

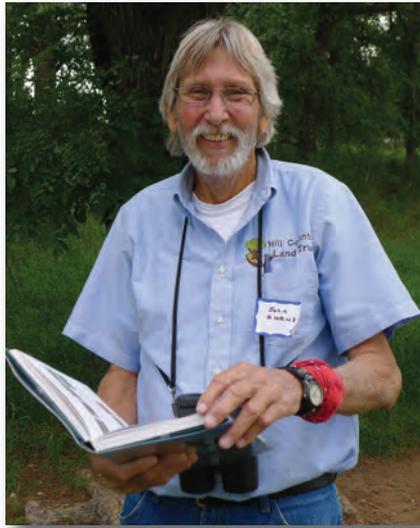


Newsletter

Spring 2014

Remembering John Ahrns (1947-2014) HCLT Board Member 2011-2014

Everyone who knew John shared a common high respect for who he was and what he represented – a family man, conservationist, naturalist, educator and



worker all wrapped up into a great human being with a kind spirit and passion for life. What you saw in him is what you got.

John spent his career as the manager of the Westcave Preserve, a beautiful Hill Country natural area tucked in a canyon west of Austin. The

collapsed sink-hole feature formed a waterfall and exposed a small grotto, now covered by emerald green mosses – a perfect fit for a man of the earth and naturalist.

John's first task in 1974 was to clean up the trash of years of abuse by trespassers, and to develop access trails to preserve the flora and fauna to showcase this natural treasure as an outdoor classroom. With a lawn chair under an oak tree as John's office, the preserve was aided along the way with financial support by the Lower Colorado River Authority and private donors. The Preserve now includes an award winning visitor's center and well-managed grounds. One of John's loves was to take children for nature walks in Westcave Preserve. Now thousands of children and visitors come annually to learn about nature at this Hill Country jewel.

When John retired to the Fredericksburg area in 2010, he moved his outdoor office from one venue to another and took on a new challenge. He joined the Hill Country

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HCLT Welcomes First Executive Director

HCLT welcomed its first executive director in January. Martha Zeiher will coordinate the land trust's activities in its 19-county area of interest by working with the HCLT Board and volunteers.

"Since achieving accreditation from the Land Trust Accreditation Commission in February of last year, we are committed to adhering to the standards and policies associated with this higher level of service to our landowner-partners. An executive director will help us maintain these practices and take us to the next level as an organization," said Katherine Peake, President of HCLT. "The executive director position will allow our all-volunteer board to focus on the land easement process in a more comprehensive way. Martha brings to us a wealth of experience in non-profit leadership, fundraising, and organizational management that is perfectly suited to our small but mighty group."

Martha comes to HCLT with over eight years of ground-level, land conservation experience at two organizations in California. She founded, and was the first president of Ventura Citizens for Hillside Preservation and a founding board member of the Ventura Hillside Conservancy in Ventura, California where she served for five years. In



HCLT's new Executive Director, Martha Zeiher

addition, Martha was the executive director of Loving Heart Hospice Foundation in Moorpark, California and the Manager of Community Relations for SAGE Publications, in Thousand Oaks, California. She received much of her fundraising experience while working in the development departments at University of California, Santa Barbara and California State University Channel Islands, and has a certificate in Non-Profit Management from the Ventura County Community Foundation.

Martha is originally from Bryan/College Station where she attended Bryan High School, and received a Bachelor of Arts in Teaching degree from Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, Texas. She has recently moved to Fredericksburg with her husband to be closer to her extensive family, many of whom live in the Hill Country. Martha will work out of the HCLT office in Fredericksburg. Please stop by to meet her if you are in the neighborhood.

Hill Country Land Trust Board

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HCLT Happenings

HCLT recently welcomed several new board and committee members.

Steve Nelle joined the Board in late 2013 and is a range and wildlife management specialist recently retired from the NRCS after a 35 year distinguished service record. Steve is a leading expert on managing riparian habitats, and conducts seminars/workshops around the state and the Hill Country. Steve, a 5th generation Texan descended from some of the earliest Hill Country German settlers, is already proving to be a great resource for HCLT landowner-partners during their easement process.

Joining the Board in 2014, is **Jill Nokes**, noted author and horticulturist who lives part-time in Llano County. Jill is a landscape designer and author of two books. Most of her career has been devoted to the study and use of native plants in both the built landscape and in the wild places where they are found. Jill's knowledge of native plants will be a great resource to our landowner-partners.

Another new addition in 2014 is **Kassi Scheffer** of New Braunfels. Kassi is currently an Education Program Specialist for the Texas Wildlife Association and also serves as the Program Coordinator for the Texas Brigades, a wildlife and leadership development experience that educates and empowers youths with leadership skills and knowledge in wildlife, fisheries, and land stewardship. Kassi grew up in Hays County, spends time in Gillespie County on family land, and currently resides in Comal County.

Also new to the 2014 Board is **Floyd Trefny** of Bandera County. Floyd's experience as a certified Master Naturalist since 2009 and treasurer of the Hill Country Chapter of the Texas Master Naturalists will be an added resource for the HCLT Board. Floyd is also a volunteer at the Old Tunnel State Park in Alamo Springs and can be found working with bat tunnel visitors most Thursdays.

In addition, **Mike Krueger** has joined the HCLT Board. Mike is recently retired from the Wildlife Division of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department with 27 years of service; more than 15 as a Technical Guidance biologist providing wildlife management assistance to private landowners in the Edwards Plateau and Cross Timbers regions of Texas. He finished his TPWD career in Kerrville, serving five years as the District Leader for the 25-county Edwards Plateau Wildlife District. Mike's Hill Country wildlife management skills and experience are a wonderful resource for HCLT landowner-partners.

Finally, HCLT also welcomes Professor **Ernest Smith** to the HCLT Land and Easements Committee. Ernest is a law professor and former dean at the University of Texas in Austin, specializing in oil and gas law. Ernest and his wife Paula, have a conservation easement on their property in Edwards County.

The Hill Country Land Trust is delighted and proud to add such prestigious and hardworking individuals to our all-volunteer board. These people are committed to preserving the Hill Country they call home.



2014 HCLT Board

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Why We Conserved Our Ranch

By Errol and Susan Candy

By Texas standards, our property in the Texas Hill Country is relatively small. But for us, the enjoyment and connection to nature we derive from living here is big. Over the years, we've invested sweat equity, some financial resources, and lots of emotion to be decent stewards of the land. It is a work in progress, and each year brings new experiences and more opportunity to learn about the wildlife and plants we share our days with. We realized that protecting our property from ever-encroaching subdivision and urbanization was essential to keep this space intact and in its natural state. Since we have no direct heirs, donating a conservation easement on our property was a good fit for us. Working with the Hill Country Land Trust, we crafted our own easement guidelines to ensure that our land will never be subdivided, bulldozed over, or subjected to poor land management practices once we're gone. It's a great sense of relief to know that the next folks to live here will see the value we place on open space and the natural world, and will carry on in supporting the investments we've made to it. A conservation easement makes that possible.

Hill Country Land Trust Adds 18th Easement

The Hill Country Land Trust is excited to announce the recent donation of a 685 acre conservation easement in Gillespie

County, bringing the total of preserved properties in the HCLT portfolio to 18 for a total of 5,732 acres.

The property, located near Stonewall, includes high plateaus, creeks, riparian areas, and woods, and borders a 1,561 acre easement also held by HCLT, making a large contiguous piece of land under permanent preservation in Gillespie County.

Many years of excellent and dedicated wildlife and range management by the donors has resulted in a wonderful diversity of native plants on this property. A large variety of grasses, forbs, wildflowers and trees including large cedar, walnut, escarpment cherry, hackberry, cedar elm, American elm, Texas Red Oak, black jack, post oak, live oak and shin oak are found.

Native grasses are prominent, including little, big, and bushy bluestem, yellow Indian grass, and switchgrass. In addition to this diversity, the existence of Golden-cheeked Warbler habitat makes this truly significant conservation easement. Habitat protection by private landowners is key to the survival of the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler.

In addition, to endangered species habitat and plant diversity, the property is important for protection of the Pedernales River Watershed. Both the East Fork and the Middle Fork of Three Mile Creek are located on the property as well as numerous seeps, springs and sinkholes. This conservation easement establishes a permanent zone of enhanced protection around these water features.

HCLT is grateful to the owners for their exemplary past stewardship as well as their foresight and desire to permanently preserve the special qualities of their land.



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The Hill Country Land Trust celebrated at our Fredericksburg office in the historic Jenschke House with a Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting. Pictured are from left to right are: Board members Carolyn Vogel, Kassi Scheffer, Kevin Pickard, Ernest Smith, Paula Smith, and Katherine Peake. Center is Penny McBride, Fredericksburg Chamber of Commerce President.

John Ahrns (Continued from page 1)

Land Trust board of directors in 2011 and served on both the fund-raising and stewardship committees.

He shared his passion for nature and the outdoors with his fellow board members and area landowners. When not hiking in a remote wilderness area out west, he was volunteering as a trail builder at nearby Old Tunnel State Park and Fredericksburg Nature Center. He also monitored area streams by collecting monthly water samples for analysis.

Until a few weeks of his passing he was still making monitoring visits to local ranches for the Hill Country Land Trust. His colleagues admired his willingness to make a difference in all what he did in his full life. We will all miss him, but we all know that we are better off for having known him.

- **Bill Lindemann**