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Contact:

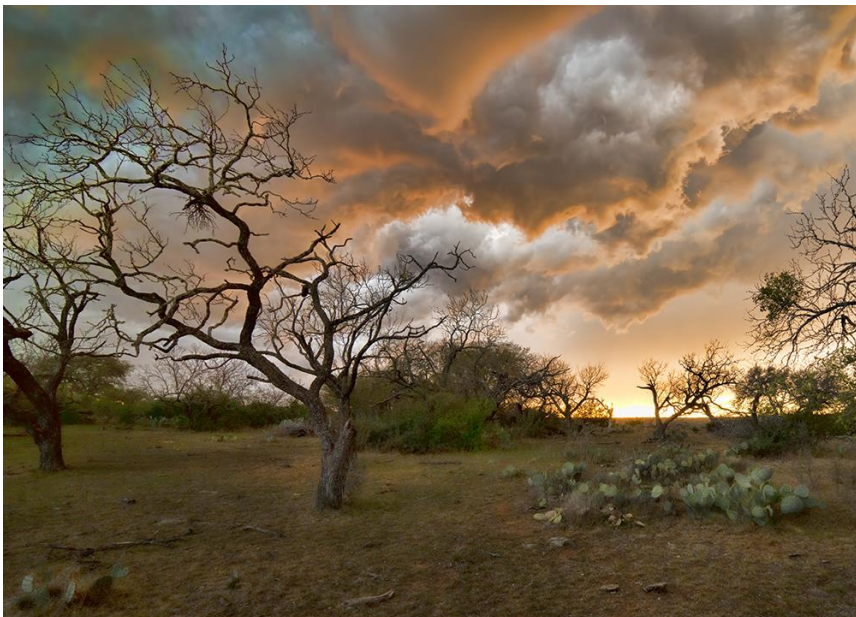
Christy Muse, Executive Director  
Hill Country Alliance  
[christy@hillcountryalliance.org](mailto:christy@hillcountryalliance.org)  
512.560.3135

## **Hill Country Alliance Announces Winners of Photography Contest for 2015 Calendar**

(August 13, 2014) – A desolate tree beautifully framed by a sunset and clouds, an old railroad bridge by starlight, a Texas-sized colorful bug, a cabin framed by a double rainbow—these describe images chosen as winners in the 2014 Hill Country Alliance (HCA) photography contest. These photos and more will be spotlighted in the 2015 HCA calendar, expected to go on sale in September on HCA’s website.

“All of our photographers are winners,” said Christy Muse of HCA. “Each year it is so difficult to choose photos that best represent the Hill Country and tell the story of what we must protect and preserve. With nearly 400 photo submissions this year, the 2015 calendar will be as usual, stunning and evocative.”

“It’s through photographs like these that we help share the importance of protecting our Hill Country environment, and one of the reasons our calendar has been so popular with both area residents and nature lovers worldwide,” said Milan J. Michalec, board president of HCA.



Grand prize winner Mark Holly, who recently relocated from Bandera to Boerne, submitted “No Bluebonnets this Year!” and although the spring flowers weren’t what were hoped for, the striking composition of a dead tree and parched landscape surrounded by clouds glowing in the sunset allowed him to find beauty where some might not. Holly, who took up photography in college while studying information technology, said that he most enjoys landscape settings because there are “so many

beautiful scenes that need to be shared.” After an early retirement, he took time to determine what he wanted to do with his life and focused on photography, much of which lends itself to black-and-white compositions. “I love the ability to capture and create scenes that might brighten someone’s day ... I hope that people who are unable to visit these sites will be able to enjoy their beauty. The Texas Hill Country keeps me inspired, and I worry about our natural resources. I hope its beauty will remain for generations to come.”

Tod Grubbs won first place with his work “Stars over the Rail Road Bridge.” Grubbs and his wife have turned their passion for photography into a career, and prefer to photograph landscapes and cityscapes. “It was a challenge finding the composition we were looking for outside of the light dome of Austin and San Antonio, but this happened to be just what we were hoping for – the perfect combination of a moonless night, the star-filled galaxy, and the railroad bridge,” Grubbs said. The photo was taken east of Llano on Highway 29. “The unique and varied landscapes of Central Texas bring me a lot of joy as a photographer.” He and his wife are searching now for the perfect windmill to photograph.



Second-place winner Tom Conner credited the Hill Country with reconnecting him with nature and as his inspiration for photographing wildlife surrounding his cabin near Hondo. “I decided to submit ‘Texas Alien’ because the smaller life forms we encounter every day are very often overlooked,” he said. “If we slow down and really take time to observe them, they each offer something interesting. Capturing the magnificence and mystery of Texas wildlife is my

passion.” Now retired, Conner’s photography hobby became his career and after courses at the New York Institute of Photography, he ran a studio in San Antonio.

Christina Ellis garnered third place for “Driftwood Cabin,” photographed during a break in an intense thunderstorm in April near Wimberley. “I stepped outside to enjoy the rain-cooled air, and saw an amazing double rainbow over the art studio my husband built,” she said. “It seemed magical.” A photographer for some 40 years, Ellis said she never tires of finding inspiration from the outdoors. “The Hill Country is my home, and it is never boring,” she said.



*The Hill Country Alliance is a nonprofit 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.*

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