

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**How Can We Conserve Our Rural Heritage?
During Historic Drought, Farms, Ranches, and Wildlife Habitat
Suffer Unprecedented Challenges**

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

“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 the Harris Ranch and the Saturday forum is on the campus of Southwest Texas Junior College.

Caught in the grips of the second worst drought in recorded history, with the worst statistics ever for a single year, south central Texans are struggling with how to manage their lands in these unprecedented climatic conditions with no end in sight. Managing to make a living was once the goal of western landowners. Today, the question may be, how can I just keep from losing my land or simply seeing it dried up and blown away by the wind?

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.

The solutions to surviving are ones we will discover together. The Farm & Range Forum is a place for sharing concerns and frustrations, as well as ideas and plans to get through these difficult times.

Texas lost 2.1 million acres of farms, ranches, and forest land between 1997 and 2007 and more than 360 acres of farmland is converted to other uses every day (*Texas A&M Institute for Renewable Natural Resources and American Farmland Trust*). But the wide-open spaces of the western counties in our region are where the natural resources are that help keep our water pure and our air clean, produce food and fiber, and generate benefits that mitigate climate change.

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Conserving these lands also conserves our rural heritage – something we can't recover once it's lost and something many hope to teach their children and grandchildren about through experience – not just pictures in a book.

“When we began to plan this year's Forum,” explained Susan Hughes, one of the Forum organizers, we had no idea we would be facing such difficult times in terms of water shortages, extraordinary heat, and exceptional drought, as the U.S. Drought Monitor report calls it. We feel this Forum will provide great value to attendees in terms of the information that will be presented, and through the interactions available with other landowners, conservationists, and agency professionals who will be sharing their expertise.

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

Saturday's program includes informative panels as diverse as public benefits of private lands, land fragmentation, ways to maximize the conservation values of rural lands, and an update on estate planning and the legislature. An afternoon session on “Water in the West” – definitely a hopeful title – examines new developments in groundwater science, water resource planning, rain enhancement, and rivers in peril, as well as the “Barn Again” program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and its tax credit offering for barn restoration.

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.

Continuing education credits have been approved for Certified Private Applicator, Certified Professional in Range Land Management, and Master Naturalist.

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).

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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.

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2011 Farm& Range Forum Schedule*

Conserving Our Rural Heritage

Friday

- 12:00 noon Field trip at Harris 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 — Mark Mapston, TxDoA Animal Services
Dinner
Campfire discussion — 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:
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

9.6.2011

* Speakers, schedule, & topics subject to change.

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