



Newsletter

Summer-Fall 2013

Why I Value Conservation Easements

by Katherine Peake

In 2001, Bruce and Bernice Jordan donated to the Hill Country Land Trust (HCLT) our first conservation easement. Of all our 17 current easements, this first one holds special significance for me. It is off Highway 290, about six miles east of Fredericksburg and is about five miles from my home. Over the years, I have driven past it thousands of times on my way to Fredericksburg.



Bernice and Bruce Jordan

A few weeks ago, I visited Bernice during our annual stewardship visit. Just past an unpretentious gate is a field planted in wheat. Following a caliche road to the middle section, there is a low-slung house surrounded by native pastureland with cover and good wildlife habitat and rising towards the south, the highest point commands a “million dollar view” of the Pedernales River Valley.

Until a few years ago, most of Highway 290 between Fredericksburg and Stonewall looked like this. It was a pastoral landscape; farms and ranches with pioneer homes dotted the Pedernales River Valley, and I very much enjoyed this drive. How quickly things can change.

Cluttered (and dangerous) is one way to describe this section now. Commercial ventures have sprung up like fire ant mounds after a rain.

There are two reasons I treasure this easement. The first is that, because of Bruce and Bernice’s clear vision and foresight, there will never be a gas station, an RV park, a flea market, a vineyard or other commercial venture on this land. No large hilltop home will dominate the countryside because Bruce and Bernice specified that no additional buildings or subdivision would ever happen. Their land will always and forever be open space and a sanctuary for wildlife. The second is that it demonstrates how foresighted and generous individuals can work to slow down the fragmentation and commercialization of the Texas Hill Country.

As President of the Board of Directors of HCLT, I am honored to work in partnership with board members and landowners like the Jordans who recognize the value of open space, scenic views, habitat and diversity of plants and animals. I give thanks for every easement, but have a special place in my heart for this very first one.

HCLT Receives Accreditation

Jubilant and celebration greeted the news of our accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission and we are pleased beyond measure with our new status as an accredited land trust. The entire board worked tirelessly over the past two and a half years, putting in over 1900 hours while reviewing, modifying and adopting over 50 policies, plans, checklists and forms.

Special challenges face volunteer land trusts undertaking the accreditation process and perhaps only those who have experienced it can truly appreciate the process. Of the 1699 land trusts in the US at this time there are 201 accredited land trusts, and we now join a special sub-set of the 13 accredited all-volunteer land trusts!

While proud of our new status, we recognize that the true value is the knowledge we have gained by reviewing and updating our practices. Over the past two and a half years, we have become a more professional, efficient and competent land trust, and we are much stronger than when we started. Like a runner who trains for a marathon, the training is as much or more benefit than the finish.

Accreditation portends a new era for HCLT. We will proudly display the seal of accreditation as it represents our inclusion in a select group of land trusts as well as our continued commitment to excellence. We will not be resting on our laurels, as we have committed to continue our quest to be an exemplary land trust in the Texas Hill Country.



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A Tribute to Outgoing President Bill Lindemann

Bill's fingerprints can be found in every nook and cranny of HCLT. While we all work hard fulfilling our responsibilities as HCLT directors, Bill goes the extra step. We are grateful to him on many levels, high and low. To achieve his dream of conservation in the Hill Country, no goal has been too large nor task too small.

What Bill does for HCLT is astounding. He has done everything from securing our office, raising a majority of our annual budget, seeking and achieving accreditation, and compiling baseline studies for easements...to emptying the trash and picking up the mail every day. He even hand built the sign for our office.

Bill started with a vision of HCLT and he has seen it through. His expertise, vision, leadership and hard work have made us the land trust we are today. He has "taken us to the next level."



Thank you, Bill
From The HCLT Board of Directors

HCLT Happenings

by Bill Lindemann

We are pleased to have Pam Mabry Bergman and Steve Nelle joining our board. Pam and husband, Kim, are conservation-minded ranchers in the Albert Community in southeast Gillespie County. Pam, an attorney with many years experience in natural resources law, has agreed to hold the office of secretary and be a member of the easements and finance committees.

Steve Nelle is a range management specialist who recently retired from the Natural Resources Conservation Service after a 35 year distinguished service record. Steve and wife, Marnie, live in San Angelo where he can provide valuable outreach to citizens of our westernmost counties in our 19 county service area. Steve is a leading expert on managing riparian habitats, conducting seminars and workshops around the state and Hill Country.

Bart English, a founding board member and president from 1998 to 2008, has retired from the board, but will continue to serve as a committee member. His long term service and leadership has been greatly appreciated.

We welcome Martha Zeiher as our office staff person. Martha has experience in working with land trusts in California and we look forward to her help in coordinating our land trust activities. When in Fredericksburg, please stop by the office to say hello and welcome her to HCLT.

We are also pleased to have Gary Neffendorf and Susan Candy, Fredericksburg; Betsy Bouchard, Llano; Kerrie Richert, Bertram; Kassi Scheffer, New Braunfels; John Huecksteadt, Fredericksburg and Chris Hopf, Harper; all serving on HCLT committees. We appreciate them volunteering their service on our committees.

Since our last newsletter, HCLT has added a donated easement near Enchanted Rock State Natural Area to further our commitment to protect the view shed from the top of one of America's most treasured natural landmarks (see photo page 3). We also held our third Neighbors meet Neighbors barbecue to promote the need to protect that view shed for the enjoyment of future generations.

HCLT is also working with the Hill Country Alliance to promote a Hill Country Dark Skies initiative. With the help of two of our conservation easement donors, Betsy Bouchard and Maggie Booth, an outreach social event allowed HCLT to share its land conservation commitment to interested conservation-minded friends and neighbors. Kerrie Richert, another HCLT donor, is organizing a similar event with the Friends of the Balcones Canyonlands Natural Wildlife Refuge to encourage adjoining landowners to consider protection of endangered bird species and their habitats. We hope other donors will help HCLT to reach out to their friends and neighbors to promote land conservation in their areas.

**Yes! I support the work of Hill Country Land Trust
Please Complete and Return**

Name _____

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My donation of \$ _____ is enclosed

This gift is made: In memory of: _____

In honor of: _____

Towards the ED matching grant

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I would like more information about:

conservation easements/HCLT

volunteer opportunities

other: _____

I would like to receive my newsletter electronically to save postage and paper

Please remove my name from your mailing list

Good Stewardship Means Monitoring

by John Huecksteadt

Annual monitoring visits are important for several reasons. Although the IRS requires annual monitoring, reason enough to prod any sane person into action, it is probably not the most important reason.

One way to think about the importance of annual monitoring is to ask yourself the question, "What would it be like if a person from the land trust never visited our property?" The first thing that comes to my mind is that you would think, "The land trust really doesn't care about our easement or what happens to it." Close on the heels of that conclusion would probably be a thought like, "The land trust doesn't really care about me, my family, or our interests."

I've been around the Hill Country Land Trust long enough now to know that, truly, we consider our easement owners friends. It's amazing how, when we walk around a beautiful Hill Country ranch with a donor, how close we become. Our shared values, mirrored by the beauty of the Hill Country, have a miraculous way of making wonderful, meaningful relationships. I can add that every member of the HCLT organization feels this way. I've heard the phrase, "It's all about relationships," untold numbers of times from so many board members.

To a person, HCLT board and committee members and staff feel deeply, just like you, that what we are doing is the most important thing we could be doing for the Hill Country, Texas, and the Earth. Some of us who are retired frequently ask ourselves the question, "Why am I working so blasted hard? I'm retired, and now I'm busier than when I was working!" I always come to the same conclusion. I can think of no more fulfilling and happy a retirement than spending it like this.

Despite all this touchy-feely stuff, we cannot forget the practical matters that demand an annual monitoring visit. Yes, there's the IRS, but add to that the need to understand and document the conservation values you've chosen to preserve in perpetuity and record and track changes. There is no way we could do this without our visits.

These are just a few of the reasons monitoring is important. There are dozens of specific statutes and conservation related reasons, too many to go into here. The reasons given here are important enough to put monitoring high on your list of stewardship responsibilities.



Our newest conservation easement near Enchanted Rock - Faltin Nature Preserve!

Matching grant opportunity for HCLT

The HCLT board has recognized the need to transition from an all-volunteer organization to a higher level utilizing an executive director to more efficiently and effectively manage our commitments. Meanwhile, our board will have more time to increase our inventory of conservation easements. To help meet this new goal, HCLT has received notice of a most generous \$20,000 matching-grant offer to be applied to our executive director fund. Your donation will help us match this grant opportunity. Ways to contribute include personal check by mail or through our website at hillcountrylandtrust.org.

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Photo by Bill Lindemann

Why We Conserved our Ranch

by Gordon and Judy Chapin

We have owned our small ranch on the north edge of the Texas Hill Country only since 1970. Since that time, we have seen a number of other ranches in the area sold off in small home sites, reducing and degrading the wildlife habitat. Starting in 2002, we became aware of the conservation easement concept as a method of protecting the native plants and wildlife on our place into the future years.

Through the years since the settlement of this area of Texas by farm families, any land that could be plowed was planted to cotton and grain crops each year, resulting in significant soil erosion. The upper rangeland acres were grazed by cattle, sheep and goats. Barbed wire fences came into use in about 1880, further facilitating over-grazing the native forages.

Since we have owned our ranch, we have tried to reverse the damage done in previous years of overuse of the land and the plant community. We participated in the USDA Great Plains Program in 1970-80, planting perennial grass on the 95 acres of plowed land, installed cross fencing and water lines to facilitate rotation of grazing and removed Ashe Juniper from selected areas of rangeland. We restricted the number of cattle to fit the forage availability and did not use sheep and goats, all of which helped the native grass and forbs to recover. Our choice not to use herbicide on the perennial pastures improved the wildlife food supply.

Since 1980, we have continued to battle Ashe Juniper by hand removal of regrowth and by some selective clearing of strips. The native grass and forbs have come back nicely in the cleared areas.

From 2004-07, we worked with the officers and board of the Hill Country Land Trust to develop the conservation easement filed in 2007. We continue to broaden our knowledge of native plants and wildlife by working with the HCLT Stewardship Committee.

We and our family are pleased that our place will be in far better condition for the future years than we found it in 1970.