

# We Can't Do It Alone

By Terry Tull



*David K. Langford on his family's portion of the historic Hillingdon Ranch near Comfort, Texas. Photo courtesy of David K. Langford.*

David K. Langford tells an eloquent story about his family's longstanding connection to the land, and about a problem he is facing that is bigger than even he can deal with. With an earnestness that reveals his passion, David describes how his ranch's natural springs and creeks that are so vital to the health and diversity of his land are being jeopardized by an external threat over which he has little to no control. Many of you may have heard David tell his story, and some of you may be living a story similar to David's. It goes like this...

Long ago – in fact, some 7 generations ago – David's ancestors settled where he lives today – on his family's part of the original 13,000 acre ranch near Comfort, Texas. Over the generations, through one family's continuous and enlightened management, the land has flourished. Over those many years, his predecessors developed a love of the land and honed the skills of land stewardship that today make David rightfully proud of his family ranch's success. For years, David has shared his land stewardship acumen and passion with others through his involvement as one of the Texas Wildlife Association's original and continuing leaders, and through his many other activities.

David's creeks and streams add important value to his land and the surrounding Hill Country. They are not only essential for his ranching and hunting enterprises, but also for sustaining the wildlife habitat that creates a complete and healthy eco-system that makes his land so productive – and which features in his well-known photography. His land, he says, is but a tile in a greater mosaic that makes up the Texas Hill Country, a land of diverse landscapes, wildlife, and communities that prosper from the bounty and beauty the land bestows on us all.



*Water is life to a landowner, but our water is being depleted and landowners can't prevent it by acting alone. Photo of Block Creek taken by David K. Langford about 150 yards from his home on the Hillingdon Ranch at sunrise. To see more photography by David, visit his website: [www.westernphotographycompany.com](http://www.westernphotographycompany.com)*

But, David says, his family's wells and springs are dropping precipitously – not just from the recent drought – but from overuse of the groundwater sources that supply them. And when groundwater dries up, so do the creeks and streams that are fed by it, and so forth down the whole riparian system. It is a pattern of loss that we have been seeing for a long time, but only now are we realizing its increased rate of acceleration due to the fragmentation of Texas ranchland and the resulting draw on our aquifers. As good as David's family may be at stewarding their land, and at keeping their water use within the carrying capacity of the land, he is being undermined by the harmful actions of others who have not been restrained in their use of available groundwater.

The resulting loss of groundwater, and thus spring and stream flow, is imperiling all the benefits that flow from their land. It is destroying the value David and his extended family have built over generations, and it is also negatively affecting all of the land around them, including the communities downstream. And, it is happening all across the Hill Country.

David's family alone can do almost nothing to prevent or alleviate these problems. But together, with others who also acknowledge the threat to our aquifers, they have a fighting chance at restoring a balance to our state's use of groundwater.

**David K. Langford recommends landowners take these actions to protect and preserve their groundwater:**

- Implement improved water management and conservation practices as key elements of your own land management efforts.
- Support conservation initiatives that not only conserve land, but also water resources.
- Work with other landowners and the general public to increase their awareness of the threats against our groundwater.
- Communicate your concerns to your elected officials at all levels.
- Support organizations working to protect landowners' groundwater property rights.