

PRESS RELEASE: For Immediate Release

HILL COUNTRY CONSERVANCY EXPANDING INTO SIX COUNTY AREA

Austin, Texas – February 2, 2016 – Hill Country Conservancy (HCC) has officially announced that it has expanded its focus area to include six counties within the greater Texas Hill Country region. To date, HCC's focus area covered the Barton Springs segment of the Edwards Aquifer, generally contained within Travis and Hays Counties. The newly expanded area includes Travis, Hays, Llano, Blanco, Burnet and San Saba counties, an area selected in order to ensure an even greater conservation impact in future years.

This expansion comes into effect as HCC begins the second half of a three-year Capital Campaign - its most ambitious fundraising campaign to date. The campaign goal of \$13.125 million includes funds for land conservation and stewardship in the expanded focus area as well as funds for the continued development of the Violet Crown Trail. As of February 2, 2016, HCC has reached its mid-campaign goal of \$10 million. The campaign is scheduled to end May 1, 2017.

Hill Country Conservancy has had great conservation success since its inception in 1999. Working collaboratively with its partners, HCC has helped conserve over 44,000 acres in the Texas Hill Country. Altogether the conservation easements that HCC holds as well as the Nalle Bunny Run Nature Preserve are valued at over \$83 million, a striking amount of conservation accomplished by leveraging a fraction of that amount in funding from grants and municipal and county bonds, together with donations from individual supporters.

Over the past several years, HCC created a strategic conservation plan with the help of the Siglo Group and the Still Water Foundation. As real estate values continue to increase and the pace of commercial and residential development increases in new areas, land conservation becomes even more urgent and challenging. The Hill Country landscape was thoroughly analyzed in order to understand better how to effectively protect precious resources such as drinking water, wildlife habitat, agricultural viability, historic features, and scenic views. In addition to looking at patterns of development to determine where threats to these resources are greatest, the output of this strategic planning analysis guided HCC towards expanding its conservation focus area into the six-county area.

“We’ve had great success in the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer, but new opportunities for conservation were dwindling as much of the area became transformed by development and fragmentation. As a result of this strategic expansion, HCC can pursue future land conservation and fundraising efforts with full assurance that we’re fully informed and that we’re intelligently conserving the most unique, sensitive and quintessential Hill Country properties, to benefit the greatest number of people, for many years to come,” said Carlotta McLean, who chairs the Capital Campaign for HCC. “The legacy of this work will be a network of critical land and water resources protected for the benefit of our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.”

This announcement also comes at a time when, within the last five years, 88% of Texas experienced an exceptional drought. The drought of 2010-2015 was the second worst in the history of the state, and although there has been recent relief, residents are learning that they can't rely on regular rainfall. Worse yet, scientists have warned that frequent droughts may become a permanent part of Texans' lives.

As recent events have shown, drought isn't the only issue we face when it comes to our water. Severe floods can quickly destroy homes and businesses, devastating families and disrupting lives.

“Living with water shortages or damaging floods brings to light how connected we all are to the natural world around us. Our health suffers without clean water and fresh air. Our families’ quality of life suffers without safe places to spend time together outdoors,” said George Cofer, executive director of HCC. “Actions we take today can help us handle these situations in the future, and conserving land is one huge step that we can take. Expanding our work in the Hill Country to get ahead of some of the growth will allow us to protect sensitive areas and the lands surrounding lakes, rivers and streams to maintain floodplains and keep polluted runoff out of our drinking water.”

Preventing critical lands from being fragmented and developed ensures that more of the little water that falls has the ability to soak into the ground and local aquifers, replenishing the water supply and reducing the chance of serious flooding.

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