



Friends of
Balcones Canyonlands
National Wildlife Refuge

November 13, 2014

Dear Friends;

The Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, located just northwest of Austin, is an amazing natural resource area devoted to protecting the habitats of hundreds of species of native flora and fauna, grasslands, wooded hills and canyons, and vital watersheds. A generation ago, our leaders had the foresight to create the refuge to protect the endangered Black-capped Vireo, Golden-cheeked Warbler, and other species of plants and animals unique to the area. Thousands of school children visit Balcones for hands-on science learning in these wide-open spaces. Native grasslands and habitats are being improved through fire management and other restoration techniques that are transforming overgrazed pastures and hillsides into prime habitat for warblers, vireos, quail and other native species.

The acquisition boundary of the Balcones Canyonlands Refuge encompasses approximately 80,000 acres, most of which is undeveloped, privately held land that will likely be lost to urban expansion in the future if we don't take action to protect it. Approximately 25,000 acres are protected through permanent conservation easements, or held in the public interest by the US Fish and Wildlife Service. In the early years of the refuge, public funding enabled the protection of over 20,000 acres through congressional appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which relies on mineral development fees from offshore oil and not on tax dollars. Since the turn of the 21st century, congressional support for protecting natural resources has been drastically reduced, leaving a void in funding for the additional 20,000 acres authorized for permanent protection on the refuge.

In this challenging time, the Friends of Balcones Canyonlands, the Trust for Public Land, Travis Audubon Society, the Hill Country Land Trust, the Hill Country Conservancy, and others have spent years seeking opportunities to work with landowners and the US Fish and Wildlife Service on conservation easements and fee acquisition of land from willing sellers. Through this collaborative partnership, we have a historic opportunity to continue this important work within the Balcones Canyonlands. An agreement is in place that would allow for the acquisition and permanent protection of the tract known as Peaceful Springs Ranch. This tract consists of 525 acres of prime hills and grasslands, hundreds of acres of habitat for the endangered songbirds and migratory monarch butterflies, as well as important watersheds and riparian areas that are vital to the health of the Lower Colorado and Brazos Rivers. Peaceful Springs is a wonderful tract for conservation on its own merits, but what makes this opportunity so compelling for acquisition is its connectivity to lands that are already protected. Peaceful Springs is bordered to the north and south by thousands of acres of prime habitat that is already part of the refuge. Acquiring Peaceful Springs for permanent conservation will join together these areas and eliminate the potential for future fragmentation if this area was to be developed. *(Continued)*



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In spite of its high value for wildlife and watershed protection, Peaceful Springs is also a primary target for real estate development and even gravel mining. If the land were to be used for development purposes, the impact would be devastating, and the great work that has been done to protect this area would be in peril.

Through months of negotiation with the seller, there is a purchase agreement to acquire the entire tract at a very reasonable price, but with an extremely tight time frame. The property is valued by appraisal in excess of \$3 million. The seller has made a generous donation of land value, and nearly half the purchase price has been raised through grants and donations from individuals, foundations, and corporations. The challenge is to raise the balance of the purchase price, \$1.5 million by December 31st to close the deal. **We need your help to make it happen.**

In terms of conserving the American landscape, the 20th century will be remembered for historic strides in protecting our treasured landscapes through the creation of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the expansion of our National Parks. Continued success in land conservation this century will require collaborative efforts between landowners and partner organizations in our communities to preserve private lands alongside these vital public spaces for the overall good of our society. The wide variety of recreational opportunities at Balcones Canyonlands also provides a huge economic boost to the area, with folks traveling thousands of miles each year to get a glimpse of our cherished vireos and warblers, whether at the annual Balcones Songbird Festival, or a weekend family outing

Please donate to our Conservation Giving Fund today in whatever amount you are able to contribute.

Protecting the Peaceful Springs tract will be a huge accomplishment toward fulfilling the conservation plan for Balcones Canyonlands. Your donations will be directed towards realizing the goal of protecting vital lands within the Balcones Canyonlands NWR, and may be made by mail, or online, using our secure website. Please help us achieve this important milestone for Balcones Canyonlands. Thank you kindly for your support.

Sincere regards,



Jim Nosler

Director of Conservation
Friends of Balcones Canyonlands NWR