



# Conservation Insider

May 2021

**Hello!** A brilliant Spring welcome to all our CCCA Friends and Partners. The recent rains have certainly been a help for our native landscapes and wildlife. Rain is a welcome event in the Hill Country as it is one of our most precious resources. Let it rain, let it rain!

**Here's an insightful quote to begin this issue.**

*"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."*

*Aldo Leopold*

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**ZOOM WITH US - May 11 at 6:00pm**

**IT'S (PAST) TIME TO SAVE OUR RURAL LAND HERITAGE**

Program hosted by Comal County Conservation Alliance (CCCA)

Tuesday, May 11, 2021 from 6:00 – 7:00 pm

ZOOM <https://zoom.us/j/94851807176>, ID: 94851807176

On Tuesday, May 11, 2021, from 6:00 – 7:00pm, the Comal County Conservation Alliance (CCCA) will host an evening program on “Saving our Rural Land Heritage.” **Guest speakers are David K. Langford of the Hillingdon Ranch in Kendall County, and Rob and Teresa Ohlrich Johnson of the JO Ranch in Comal County.** They will tell their stories about their families’ use of conservation easements as a tool to preserve their families’ land and ranching heritage along with the natural and cultural heritage of our beautiful Texas Hill Country.

Under the pressures of rapid population growth, Comal County’s rural lands are turning into subdivisions, shopping centers, quarries, roads, and other elements of an urbanizing landscape. Comal County is losing its rural heritage, and that is affecting the well-being of our entire county. It’s time we did something. These two families have done something, and they’re prepared to share their stories.

**David K. Langford** is an internationally known wildlife photographer and the co-founder and Executive Vice President (emeritus) of the Texas Wildlife Association. He and his wife **Myrna Langford** live on their part of the historic Hillingdon Ranch where seven generations of the extended Giles family have lived and ranched. The Langford family recently put their ranch under a conservation easement with the Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT), an organization David also helped found. David was once a critic but is now one of the strongest advocates of conservation easements as a tool for preserving a family’s land and legacy. He is also well aware of all the public benefits that protected open space lands provide, including clean air and water, native wildlife, pastoral beauty, and a way of life.

**Rob and Teresa Ohlrich Johnson** recently did the same: preserve their family’s heritage on their JO Ranch in Comal County. They too used a conservation easement held by TALT. Teresa’s ancestors were among the first settlers who traveled from Germany with Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels in 1845. Five generations of her family have lived on the ranch her ancestors settled. Through the generations, the ranch has been divided among descendants and some parts have been sold off. The Johnsons have now assured their historic family ranch will remain intact and undeveloped for future generations.

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### **CCCA NEWS**

Working to save Comal County from the loss of land, water, and wildlife isn't an easy task, but it helps to have the support of our great Partners. CCCA welcomes two more new partners this month!

The **Comal County Friends of the Night Sky** group is an all-volunteer non-profit group of Comal citizens formed in March 2020 to promote and encourage the protection and preservation of the night sky in Comal County. The primary effort of CCFNS is to make Comal a place where the darkness of the night sky is relatively free of interference from artificial light.

Learn more at: [www.comalcountyfriendsofthenightsky.org](http://www.comalcountyfriendsofthenightsky.org).

The purpose of **Bulverde Neighborhoods for Clean Water (BNCW)** is to protect public health, the environment, and the quality of life for residents in Bulverde and Comal County, with a special emphasis on water quality in the Cibolo Creek watershed. With citizen support, their goal is to keep their community safe and clean, and ensure that the native beauty that is the hallmark of Bulverde and surrounding areas endures for future generations. Get more information about BNCW's current efforts at: <https://bncw.bulverdetexas.net>

Welcome Comal County Friends of the Night Sky and Bulverde Neighborhoods for Clean Water. **We are pleased to have you join us!**

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### **MONTHLY SPOTLIGHT ON SAVING RURAL HERITAGE**

<https://www.comalconservation.org/saving-rural-heritage.html>

Our **CCCA SPOTLIGHT** this month highlights the importance of and how to preserve rural family lands. And here is Frank's May column for the New Braunfels HZ.

#### **Cherish! Encourage! Affirm! Comal's Rural Heritage...**

By Frank Dietz

Hike, cycle or drive across the expanse of Comal County and one notes considerable turning of soil surfaces or drastic clearing for home or commercial development. When the turned or piled topsoil is placed in a mound it is easy to imagine how that soil was previously supportive of crops and pasture. Speak with many newcomers as well as old timers and they'll soon speak of the cherished rural heritage that has characterized much of Comal farms and ranches. Note, too, their excitement in describing the gifts of springs, rivers and a lake. This defines the attraction to become a Comal resident for their family future and home.

My own interest in agricultural production began very early with an in town "victory garden" alongside our family residence in a New Orleans neighborhood. Read it all at:

<https://www.comalconservation.org/saving-rural-heritage.html>

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### **Kendall and Comal Landowners Save Their Land by Putting Their Ranches Into Conservation Easements**

#### **Kendall County - Laurels Ranch**

David K. Langford loves the Texas Hill Country land that his family has cherished for five generations. His passion for the land has informed his career as a professional photographer, and he has been a tireless advocate for working lands conservation and private property rights his entire adult life.

He was among a small group of private landowners who got their heads together in the 1980s to form the Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) to raise the profile of private land issues in Texas. He served as Executive Vice President of the organization until late 2001 and shepherded the organization as it became one of the leading voices for private landowners in Texas. At one point in his TWA career, he was also one of the loudest critics of conservation easements.

A 2005 trip to Billings, Montana for a meeting of the Partnership of Rangeland Trusts with his friend Blair Fitzsimons changed that. Continue reading this story at:

<https://www.comalconservation.org/success-stories.html>

### **Comal County - JO Ranch**

Teresa Ohlrich Johnson's love for the land near New Braunfels that has been in her family for generations runs deep. Her ancestors were among the German settlers who traveled with Prince Carl of Solms-Braunfels on a journey to settle immigrants in the heart of Texas in 1845. Owning land in Germany was all but impossible for anyone other than royalty, and the yearning for their own piece of land was a driving force for most immigrants in seeking a new life in the rough and tumble Texas of the mid-1800s.

Five generations of Teresa's family have lived on the land her ancestors settled, but in recent decades, the land has been divided among different factions of the family, and tracts of the original land holding have been sold off. Teresa and her husband Rob Johnson purchased the land where they have lived since 1998 from her father so it would remain in the family. Their four children grew up a pasture away from their grandparents and enjoyed an idyllic childhood.

Along the way, the Johnsons have watched the explosive growth of Central Texas all around them. Where there were once sprawling ranches as far as the eye could see, now there are subdivisions all around and the legacy of the land settled by German settlers is disappearing.

Teresa and Rob want to ensure that never happens to the land they've stewarded for their family. That's why they've put 123 acres of the JO Ranch under a conservation easement held by the Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT).

Continue reading this story at <https://www.comalconservation.org/success-stories.html>

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### **An Audacious and Timely Conservation Challenge**

Written by Andrew Bowman, president & CEO of the Land Trust Alliance.

We should all applaud President Biden's executive order calling for conservation of 30% of the U.S. land base by 2030. This bold "30x30" vision is firmly rooted in science, given that protected land is key to a healthy and secure future for all Americans. It provides pure drinking water, healthy food, clean air, habitat for wildlife, and places for people to reflect, recreate, hunt and

fish. Conserved land also provides protection from natural disasters, such as floods and droughts, and absorbs and keeps carbon from the Earth's atmosphere.

The president's vision also recognizes that land conservation is not keeping pace with growing threats to our lands, waters, wildlife and ways of life. Every 30 seconds, the United States loses a football field of natural lands to roads, houses, pipelines and other development. Since 1970, North America has lost 3 billion birds — 29% of its avian population. Forty acres of farmland in the United States are lost to development every hour.

Given these facts, the audaciousness of the president's conservation goal is right for this moment. And this "moon shot" for nature is necessary for more than just environmental reasons: Land — and the public's desire to conserve it — provides one of the few opportunities to reduce political polarization and build social cohesion among a deeply splintered American populace. This was demonstrated most recently in the strong bipartisan consensus last Congress that led to the permanent reauthorization and full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

In particular, land conservation that takes place outside of the government sphere — through community-based, nonprofit organizations known as land trusts — provides a means for Americans of all backgrounds to save the places they need and love through personal initiative, landowner empowerment and charity. Read more at:

<https://www.comalconservation.org/saving-rural-heritage.html#Andrew>

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## What Is a Conservation Easement?

[texaslandtrustcouncil.org](http://texaslandtrustcouncil.org)

A conservation easement is a voluntary, written agreement between a landowner and a qualified land conservation organization under which a landowner voluntarily restricts certain uses of the property to protect its natural, productive, or cultural features.

CEO of Texas Agricultural Land Trust, Blair Fitzsimons states, "In application, ..., a conservation easement is often a land steward's expression of their love of the land, enacted because they cannot bear the thought of their cherished land being broken up."

More information about conservation easements at: <https://www.comalconservation.org/saving-rural-heritage.html>

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## Texas Land Trends by Texas A&M

Texas contains 142 million acres of private farms, ranches and forests, leading the nation in land area devoted to privately owned working lands. These lands provide substantial economic, environmental and recreational resources that benefit all Texans.

Rapid population growth is driving suburbanization, rural development and ownership fragmentation that increasingly threatens working lands. These threats result in a fundamental change in the Texas landscape, impacting: rural economies, food and water security and conservation of natural resources.

The Texas Land Trends project monitors the status and changes in land use, ownership size and land values of working lands. Research results are published as topic-based reports... More information at: <https://www.comalconservation.org/saving-rural-heritage.html#trends>

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AND... If you need a little direction about how to make a difference in our beautiful Texas Hill Country here are some ideas

### **What You Can Do**

by the Land Trust Alliance

If you love the land, there's a lot you can do. Land is the key to a healthy and secure future for all Americans. It provides pure drinking water, healthy food, clean air and places to reflect and recreate.

Conserved, well-managed land also provides protection from natural disasters, such as floods and drought, while absorbing carbon and keeping it from the earth's atmosphere.

People who are connected to special places energize the land trust movement — be a part of it!

Maybe you own land that you can protect. Maybe you can donate or volunteer. Or maybe your contribution is to spark new ideas, spread the word or inspire children to love nature, too. Continue learning how you can help by going to: <https://www.comalconservation.org/saving-rural-heritage.html#LTA>

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### **SAVING PRIVATE LANDS by Texas Parks & Wildlife**

Lone Star Land Steward winners reflect on the program's impact after 25 years.

By Megan Radke

2020 would have been the 25th year of the annual Lone Star Land Steward awards banquet, where private landowners from multiple Texas ecoregions are celebrated for their land and wildlife management efforts. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the event was postponed.

The conservation and stewardship work by landowners, however, never stops. Continue reading at: <https://www.comalconservation.org/saving-rural-heritage.html#Radke>

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## **Hill Country Landowner Workshop Video**

Presented by Hill Country Alliance in October 2020

Listen and learn from regional experts on land stewardship tools and financial resources, conservation easements, and what to expect in terms of eminent domain and other rural landowner issues in the upcoming legislative session

<https://www.comalconservation.org/saving-rural-heritage.html#video>

**More information** is available on the CCCA Website at: <https://www.comalconservation.org>

**We hope to see you Tuesday May 11th on Zoom!**

*Stay safe, stay healthy, enjoy nature! See you next month.*

**Comal County Conservation Alliance**

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

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