

CONSERVATION TAKES PASSIONATE DILIGENCE

Frank Dietz HZ column- March 4, 2023

Conservation requires of us all a great deal of attention, care, utilization of resources and continuous effort. This reflection takes on an emphasis on "Conservation Easements." Folks with the good fortune as owners of a considerable acreage whether purchased or passed to them as legacy assume an awesome measure of responsibility going forward. Most of those who seek to consider using a Conservation Easement for purposes of protecting and using the property in perpetuity seek to honor the nature of the resource and the stewardship of a legacy long worked and appreciated. In Comal County we have numerous parcels, a small number now in Conservation Easements, and some others being considered. Utilization of this vehicle to hold a parcel in tact reflects deep valuing and generous dreams for green space, water, land and wildlife long into the future.

A Conservation Easement is a specialized means to set aside acreage restricting use of the land but remaining in the possession of the landowner(s). The action becomes of record in the county and establishes a protected reduced value to the land as it is shared with a Land Trust third party. Due diligence is a journey of some length as the proprietors engage legal, accounting and land trust parties. When the party setting the parcel aside needs assistance to deal with the costs along the way, there are sources private and public that may be accessed. As many folks know, surveys of large parcels and updated appraisals do not come cheap, nor do the services of well-informed professionals. CCCA has opened a Land Conservation Fund that hopes to assist in the front-end costs of preparation. The funds can be restored to assist others once consummation of the effort takes place. You will find on helpful websites information and technical assistance, including good descriptive help at comalconservation.org, the CCCA website.

In Comal County some parcels have successfully been placed into Conservation Easements. One such magnificent parcel has recently achieved its goal as a Conservation Easement. Though it remains privately owned with the partnership of a Land Trust, all are invited to McKenna Center on 14 March from 6-7:30 p.m. for a dive into this geological wonder out at Honey Creek Cave. This cave of a documented 20-mile reach has impressive awesome features. A peek took place with meteorologists from San Antonio's KSAT earlier last spring. Michael Cicherski, a fellow of the National Speleological Society and caving since the 1980's will take us into the cave from its mouth, revealing some "dark, creepy and chilly" features.

Now that this parcel out near the Honey Creek Natural Preserve is protected from the carving tools of development, an exciting natural feature will continue to enrich the Comal County treasures of open space. In time, may it be joined by several more.

The March 14th gathering for CCCA brings another feature for you to experience in meeting our Comal County Conservation Alliance first-ever Executive Director, Ryan Keith Spencer. Next month I intend to introduce you to Ryan and my excitement for his resourcefulness in shaping a broader conservation future for all of us in Comal and in all of the Texas Hill Country. He's easy to meet and as engaging as can be with experience and enthusiasm for the challenging tasks at hand. That's 14 March at McKenna, 6-7:30 p.m. Come ready to learn all about Honey Creek Cave and to get to know Ryan.