

2019 Annual Report



hill country alliance

From the director's desk

The Hill Country Takes a National Spotlight

Dear Neighbors:

As 2020 finds us grappling with unsettling times, it is all the more important to reflect on and celebrate our accomplishments, as well as look ahead with resolve and creativity for how we continue to build our alliance in the face of a global pandemic.

For the Hill Country Alliance (HCA), 2019 was the year that conservation in the Texas Hill Country reached a national stage.

- HCA and our partners in the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network won recognition from the Water Funder Initiative. We were selected as one of five campaigns nationwide to receive a challenge grant to support our work advancing water resilience in our region. This would not have been possible without the leadership of our Network partners and the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation.
- The US Water Alliance's One Water Conference came to Austin in September, in no small part due to the incredible work being done by our regional partners to advance One Water solutions that

thoughtfully use all forms of this precious resource—from AC condensation to rainwater. HCA had the chance to work with Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, the Headwaters at the Comal, and others to take water professionals from around the country into the Hill Country, and show them the work that is happening to ensure our springs, rivers, and groundwater resources are here for future generations.

- Working with 19 partners, including the Hill Country Conservancy and the Llano River Watershed Alliance, we garnered federal funding through the US Department of Agriculture to support private landowner stewardship and conservation. In the pilot year, partners obligated \$497,000 towards nine innovative stewardship projects that will benefit 10,810 acres and multiple river basins.

At our 2019 Leadership Summit, we honored two incredible Hill Country champions with our first ever Heart of the Hill Country award. Through her work with the Nueces River Authority, Sky Lewey has done more to advance awareness of riparian stewardship than perhaps any other person in the state. Christy Muse, founding executive director of HCA and long-time champion of place-based community making in our region, continues to demonstrate what it means to effectively convene and advocate for responsible growth.

We will continue to rely on the wisdom of long-time partners as we also expand our alliance to address significant challenges. In 2019, we saw: new aggregate operations proposed for some of our most sensitive areas; direct discharge permits to pump treated waste water into gems such as Commissioners Creek; and, of course, the Permian Highway Pipeline, a 42-inch natural gas pipeline routed across the Hill Country.

At HCA, we firmly believe that by bringing folks together, across fences and the urban-rural divide, we can champion a better path forward, one that ensures that our lands, waters, night skies and communities are healthy and here for future generations.

In spite of the many challenges facing our region, state, and nation, I have optimism for maintaining the momentum we have built as an Alliance of incredibly passionate, dedicated individuals and organizations championing a bright future for the Hill Country. HCA celebrates its 15th anniversary this year, and continues to grow and evolve as an organization and a movement. Let's focus on creating a region that is resilient in the face of challenges, united in the face of adversity, and unwavering in our commitment to this region, its people, and its most special places.

I'm for the Hill Country,



Katherine Romans
Executive Director



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info@hillcountryalliance.org



Because of you...



95

Total events hosted,
convened, or presented at



190

Leadership Summit attendees

1,352

Landowners supported with
in-person stewardship programs

13,500

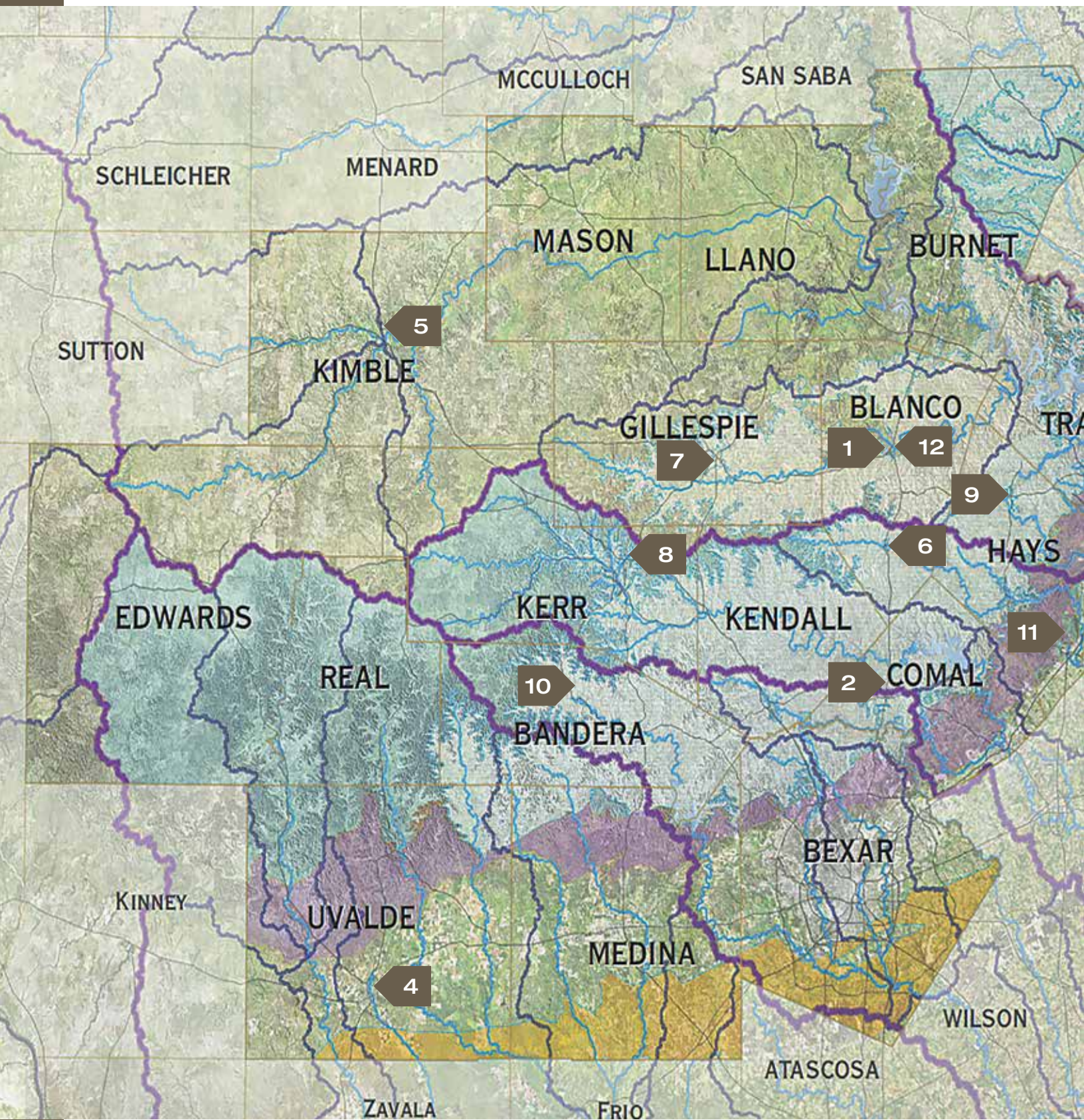
tuned in to our online outreach through
social media and the Neighbor to Neighbor newsletter



1 Hill Country

worth protecting for future generations







HCA works tirelessly to advance new ideas and drive change through community forums and events. Our events inspire, motivate, and educate. The timeline below represents a small sample of the more than 95 community events and meetings hosted by or featuring HCA in 2019.

January

- 1 1.10.2019** Johnson City – Pedernales Team Meeting

February

- 2 2.15.2019** Spring Branch – Saving Family Lands Conservation Workshop
- 2.23.2019** Blanco – Cold Ones for Conservation at Real Ale Brewery
- 2.28.2019** Johnson City – Stewarding the Blanco and Pedernales Rivers

March

- 3 3.28.2019** Austin – Texas Water Symposium: Water and the 2019 Legislative Session
- 3. 30-31.2019** Dripping Springs – Texas Night Sky Festival

April

- 4.9.2019** Fredericksburg – Kolaches & Conservation
- 4 4.27.2019** Uvalde – Uvalde County Astronomy Day

May

- 5.2.2019** Fredericksburg – Healthy Creeks Initiative: Arundo Control Workshop
- 5.7.2019** Blanco – Healthy Creeks Initiative: Arundo Control Workshop
- 5 5.21.2019** Junction – Permian Highway Pipeline – Kimble County Town Hall
- 5.23.2019** Boerne – Protecting the Water, Land, and Future of Kendall County

June

- 6 6.13.2019** Blanco – Low Impact Development: One Water Stormwater Management Workshop
- 6.10.2019** Wimberley – Healthy Creeks Initiative: Arundo Control Workshop
- 6.7.2019** Fredericksburg – Night Sky Conference

July

- 7.10.2019** New Braunfels – Landowner Workshop on Conservation – Dry Comal Creek Greenway Trail

- 7 7.11.2019** Fredericksburg – Scenic Cities Seminar

August

- 8 8.6-7.2019** Kerrville – Change Your Development Story Workshop

September

- 9.18-20.2019** Austin – National One Water Summit

- 9 9.26.2019** Dripping Springs – Annual Hill Country Leadership Summit

October

- 10.4.2019** Blanco – Caring for Your Land: Incentives for Stewardship and Conservation Workshop

- 10.17.2019** Spicewood – No Water, No Beer: What a Groundwater Conservation District Means for Western Travis County

- 10 10.29.2019** Medina – Dark Sky Night

November

- 11.13.2019** Kerrville – Texas Water Symposium: Mysterious Creatures – Exploring the Depths of Our Aquifers

- 11 11.21.2019** San Marcos – Texas Water Symposium: One Water – Projects in Motion

December

- 12 12.7.2019** Leakey – Leading in the Rural Hill Country

- 12.13.2019** Johnson City – Year-end Celebration – Sustaining Neighbors Thank You Gathering/ Honoring Mike & Pam Reese

Network

Photo By: John Pace

With a mission to maximize natural resource protection through enhanced collaboration, the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network is bringing together non-profits, academic institutions, government agencies, and businesses to address our most pressing conservation challenges.

The Texas Hill Country Conservation Network (the Network) saw a number of exciting developments and successes in 2019, including the onboarding of its first dedicated staff following the formalization of Hill Country Alliance as the backbone organization for the Network. Continued progress on the Network's six strategic goals brought national recognition in the form of several grant awards and on-the-ground successes.

Additional Network activities and successes included

- Six convenings of the Steering Committee
- One convening of the full Network, with 60 in attendance
- Continued deployment of the USDA Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant award funding for land stewardship and conservation
- Adoption of a formal operating agreement, hiring of a Network manager, and the momentum building around collective fundraising for shared goals.
- Securing support from the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, Landscape Conservation Catalyst Fund, Healthy Watersheds Consortium, and Burdine Johnson Foundation

Perhaps most exciting was the recognition of the Network through an invitation to partner with the Water Funder Initiative (WFI). WFI is a collaborative effort to identify and activate promising water solutions through strategic philanthropic investments in the United States, starting in the West. Learn more at waterfunder.org.



Photo By: Daniel Oppenheimer



Water

Photo By: Scott Bauer

HCA's Water Program focuses on informing water planning and management processes, advocating for water policies that recognize the connection between groundwater and surface water, and promoting water infrastructure alternatives that wisely steward critical water resources in the Hill Country.

During the State Legislative Session, HCA created nine articles of testimony and registered On, For, or Against over 20-bills that would have major impact on our property values, economy, and stream-flow.

We informed three Regional Water Planning Groups, the San Antonio/Guadalupe Bay and Basin Advisory Council, and three Groundwater Management Area aquifer-wide planning groups across the Hill Country.

Through partnerships, we: aided in the creation of the new Southwestern Travis County Groundwater Conservation District; helped establish the Jacob's Well Spring Management Zone in Hays County; and advanced green-infrastructure opportunities for flood mitigation with the rollout of the new Texas Flood Plan. We served as the US Water Alliance One Water Summit Hill Country Delegation lead, assembling a broad delegation of about 50 delegates, highlighting Hill Country One Water projects, and

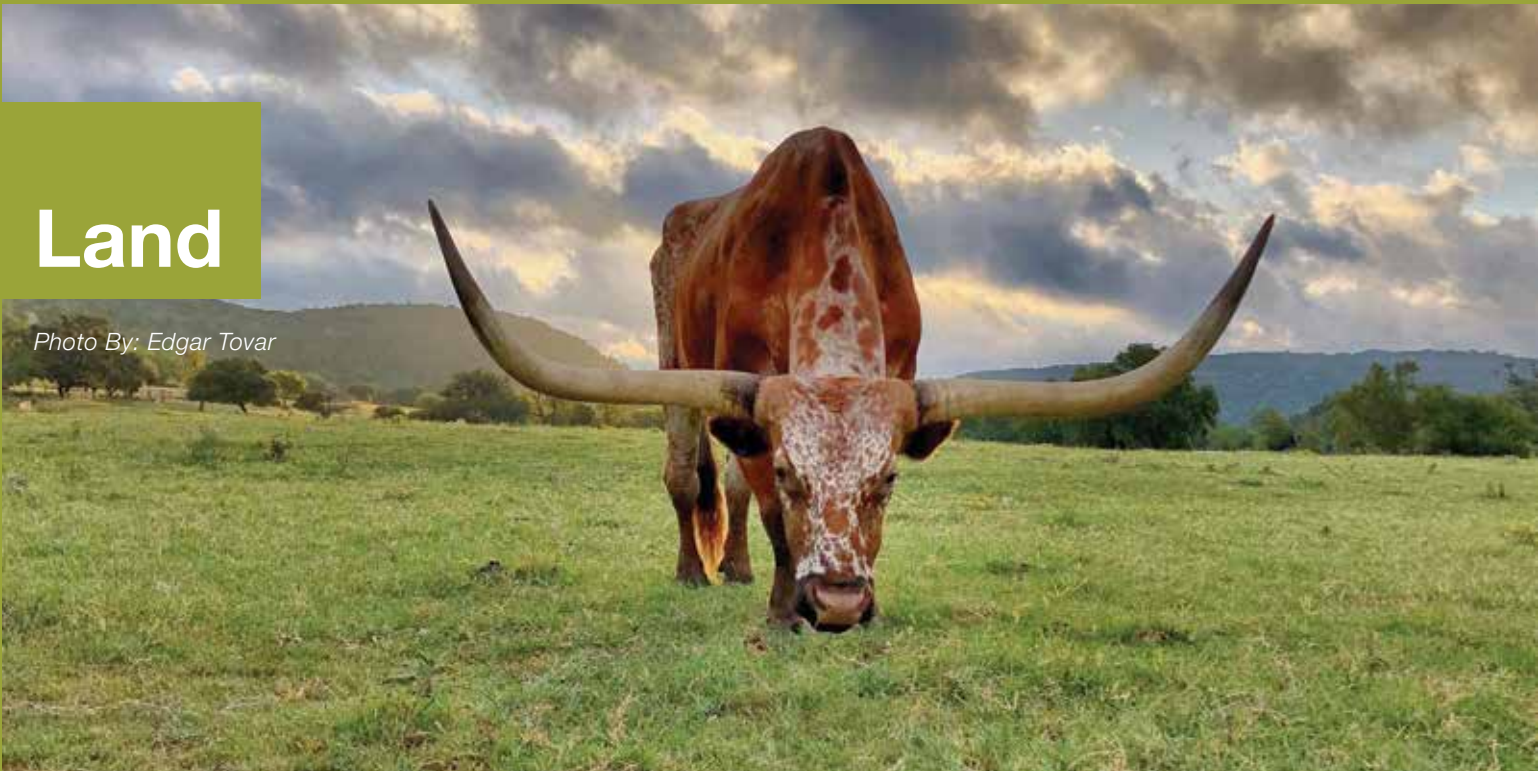
leading a panel discussion on Texas Flood and Water Supply Planning processes. We also co-hosted numerous educational events throughout the year—from the Texas Water Symposium series, to the One Water LID Stormwater Management Workshop at the Historic Blanco Courthouse—and produced a new Direct Discharge of Treated Effluent Issue Paper.



Photo By: Katherine Romans

Land

Photo By: Edgar Tovar



HCA's Land Program, led by Daniel Oppenheimer, is dedicated to promoting on-the-ground stewardship that benefits Hill Country lands, creeks, and rivers as well as bolstering conservation strategies to protect ranches, wildlife, and water resources. Here are some highlights from 2019:

In 2019, the HCA Land program reached over 1,300 landowners and community members across the Texas Hill Country through in-person educational events. These events ranged from riparian stewardship workshops along Sandy Creek and the Guadalupe River to presentations at Wildlife Management Association gatherings in the Pedernales River Basin.

We also helped several landowner groups form or grow around their shared goals to steward land and water resources. In the Blanco River Basin, we helped a group of riparian landowners strategize and find the right resources to form the Friends of the Little Blanco River to keep the river clean, clear, and flowing.

The Land Program created new educational resources for Hillside Stewardship, Riparian Planting, and Stewarding the Pedernales River Basin; worked with 19 partners to obligate \$497,000 of USDA funding through the Regional Conservation Partnership Program towards nine innovative land stewardship projects that will benefit nearly 11,000 acres; and convened teams of partners from more than 50 agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses to enhance coordination and collaboration for enhancing the health of Hill Country river basins.



Photos By: Daniel Oppenheimer

Night Skies

Photo By: Hector Rodriguez

HCA's Night Skies program, led by Cliff Kaplan, engages communities across the region in night sky preservation efforts and convenes a broad spectrum of partners to minimize the spread of light pollution as the region grows. Here are some highlights from 2019:

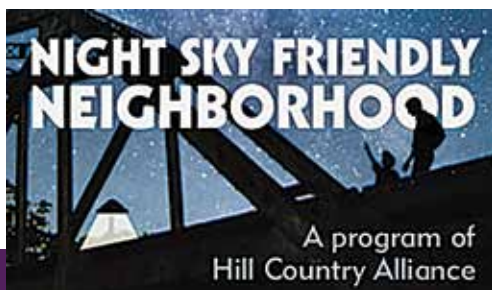
HCA worked with local partners in Hays and Llano Counties to secure Night Sky Preservation resolutions from both counties' Commissioners Courts, bringing the region-wide number of counties that have indicated their support for night sky preservation up to 13.

During the legislative session, HCA supported Representative Erin Zwiener's work with local partners in Hays and Blanco Counties to establish outdoor lighting improvements as an allowed use of Hotel Occupancy Tax in certain communities. This new model can be expanded upon in future sessions.

We established a Night Sky Friendly Neighborhood recognition program, recognizing the first two qualifying subdivisions in Blanco and Round Mountain.

The 3rd Annual Hill Country Dark Sky Conference was attended by 70 community leaders and night sky preservation advocates from around the region. The program included informative talks on sports lighting and electronic billboards policy and has resulted in improved policies in a half dozen Hill Country communities.

Photo By: Blanco County Friends of the Night Sky



Community

Photo By: Jerry Sargent



HCA's Communities Program, led by Cliff Kaplan, supports communities in their efforts to maintain their distinct character – from historic main streets to winding country roads – while they grow. Here are some highlights from 2019:

HCA continued to provide support and partnership to the Comal County Conservation Alliance in the pursuit of publicly funded land conservation. This year, besides the general effort to educate local communities and officials about strategies for and benefits of publicly funded land conservation, we focused our attention on preserving El Rancho Cima, the former Boy Scout Ranch along the Devil's Backbone.

We facilitated collaboration among landowner groups and legislators from around the region who are concerned about the negative impacts of the aggregates industry – limestone quarries, gravel and sand mines, and concrete and asphalt plants. This collaboration led to the formation of a statewide coalition, Texans for Responsible Aggregate Mining, facilitated by HCA.

With the H.E. Butt Family Foundation, HCA co-hosted the third "Leading in the Rural Hill Country" workshop for a diverse group of leaders from the most rural Hill Country counties.

We also held a two-day workshop on "outside-the-box" and fiscally responsible strategies for municipal development codes and infrastructure investments, attended by delegations of city officials from 7 rural Hill Country communities.

Photos By: Plumeria Alexander



Net Assets Total Change = + \$132,260

Net assets, beginning of year	395,946
Net assets, end of year	528,206
Change in Net Assets	132,260

HCA Endowment Fund (held at Austin Community Foundation) Amount

Start of 2019	\$178,866
End of 2019	\$217,894

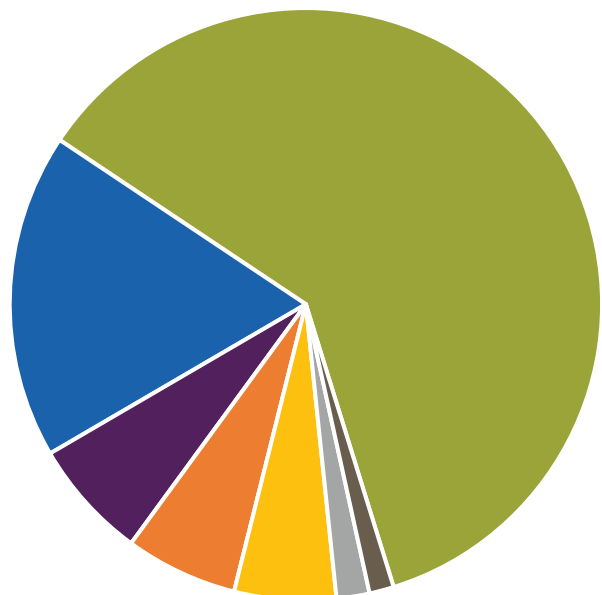
TOTAL INCOME

Support and Revenue Sources Total Income = \$845,634

Foundations* = \$514,500	514,500
Individuals = \$150,289	150,289
Government = \$55,368	55,368
Earned Revenue** = \$51,979	51,979
Organizations = \$46,978	46,978
Other*** = \$15,220	15,220
In-kind = \$11,300	11,300

Total support and revenue **845,634**

*Foundation contributions for the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network are included
 **Earned Revenue = events + calendar and store sales
 ***Other = rental income + change in beneficial interest in HCA Endowment Fund + interest income

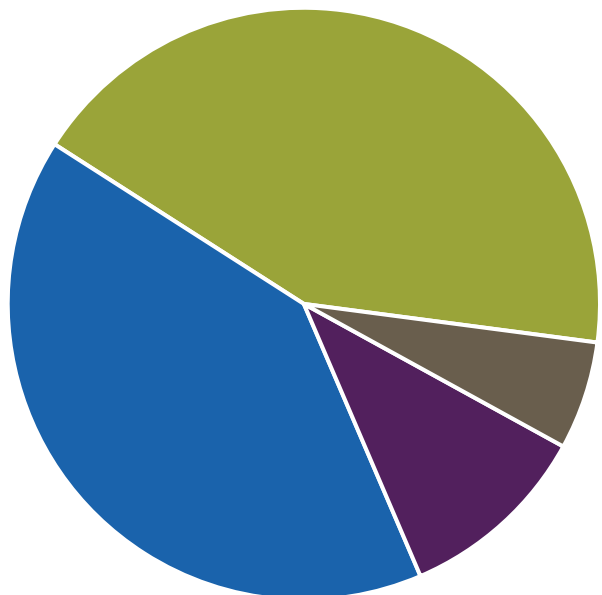


TOTAL EXPENSES

Program Area Total Expenses = \$713,374

Texas Hill Country Conservation Network + Education Outreach Programs = \$306,875	306,875
Land, Water, Community & Night Sky Programs = \$288,988	288,988
General Management = \$75,329	75,329
Fundraising = \$42,182	42,182

Total Expenses **713,374**



Financial Breakdown



Who We Are

Board of Directors*

President: Matt Lara – Travis County

Vice President: Francine Romero – Bexar County

Treasurer: Emily Warren - Travis County

Secretary: Sarah Schlessinger - Travis County

Connie Barron – Blanco County

Ben Eldredge – Kendall County

Vanessa Escobar – Travis County

Pete Dwyer – Travis County

Ted Flato – Real + Bexar Counties

Kathleen Krueger – Bandera + Comal Counties

Sharlene Leurig - Travis County

Bill Neiman – Kimble County

Michelle Whitwell Pokorny – Bexar County

Dr. Leo Tynan – Gillespie County

Vanessa Puig-Williams – Travis County

Ira Yates – Travis County

Staff**

Katherine Romans – Executive Director

Charlie Flatten – Water Program Manager

Cliff Kaplan – Night Sky & Community Program Manager

Daniel Oppenheimer – Land Program Manager

Sheila Holt – Office Manager

Leah Cuddeback – Online Outreach & Communications Manager

Amy Crowell – Development & Community Engagement Manager

John Rooney – Texas Hill Country Conservation Network Manager

Plumeria Alexander – Kent Butler Summer Intern

Nathan Steddom – GIS Intern

*Board of Directors officer positions listed based on January 2019 officer list. Positions change as board members depart the board. Full board list includes new members added throughout 2019.

**Staff includes all staff of HCA throughout 2019

Thank you to all of our 2019 donors who made this work possible

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- Winifred Simon
- Winkler Family Foundation
- YourCause
- Zoch Family

The mission of the Hill Country Alliance is to bring together an ever-expanding alliance of groups throughout a multi-county region of Central Texas with the long-term objective of preserving open spaces, water supply, water quality and the unique character of the Texas Hill Country.

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hill country alliance

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