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Hill Country Conservancy to Open a 1,205-Acre Nature Preserve in Williamson County

Anonymous land donation will enable the nonprofit to protect sensitive land in fast-growing area

AUSTIN, Texas (Aug. 1, 2023) — [Hill Country Conservancy](#) (HCC) is opening a nature preserve in northern Williamson County after an anonymous landowner donated 1,205 acres of ecologically sensitive land to the nonprofit land trust to be used for conservation, research, educational outreach and public recreation.

Five miles west of Jarrell, Texas, the rolling property named Pecan Springs Karst Preserve sits within the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone at the gateway to the Hill Country. Long used for cattle ranching, the karst landscape is rich with limestone caves and sinkholes that enable rainwater to easily permeate into the aquifer underground, filtering the water as it flows through soils and limestone. Home to numerous endangered species including Salado Salamanders, Golden-Cheeked Warblers and Tricolored Bats, the property also features the headwaters for three tributaries of Salado Creek, including Pecan Springs Branch.

“Pecan Springs Karst Preserve is by far the largest land donation that Hill Country Conservancy has ever received, and the property is well-suited to our mission to protect the water, wildlands and wonder of the Texas Hill Country,” said Hill Country Conservancy CEO Kathy Miller. “The generosity of the previous landowners and the trust they have placed in Hill Country Conservancy is truly awe inspiring. We also look forward to creating numerous opportunities for the community to enjoy the unique landscape that makes the Hill Country such a magical place.”

This fall, HCC will begin opening the Pecan Springs Karst Preserve to the public on a limited basis for guided nature hikes, cave talks, bird-watching and other educational and recreational public events. The first opportunity the public will have to experience this unique landscape will be September 23, in celebration of National Public Lands Day.

Home to two of the four fastest-growing cities in the nation according to recently released U.S. Census [2022 population data](#), Williamson County has set aside just 27,620 acres for conservation to date, according to Siglo Group. Hays County, which is approximately 40% smaller in land area, already has nearly 39,660 acres under protection while Travis County has 95,040 acres under conservation.

The Pecan Springs Karst Preserve lies directly in the path of a new wave of growth that is expected to bring at least 24,000 homes to properties adjacent to the now rural property over the next decade.

HCC has traditionally worked to preserve land in the Hill Country area by partnering with landowners to establish conservation easements on private property. Since securing its first easement in 2004, the nonprofit's land conservation portfolio has grown to include more than 14,000 acres of protected land in the Texas Hill Country.

The anonymous donor originally sought to create a conservation easement on the property, but after consulting with HCC and learning more about the astounding ecology of this landscape, they decided HCC was the best possible landowner to maximize public benefit by creating a nature preserve.

"We are thrilled to engage the research and conservation experts in our region on this property and provide opportunities for people to experience and benefit from the natural wonder that the property holds," Miller said. "Since we own this land, Hill Country Conservancy can share it with the public and conduct valuable research year-round that ultimately will help landowners throughout the Hill Country better protect and steward their land."

The group has already begun taking the first steps toward restoring the property, relocating all cattle to replenish vegetation, monitoring endangered species, planning restoration efforts for Salado Salamanders, surveying species present on the property and clearing debris from caves and sinkholes so that surface water can permeate down to the aquifer more efficiently. Long-term, HCC is working to maximize ecological function at the site, increasing biodiversity and the land's natural ability to absorb rainfall to recharge the Edwards Aquifer.

About Hill Country Conservancy

Founded in 1999, Hill Country Conservancy is a nonprofit land trust committed to protecting not only the natural beauty and open spaces of the Texas Hill Country but also its economy. Hill Country Conservancy preserves our vital natural resources through conservation, community collaboration and engagement to sustain our region now and forever. For more information, visit www.HillCountryConservancy.org.