism, Nature Tourism, & Rural Heritage — Shelly Plante, Texas Parks &
Wildlife Department
- 12:30pm Lunch served
- 12:50pm Introduction: Susan Hughes, Green Spaces Alliance
Keynote by Con Mims, Nueces River Authority
- 1:30pm Introduction: Bruce Fried, Green Spaces Alliance
"Barn Again" Program & Tax Credit for Barn Restoration — Stuart Johnson,
San Antonio Conservation Society & National Trust for Historic Preservation
- 2:00pm "Water in the West" — Moderator: Susan Hughes, Green Spaces Alliance
Western Rivers & Streams in Peril — Sky Lewey, Nueces River Authority
Land Management Programs for Water Conservation — Philip Wright, USDA NRCS
New Developments in Groundwater Science — Geary Schindel, Edwards Aquifer Authority
- 3:00pm Break
- 3:15pm Edwards Aquifer Authority: 15 Years Out — Luana Buckner, Edwards Aquifer Authority
Water Resource Management: Past, Present, Future (Region L & GMA 10) — Con Mims, NRA
- 4:00pm Introduction: Ken Weidenfeller, Texas Department of Agriculture
Rain Enhancement — Stephanie Beall, Southwest Texas Rain Enhancement Association
- 4:30pm Moderator: Helen Holdsworth, Texas Wildlife Association
Q&A/Discussion/Breaking Issues

9.20.2011

* Speakers, schedule, & topics subject to change.