

*Our Choices Today Create the
Hill Country of Tomorrow.*



Hill Country Land Trust

Spring Newsletter | 2015

Sandy Ranch Conserved in Blanco County

Just northwest of Johnson City in Blanco County sits the tiny community of Sandy. Early settlers were drawn here in the 1800s by the abundant water and sandy soil. On a fall day in 2013, several HCLT Board members including Bill Lindemann, John Ahrns, Katherine Peake, Kerrie Richert, and Jill Nokes were invited to visit Sandy Ranch, a nearby 200-acre ranch. The owner was interested in sharing his vision for the property and learning more about how a conservation easement might help him achieve it.



On that bright day at Sandy Ranch, Hickory Creek was running clear and fast. A large flock of turkeys wandered through tall grasses, and remnants of old rock fences hinted at the long history of the ranch. Pecan, live oak, elm, post oak, buckeye, cedar elm and sycamore were thriving along the creek, as were desirable native grasses, including Indian grass and switchgrass. It was immediately apparent that the property provides important habitat for native wildlife, nesting and foraging grounds for resident and migratory songbirds, and a corridor for wild game movement along Hickory Creek. The owner noted that

the ranch serves as a stopping place for monarchs during their fall migration. The flock of over 40 turkeys the HCLT board members saw during their visit often roost in the pecan trees alongside Hickory Creek.

The owner discussed his goals for the property: He wanted to prevent the ranch from being subdivided, maintain it as native rangeland for both wildlife and livestock, improve the riparian zone along the creek, and to preserve the existing rock fences and rock structures. He also wanted to reserve the right to construct a home site in the future. His goals and HCLT's mission fit perfectly.

HCLT and the landowner entered into lengthy discussions resulting in the terms of a conservation easement. In late 2014, the easement was signed and recorded in the Blanco County Court records to ensure the landowner's wishes will be permanently honored. HCLT has worked with this owner on extensive stewardship plans to fulfill his goals, and will visit with him on a yearly basis to offer advice and observe the progress.

HCLT is honored to work with conservation-minded landowners to achieve their goals for their lands. With the addition of Sandy Ranch, we have negotiated 19 conservation easements, conserving close to 6,000 beautiful Hill Country acres. For further information about HCLT and conservation easements, please contact us.



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Scott Gardner, Romey Swanson, Linda Campbell & Tim Riley

A Big HCLT Welcome

to our four new board members! Scott Gardner, Linda Campbell, Romey Swanson and Tim Riley joined the board in January of this year. They will each serve a three-year term.

Scott Gardner's experience is largely driven from his work with the C.L. Browning Ranch in Johnson City, where he has led land restoration efforts as the ranch manager. Scott has collaborated with numerous institutions and agencies on studio projects and research studies that promote good land planning and environmentally sound management practices in the Texas Hill Country and elsewhere. Scott is a fifth generation Texan.

Recently retired from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department after nearly 22 years of service, Linda Campbell served as Program Director for the Private Lands and Public Hunting Program, providing direction for TPWD's landowner assistance and recognition programs. Prior to that, she held various positions with TPWD, including central Texas regional biologist and statewide nature tourism coordinator, and worked 11 years with the Natural Resources Conservation Service providing assistance to landowners. Linda and her husband own and manage a ranch in Stonewall County.

Romey Swanson is a senior wildlife biologist with Plateau Land and Wildlife where he provides technical guidance to numerous landowners. He is a graduate of Texas State University with a Masters in Wildlife Ecology. He is a member of The Wildlife Society (Associate Wildlife Biologist) and the Texas Ornithological Society.

Tim Riley is a real estate broker with Land Advisors in Austin specializing in large tracts of rural land and conservation easement properties. Tim's interest in land began at a young age on his family's ranch in Washington County and has led to a life out-of-doors both professionally and in his personal time whether it is hunting, fishing, or just exploring the vast natural resources of Texas.

The Hill Country Land Trust is delighted and proud to add such prestigious and hard-working individuals to our all-volunteer board. Each of these people is committed to preserving the Hill Country they call home.

HCLT works in the following counties - Menard, Kimble, Mason, Llano, Burnet, Blanco, Hays, Comal, Ke

Note from Our President

As a TPWD technical guidance biologist headquartered in Lampasas during the early 1990s through the mid-2000s, I had the privilege of working with many landowners in a multi-county area of northcentral Texas. The vast majority of landowners that contact TPWD biologists for guidance are interested in managing their properties for game species, including white-tailed deer, bobwhite quail and turkey. While I was always aware of conservation easements (CEs) – primarily through regular presentations by Carolyn Vogel, former HCLT board member and one of the first champions of CEs in the State of Texas – I never encountered a landowner who was interested in giving the idea more than a passing consideration. That is, until I met the Chapins.

Judy and Gordon Chapin own Gravel Hill Ranch in western Lampasas County, only a few miles from my former home. My relationship with the Chapins started like most others – I assisted in converting the ranch to a wildlife tax valuation, obtaining brown-headed cowbird traps, and with the establishment and maintenance of the Donalson Creek Wildlife Management Association (WMA), in which they play an active role. Over the years I came to recognize the Chapins' very deep appreciation for – and strong commitment to – the stewardship of Gravel Hill. The Chapins are renaissance landowners, dedicated to the holistic management of all of their resources.

In late 2003 Judy and Gordon began talking about a CE as a way to forever protect the conservation values of the Gravel Hill Ranch they so loved. They invited me to supper in Lampasas with Bill Lindemann after one of his early visits to the ranch. That was my first introduction to Bill, and to HCLT. The rest is history as they say. In 2007 the Chapin's Gravel Hill Ranch became HCLT's fourth conservation easement, and I guess it is serendipity that 10 years after my first meeting with him, I would join Bill on the board of HCLT. Judy and Gordon, I owe it to you for setting all those wheels in motion.

I am honored to serve as the HCLT President in 2015 alongside a very capable board, Executive Director, and volunteers. There is still much work to do. Through our combined efforts, we can ensure that there remain a few places in the Hill Country that will forever provide un-fragmented and relatively undeveloped wildlife habitats, water resources, scenic beauty, historic sites, and traditional rural land management practices. As always, the Hill Country Land Trust appreciates your continued support of our efforts.

Mike Krueger

President



Bill Lindemann, Gordon Chapin, Mike Krueger, and Judy Chapin

A Bastard Invasion

by Bill Lindemann, HCLT Vice-President

Can you imagine the Hill Country without wildflowers? Unless we act fast to eradicate a very invasive alien mustard plant, that dire situation will become reality in less than ten years. In parts of Texas this yellow-flowered wild mustard has already taken over highway right-of-ways and is moving onto farms and ranches. Whether you know it as wild turnip, Mediterranean mustard, or my personal favorite – bastard cabbage— our native wildflowers don't stand a chance against this alien.

Bastard cabbage, whose scientific name is *Rapistrum rugosum*, is an annual plant that can grow to 2-3 feet high and is most noticeable in the early spring when its yellow flowers emerge. The real damage, though, is done in the fall. When bastard cabbage sprouts, it puts out a large, dinner-plate sized rosette of leaves that blocks sunlight from native plants. If the plant is allowed to produce seed, expect dozens more plants the following spring. In succeeding years patches of the plant will combine, and bastard cabbage will be the only flower present.

The first line of defense against this invader is to acknowledge it will cause serious problems and take action to eradicate it. Learn how to identify bastard cabbage from other yellow-flowering plants in our wild landscape. If you find one on your property, pull it up, put it in a bag and toss it on the burn pile. Annual follow up reconnaissance runs are necessary to insure all plants have been eradicated. Chemical application for large areas of bastard cabbage should be a last resort.

If you appreciate our beautiful bluebonnets, paintbrushes, coreopsis, phlox and firewheels, you cannot simply wait and hope someone else takes on this challenge. Visit www.texasinvasives.org and search for bastard cabbage to learn more.



Bastard Cabbage



Hill Country Land Trust

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Mike Krueger, HCLT President,



Photo by Stanley Farrar

welcomes friends and neighbors
of Enchanted Rock State Natural Area
to our annual barbeque lunch co-hosted
by TPWD and Friends of Enchanted Rock.
If you, or someone you know lives in the
neighborhood and would like to be added
to the guest list for next year's barbeque,
please contact the office.

The Mission of the Hill Country Land Trust

*is to conserve and protect the agricultural lands, scenic beauty,
wildlife habitat and watersheds of the Texas Hill Country
for present and future generations.*