

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Media Contact:

Ashley Kegley
Buie & Co. Public Relations
ashley@buieco.com
512-660-2898

**Texas Hill Country Conservation Network Receives \$5.15M Award for Hill Country
Headwaters Conservation Initiative**

19 Partner Organizations to Increase Private Land Stewardship Throughout Central Texas

July 31, 2018 – AUSTIN, TEXAS – The Hill Country Conservancy (HCC) and 18 of its partners, including a new collaborative group called the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network (the Network), today announced a \$5.15 million pledge from the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP), part of the USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The award will support the Hill Country Headwaters Conservation Initiative, which will provide funding to private landowners performing land stewardship best practices and ensuring long-term conservation of sensitive agricultural lands across the Blanco, Middle Colorado and Llano River basins.

“This award will allow HCC, the Network and our partners to work with private landowners to protect water, enhance habitat for iconic Texas wildlife, and mitigate flooding risks, while supporting agricultural production throughout a region that provides drinking water for millions of Central Texans,” said Frank Davis, Director of Land Conservation for Hill Country Conservancy. “The RCPP award allows us to channel environmental quality incentive and agricultural conservation easement dollars directly to Hill Country landowners - who are daily caring for our precious natural resources, growing our food, and keeping our land beautiful, often without recognition for their work.”

The Hill Country region is characterized by both extreme drought and flooding, both occurring with increasing intensity and frequency. Compounded by climate change, development pressures and ecological vulnerability, the region’s rich natural resources are at risk of permanent damage. 95 percent of Texas is privately owned, making it critical to incentivize private landowners within rapidly-developing regions such as the Hill Country, to enhance and protect their rural lands.

“Our men and women in agriculture provide our nation with the safest, most affordable food and fiber supply of any nation on the globe,” said Congressman Mike Conaway, 11th District of Texas. “And to do that, they need the flexibility that strong public-private conservation programs provide. As Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, I’m committed to working with groups like HCC and the Network to ensure our farmers and ranchers have the private stewardship resources they need to conserve their land. The Hill Country Headwaters Conservation Initiative is set to positively influence more than 4.5 million acres of our hardworking ranchers’ private land.”

As one of its first major collaborative efforts, the Network crafted the Hill Country Headwaters Conservation Initiative project to channel resources to Hill Country landowners to address these natural resource challenges. Using the collective power of its members, the proposal was submitted in the fall of 2017 by members of the Network, including: HCC, the Hill Country Alliance, The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment, Wimberley Valley Watershed

Association, Llano River Watershed Alliance, Texas Water Resources Institute, Holistic Management International, The Nature Conservancy of Texas, United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners Program, Texas Agricultural Land Trust, Texas Forest Service, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program and Department of Inland Fisheries, Texas Wildlife Association, Travis County, Hill Country Land Trust, Texas Land Conservancy, the City of Austin's Watershed Protection Department and Texas Tech Llano River Field Station.

"The Natural Resources Conservation Service is pleased to partner with the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network as they have demonstrated an innovative approach and proposed lasting solutions to the state's conservation and agricultural needs," said Claude Ross, Natural Resources Specialist of the Natural Resources Conservation Service. "The diverse array of stakeholders from the 19 partner organizations made for a very compelling application, and we're honored to be a part of this critical investment in the protection of Central Texas' working lands and natural resources."

Through this pledge, HCC, the Network and their partners will assist landowners with projects addressing short-term and long-term conservation of water quality, wildlife habitat, and drought and flood management, with roughly 48 percent being allocated to the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), 39 percent to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and 13 percent to the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

"On behalf of all landowners who are receiving this gift, we are deeply grateful to NRCS, HCC and the coalition of environmental organizations who share our values and have invested in the land we love," said Jennifer Puryear, of Puryear Ranch, a privately-owned property which includes 425 acres in Travis County. "Our land has been in the Puryear family for over a century. My husband's mother, Alice Puryear Perkins, taught her children the value of thoughtful conservation, and now we're teaching ours. Because of this easement, our beautiful land's legacy and wildlife will be preserved for many generations to come."

HCC and its partners hope to continue growing the Network in order to further support conservation efforts and smart growth, and gain professional diversity that allows the group to meet key economic, social and environmental objectives at a regional scale.

About Hill Country Conservancy (HCC)

Hill Country Conservancy is a nonprofit land trust committed to preserving not only the natural beauty and open spaces of the Texas Hill Country but also its economy. HCC marshals public and private resources to preserve the natural areas and scenic vistas, aquifers and springs, rivers and streams, working farms and ranches, and the rural heritage of the Central Texas Hill Country for people to enjoy and cherish for generations to come.

For more information, visit HillCountryConservancy.org.

About the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network (the Network)

In 2017, a coalition of organizations and agencies came together to form the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network (the Network) to advance shared goals of conservation and sustainable growth in the Texas Hill Country. Working across a 17-county region of Central Texas, the Network aims to significantly scale the impact of conservation-focused organizations, universities, agencies, businesses, and individuals working to protect natural resources, rural heritage, and quality of life of this region.

About Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) draws on a long history of helping people help the land. For more than 80 years, NRCS and its predecessor agencies have worked in close partnerships with farmers and ranchers, local and state governments, and other federal agencies to boost agricultural productivity and protect our natural resources through conservation.

For more information, visit [NRCS.USDA.gov](https://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

#