
CCCA April 2023 Conservation Insider

1 message

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Conservation Insider

April 2023

Hello, CCCA Friends, Partners, and Volunteers,

Happy Springtime! After its sputtering start-and-stop showing during March, it looks like Spring is finally here for real ! Even the mesquite trees have leafed out and are blossoming – a sure sign that there will be no more freezes.

Another sure sign is the preparation for the area's traditional April community events. Two of our favorites are the New Braunfels Heritage Society's Folkfest, and Earth Day at the Headwaters at the Comal. Spring is also the time of plans and projects . . . so please plan to come help at the CCCA booth during Folkfest and Earth Day; and let's hang our hummingbird feeders, get our gardens cleaned up, do the 'rain dance,' and enjoy Springtime in the Hill Country!

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## CCCA NEWS

## A Message from CCCA Executive Director, Ryan Spencer

Hello, Friends of CCCA,

Although I haven't even been here a month yet, I wanted to say thank you and share a little about my motivation for joining CCCA and some thoughts about what I'd like to help us achieve. First, I want to thank our board for giving me an incredible opportunity to help guide our organization. I want to thank each of you for your efforts in bringing CCCA to this moment and for all the work that each of you have done to conserve the precious ecological and cultural resources of our county.

Like many of you, my journey toward stewardship started as a child. I grew up on the plains of North Texas. My family and I lived in the heart of Fort Worth, Texas and I spent many days down by the Trinity River and its surrounding parks. As I grew up my father took my brother and me camping. For him, scouting was our vehicle. He wasn't a seasoned outdoorsman but regardless, he would load up our Honda minivan and drive half a dozen children into the woods. He did this, rain or shine, every month for seven years. During that time, I developed a love for nature regardless of the weather. I loved exploring open terrain and finding spots where the sound dropped, and you could hear silence. During this time of my life I forged a deep and unwavering love of the outdoors. I found in it what very few teenagers find – a world that held no judgments about your appearance or cared about your lifestyle. The only thing that mattered in the back country was if you had the skills necessary and the grit to cope with whatever nature decided to throw at you.

Read Ryan's entire message [HERE](#).

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SAVE THE DATE

CCCA Community Program

WHAT: Presentation on "The Relationship Between Land and Water" with guest speaker Dr. Robert Mace, Executive Director and Chief Water Policy Officer of The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment. Learn how increased growth, land development, and climate variability create challenges for our water supplies, requiring creative solutions to protect land and water for the future. This presentation will discuss what's happening, what's expected to happen, and what we can do in the future.

WHEN: Tuesday, May 16, 6:00-7:30 PM

WHERE: McKenna Events Center, [801 W. San Antonio Street, New Braunfels, TX 78130](#)

Folkfest

WHAT: An annual festival in New Braunfels, Texas, honoring its history with re-enactments, pioneer crafts, live music, food and drinks. Stop in at the CCCA booth to learn how aquifer recharge supplies our drinking water, and what we can all do to help.

WHEN: April 15 & 16, 10:00-5:00 PM both days; FREE ADMISSION

WHERE: Museum of Handmade Furniture, [1370 Churchill Dr., New Braunfels, 78130](#)

Earth Day

WHAT: The Headwaters at the Comal will be open for a FREE celebration of Earth Day. Come enjoy a day of fun, engaging, family-friendly, nature-filled activities. Stop at the CCCA booth and say 'Hi!'

WHEN: April 22, 10:00-2:00 PM

WHERE: Headwaters at the Comal, 333 Klingemann, New Braunfels, 78130

AgriLife Open House

WHAT: AgriLife Open House featuring demonstration gardens of vegetables, flowers, rain garden, native grasses and much more! Multiple activities for kids! (crafts, face painting, scavenger hunt and more!)

WHEN: April 29, 10:00-2:00 PM

WHERE: Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service - [Comal County, 325 Resource Dr., New Braunfels 78132](#)

**COME ENJOY AN EVENING OF MUSIC AND FUN UNDER THE STARS -
BENEFITING CCCA AND THE COMAL COUNTY FRIENDS OF THE NIGHT SKY!**

LAND & Sky CELEBRATION



MAY 20TH @ 5080 PURGATORY RD. NEW BRAUNFELS
*Music * Camping * Stargazing*

GATES AT
5:00 PM

CLOSES AT
MIDNIGHT



LIVE MUSIC
7-10

SONG CIRCLE
STARGAZING
10-12

MUSICAL GUESTS

THE
RAMBLEWOODS

& John Whipple
& Friends



PRESENTED BY

Dot's Spots

FREE PARKING

FOOD TRUCK

BYOB + CAMP CHAIR

(RAIN DATE: 6/17)



HUNGRY
HIPPIE

DAY TRIPPERS EVENT ONLY \$15/PP
CAMPING + EVENT \$25/PP

Tickets



<https://tinyurl.com/LandAndSky>
21 & UP. NO FIREWORKS.

LIMITED PRIMITIVE &
DRY CAMPING AVAILABLE
INFO: 512-757-4242
PACK IN. PACK OUT.

LAND & SKY CELEBRATION

Music, Camping, & Stargazing

WHEN: Saturday May 20, 5:00 PM - Midnight

WHERE: [5080 Purgatory Rd, New Braunfels 78132](#)

COST: Daytrippers: \$15/pp, Campers: \$25/pp

TICKETS AVAILABLE AT: [Land and Sky Celebration \(ticketspice.com\)](#)

Get your tickets now for a "stellar" event, benefiting our local, Comal County environmental organizations and to honor our Land and Sky with music, friends and fun!

All profits go to [Comal County Conservation Alliance](#) & [Comal County Friends of the Night Sky](#).

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IN OTHER NEWS

GREAT SPRINGS PROJECT LAUNCHES LANDOWNER ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Great Springs Project has launched their Landowner Engagement Initiative: a two-year program that will directly engage the owners of 1,400 parcels of land in the Austin-to San Antonio corridor, to encourage the use of conservation easements and/or conservation-based land use practices in alignment with the environmental, ecological, economic, and health benefits of Great Springs Project's land conservation and connectivity mission. Guided by a core value of respect for private land and landowners as willing partners, GSP and its partners will work with landowners on the benefits of partnering with Great Springs Project and our conservation project partners to create a healthier, connected, and sustainable environment.



In case you missed it, watch the GSP video narrated in Spanish by NBA Hall of Famer, Manu Ginobili, or in English narrated by Matthew McConaughey.

[English Video](#)

[Spanish video](#)

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## CCCA H-Z APRIL COLUMN

**"How A Splendid Meeting Has Led To Engaging Together!"**

By Frank Dietz for the H-Z April 1, 2023

In a considerable convergence of mutual interest and commitment, Comal County Conservation Alliance met and engaged our 1<sup>st</sup> Executive Director, Ryan Keith Spencer. This passionate and well-trained conservationist brings a wealth of experiences and studies to build the future with willingly allied folks in our challenging, growing Hill Country County. Though I have served on numerous and varied search committees through quite a few decades, I cannot recall another experience when I felt ready to jump to my feet and shout “let’s do this now!” Bear with me as I tell you some of my delight and hopes for this mutually beneficial engagement of gifts and passion.

In shaping a position description and frightfully detailed list of expectations, we realized we really needed to find a dance partner willing to ascertain how to walk, reach, explore and pursue together in a manner that will produce effective outcomes. Ryan expressed his attraction to the position in seeing both “the NEED and the PEOPLE.” He lifts up the extraordinary Hill Country beauty and iconic natural resources. For those of us residents

on this search journey, we listened intently and saw in Ryan's journey of discovery and learning many pluses to bring to this relationship.

While a student at Texas State he interned in a variety of capacities with Texas Parks and Wildlife. Perhaps of special surprise was an intern assignment as Park Ranger at Guadalupe River State Park and unique assignment after state acquisition on the Honey Creek Natural Area. Sometime you can ask him about that solo effort to get an area ready for public exploration. Fascinating, too, are tales about his work with the glass bottom boats so attractive to curious youngsters and adults.

Impressively, Ryan has been a student of both the contexts of the natural wonders of Texas' Hill Country and its many contours for discovery and exploration. He says he recognizes that though there are many ways in which the contiguous and regional counties have commonalities, both the particular natural phenomena of our Comal County and the people who keep coming to see and, in many instances, make a home here, shape a unique opportunity. His growing depth and breadth of wisdom along with rich experiences with people convince him that folks from many points of view are brought together cherishing and enhancing our remarkable natural resources. Rather than seeing what divides in our fractious times, as a passionate conservationist Ryan sees our rivers, springs and other natural resources as a common thread binding us together to find "best practices" enhancing what treasures we have here in Comal.

Ryan's most recent task while pursuing his doctoral studies and research has been since 2018 with The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment. As a Search Committee and Board, CCCA took special note that his work included coordinating strategic planning and key development relationships and outreach. He has an uncanny familiarity with the sources for support for non-profits in our region and state. Needless to say, this facet of getting to know Ryan found very eager and welcome ears, eyes and responses.

Capable as Ryan is in coming to his new endeavor, he stresses that his experiences, interests, and training bring him to a team building of interested and willing folks intergenerationally to create a unique expression of conservation. It promises to serve as a model well into the future here in Comal County and for others to admire and emulate.

Go to [CCCA Ryan Spencer - Comal County Conservation Alliance \(CCCA\)](#) for a more thorough acquaintance with Ryan Keith Spencer, CCCA Executive Director.

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## **CCCA APRIL SPOTLIGHT**

### **The Next Generation of Texas Farmers and Ranchers**

We're focusing our SPOTLIGHT this month on The Next generation of Texas Farmers and Ranchers. As the average age of Texan farm- and ranch-owners rises, some passionate and determined members of the 'next generation' are stepping up to take the reins, bringing new techniques and sustainable practices to the field. A few excellent articles are included here, and more can be found on CCCA's website at:

<https://www.comalconservation.org/next-generation.html#texas-farmland>.

**"TEXAS FARMLAND IS THE MOST THREATENED IN THE NATION"**

## American Farmland Trust

By Lori Sallet

April 21, 2021

**WASHINGTON, DC – Today, American Farmland Trust told attendees at the Texas Land Conservation Conference – Texas farms are under severe threat, its best land succumbing to development. Sharing results from its May 2020 report “Farms Under Threat: The State of the States” report which identifies exactly where agricultural land has been paved over, fragmented, or otherwise converted to uses that jeopardize agriculture, AFT asked attendees to join in partnership to turn back the tide of land loss by working to strengthen state and federal policies, build public support for protecting farmland and ranchland, and usher in a brighter future for agriculture.**

**Between 2001 and 2016, AFT’s report reveals 11 million acres of America’s agricultural land were developed or converted to uses that threaten farming. Using cutting-edge geospatial technology, the report maps the extent, location, and quality of each state’s agricultural land and tracks how much of it has been converted in each state. In addition, the Agricultural Land Protection Scorecard analyzes six programs and policies that are key to securing a sufficient and suitable base of agricultural land in each state. Individual state policy summaries outline state performance and how each state can improve its performance.**

**With this research, AFT makes it clear that there is an urgent need to act to retain agricultural land for future generations to produce food, support jobs and the economy, provide essential environmental services, and help mitigate and buffer the impacts of climate CHANGE.**

Read the full article [HERE](#).

## **"REGENERATIVE FARMING: WHY TEXAS FARMERS ARE MAKING THE TRANSITION"**

Texas Real Food

By Katherine Lara

November 1, 2022

**In recent years, the state of Texas has experienced a drastic increase in the number of droughts and floods. This has led to a decline in crop yields and soil erosion. As a result, farmers are increasingly turning to regenerative farming practices.**

**Regenerative farming is a type of agriculture that focuses on rebuilding soil health and improving water retention. As a result, regenerative farms are much more resilient to drought and floods. In addition, regenerative farms can sequester carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, helping to combat climate change.**

**Regenerative farming is also good for the local economy, as it helps to create jobs and support small businesses. In addition, it provides a more sustainable food source for the future. There are many benefits to regenerative farming, and it is clear that this type of agriculture is here to stay.**

Read the full article [HERE](#).



## "PURE PASTURES: COLLABORATIVE REGENERATION IN COMAL COUNTY"

By Peggy Sechrist

June 17, 2021

Nestled in the heart of the Texas Hill Country, in Comal County, Pure Pastures is a 2,000-acre multi-species operation that practices 100% regenerative management. Pure Pastures is a collaboration between the Moorman family, the ranch owners and partners in the business, and the Eubank family, the operations managers and business partners.

Lew Moorman was introduced to regenerative agriculture after experiencing health concerns in his family. He realized that the food system needed changing, from the soil up, to improve people's health. In 2018 Lew set out on a mission to regenerate the food system beginning with improving soil health on his ranch near Canyon Lake, TX. He partnered with Maggie and Jeremiah to develop their business Pure Pastures.

In October 2019, the Eubanks moved to Lew's ranch from Stockdale, TX where they had been running a hog operation since 2015. They had been attempting to buy more land, but they were facing many obstacles in doing so, which is common for many beginning farmers and ranchers. They saw a Lew's job post on Facebook for managing a much larger piece of land. They began negotiations with Lew and took the leap to manage the ranch and partner in the business. As first-generation ranchers, this gave Maggie and Jeremiah the opportunity to expand their production and gave Lew peace of mind that the ranch would be managed regeneratively.

Read the full article [HERE](#).

## "REGENERATIVE RANCHING IS BETTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, BUT CAN IT BE PROFITABLE? THESE TEXANS THINK SO"

By Dina Gachman

January 10, 2020

Meredith Ellis harbors no illusions when it comes to the demands of running a cattle ranch. As she offers me a cozy blanket to keep warm during our "buggy" ride on her Kawasaki Mule around her family's three-thousand-acre G Bar C Ranch on a crisp December morning, she tells me she has "about a hundred items" on her to-do list. Ellis, forty, isn't complaining; she just knows what it takes to do what she loves, and to do it well. When I ask if she ever takes a vacation, she replies immediately, without a trace of regret: "There is no day off. Ever."

G Bar C Ranch is nestled between Era and Rosston, about thirty miles northwest of Denton. Ellis is in charge of maintaining the land and the cattle, along with longtime ranch manager Mike Knabe; her dad, G.C., who is 69 and "trying to retire"; and ranch apprentice Jen Peterson.

Peterson sits in the back of the buggy during my tour, along with Ellis's dog, Eva. Ellis's seven-year-old son named the dog after a character in the Pixar film *WALL-E*, one of many facts and stories that Ellis shares as we navigate over steep, rocky drops on our way to see her cattle. On this winter day, the ranch has 146 pregnant cows, 62 young females,

two Charolais bulls, five black Angus, and two horses that pretty much serve as “yard art.” They’re all off grazing in one of the many pastures whose grass height and soil health Ellis and Knabe watch closely, so they know when it’s time to move the cattle along. The ranch has about 58 permanently fenced pastures, plus several temporary pastures through which the animals are rotated, in keeping with the principals of regenerative ranching. In this increasingly popular, more-sustainable form of agriculture, hooves till the soil, manure provides the fertilizer, and the plowing is done by animals, not machines.

Family legend has it that forty years ago, Ellis’s dad, a longtime rancher who once owned a fishing-lure company and a pecan farm in South Texas, wore out two pickup trucks driving around the state in search of the perfect spot for his dream ranch. Now his daughter is becoming a powerful voice in the world of regenerative ranching. She’s on the board of the Integrity Beef Alliance, a group that advocates for sustainable, progressive ranch management and humane livestock handling, and she travels across the U.S. to speak about the benefits of eco-conscious ranching. Ellis tells me she’s given talks in upstate New York, North Carolina, and Las Vegas, of all places, which felt to her “like being on another planet.”

As we drive through the peaceful pastures of her ranch, Ellis points out her own temporary fencing, as well as the patches of peas and okra she plants as cover crops, which improve soil health and reduce the need for chemical fertilizers.

“My job is to try not to be a stupid human and to figure out what the cattle want and need,” Ellis tells me as she stops to point out a stag grazing nearby. She’s making it sound simple, but regenerative ranching—which prioritizes soil health by discouraging chemical fertilizers and overgrazing, and instead advocates no-till principles and practices that mitigate the effects of climate change—is anything but.

Read the full article [HERE](#).

*Stay safe, stay healthy, enjoy Nature!*

**Comal County Conservation Alliance**

<https://www.comalconservation.org/>

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