



SUSTAINABLE WATER MANAGEMENT IN THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

A WATER CAMPAIGN INITIATIVE

Cypress Creek Waterfall by David Parsons

TOWARD WATER SUSTAINABILITY: A CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT TRANSFORMATIVE WATER SOLUTIONS

THE WATER CAMPAIGN AIMS TO SECURE \$150 MILLION BY 2021 TO PRIORITY STRATEGIES WHERE PHILANTHROPY CAN HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT: ENABLE FLEXIBLE DISTRIBUTION OF WATER; STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATIONS TO BUILD POLITICAL WILL; DRIVE DECISIONS WITH DATA; DEVELOP NEW FUNDING SOURCES; IMPROVE WATER GOVERNANCE; AND ACCELERATE INNOVATION.

Philanthropy has a window of opportunity to dramatically improve the way water is managed for people and the environment. To capitalize on this moment, funders working together at the Water Table have committed over \$100 million to transformative, water-related solutions, as part of a four-year, \$150 million [Water Campaign](#) aimed at leveraging multiples of that funding from other public and private partners.

The Water Campaign seeks to accelerate progress towards two overarching goals: (1) bring basins and watersheds into balance for people and nature; and (2) strengthen resilience of watersheds and water systems in a 21st century climate.

The Water Campaign was launched with \$10 million available to match new and increased funding to specific initiatives, including the Texas Hill Country Initiative summarized here. Funders interested in securing matching funds should contact the Water Funder Initiative team or Water Table members for more information.

The Water Funder Initiative (WFI) is a collaborative effort to identify and activate promising water solutions through strategic philanthropic investments in the U.S., starting in the American West. Learn more at waterfunder.org.

MARCH 2020



THE GOAL OF THIS INITIATIVE IS TO IMPLEMENT SOLUTIONS THAT CONNECT LAND CONSERVATION, WATERSHED HEALTH, AND THE LONG-TERM RESILIENCE OF WATER RESOURCES IN THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY.

The Texas Hill Country encompasses more than 11 million acres in 18 counties in Central Texas, including the rapidly growing cities of San Antonio and Austin, as well as extensive rural areas. It is a landscape of rugged natural beauty, rich biodiversity unique ecological systems, and heritage-rich rural communities. The Texas Hill Country is home to the headwaters of 12 of Texas' rivers, flows from which sustain life from the rural ranch lands and thriving cities of Central Texas to Corpus Christi, Port Aransas, and the coastal estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico. As a microcosm of Texas, the water and natural resources of the region face serious threats from sprawling development, groundwater over-use, and increasingly extreme droughts and floods.

The Texas Hill Country Conservation Network ("the Network") is a coalition of several conservation organizations, academic institutions, agencies, and local government representatives working together, with the backbone support of the Hill Country Alliance, to address critical water management and natural resource challenges in the Hill Country. As set out in its five-year strategic plan, the Network's overarching goals include: increasing sustainable funding for land and water protection; protecting urban water supplies through integrated management; supporting rural community efforts to mitigate urban and ex-urban growth pressures on water resources in order to maintain spring and river flows; and growing awareness and support for Texas Hill Country conservation.

TEXAS HILL INITIATIVE BUDGET

Total Budget	\$8,800,000
Funds Committed	\$6,000,000
FUNDING GAP	\$2,800,000



ADDITIONAL FUNDING OVER THE NEXT THREE YEARS WILL:

ADVANCE “ONE WATER” IN AUSTIN AND THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY

The “One Water” approach views all water—drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, grey water and more—as resources that must be managed holistically and sustainably. The City of Austin’s recent passage of Water Forward, a ground-breaking 100-year water plan with heavy emphasis on “One Water” integrated management tools, creates a unique opportunity to catalyze an institutional shift in the culture of water management in Central Texas. Successful implementation of the plan will require significant and sustained commitment from local elected officials, broad support from the community, models for the use of “One Water” practices in rural context, and data on the effectiveness and benefits of “One Water” strategies on the ground. The Network’s partners will collaborate to ensure the successful implementation of Water Forward and to expand the use of “One Water” into the wider region.

ENHANCE SUSTAINABLE GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT FOR CONTINUED SPRING FLOW

Thirty percent of all surface-water flows in Texas originate as groundwater, and groundwater contributions to surface flows are greatest in the Texas Hill Country. Groundwater in Texas is private property owned in place, with locally-elected groundwater conservation districts crafting long-term management goals, called Desired Future Conditions (DFCs). The majority of groundwater districts in the Texas Hill Country do not currently have sustainable management goals that prohibit aquifer overdraft and are, therefore, not managing for the depletion of the underlying aquifers. The Network’s partners will coordinate efforts to conduct the science, education, and policy work needed to ensure groundwater is



Onion Creek Sunset by Tom Zinn

managed sustainably across the region so spring flows continue.

SECURE SUSTAINABLE FINANCING FOR WATERSHED PROTECTION

Texas is the only state in the country where counties cannot control land use planning to appropriately manage growth. As cities grow, Texas loses agricultural lands—faster than any other state. The Texas Hill Country exemplifies this, with three of the top-five fastest growing counties in the country. As a result, the Texas Hill Country is rapidly losing agricultural land and with it, continued watershed function, aquifer recharge, and water quality. The connection between land conservation, watershed health, and the long-term resilience of Texas Hill Country water resources is inextricable. The Network’s partners will work together to leverage new and sustainable conservation finance sources, including county and city bond funding, Clean Water State Revolving Loan funds, drainage utility fees, and tax increment financing, in order to reverse the Texas Hill Country’s trajectory and ensure water for the environment and people for generations to come.

OPPORTUNITY TO LEVERAGE CHANGE

The time is now for philanthropy, working with partners, to accelerate progress towards healthy water systems for people and nature, starting in the U.S. West. Collectively, the philanthropic funding devoted to this initiative has the potential to leverage significant additional public and private sector funding and in-kind support to drive change toward the solutions we seek. For example, in November 2018, the city of Austin passed a bond related to conservation in Texas Hill Country that includes approximately \$45 million for parkland acquisition and \$72 million to purchase land to protect water quality in the city.

With philanthropy's support, this Initiative will leverage public and private financing to ensure the water needs of people and the environment in the Texas Hill Country are met for decades to come.

KEY FUNDING PARTNERS

Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation

Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation

Meadows Foundation

Network for Landscape Conservation
(Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and
William and Flora Hewlett Foundation)

Pisces Foundation

U.S.D.A. Regional Conservation
Partnership Program Grant

U.S. Endowment for Forestry and
Communities

For a full list of organizations involved in this Initiative and the Water Campaign, please visit waterfunder.org.



The Mighty Upper Guadalupe by Alison Lyons