**CCCA January 14, 2020 Community Meeting**

On Tuesday the 14th, nearly 100 people gathered in the McKenna Center to hear Leslie and Randy Collier tell the story of El Rancho Cima, the former Boy Scout Ranch.

Leslie began by telling of her personal experience, spending many summers at the ranch. She loved the place so much that she and Randy bought property near it as their planned retirement home. And then, they learned that the Scouts had sold the property without any restrictions. Despite being nearby property owners, news of the sale got to them long after the fact.

The couple then began an effort to raise awareness of the sale and $24.5 million to purchase the property. Awareness seemed to come easier than millions of dollars. With volunteer videographers and drone pilots, they produced videos to help more people experience the property. They posted signs at the overlook on The Devil’s Backbone announcing the sale. They spoke with people at the overlook. They developed a website and a Facebook page. And they gave presentations to any group that would listen.

The awareness effort was needed since very few people, even from the area, knew that the property had been sold. One of the groups that was most surprised and concerned about the sale were the many people who spent summers at the camp. Men and women from all over the country have memories of their time at the camp. Indeed, some of the 100 people at the event shared memories of their time camping.

The new owners, investors from San Antonio, have split the 2,400-acre property into several parcels. Hays County, with help from the Nature Conservancy, has moved ahead in purchasing a parcel along the Blanco River. They plan to preserve it as a limited access nature reserve. Neighboring landowners have also purchased two other parcels with the intent of making them wildlife reserves. Another Scout group is considering the purchase of two parcels, which would likely preserve them. (The Scouts face the challenge of finding the money.) Finally, Comal County has shown some interest in acquiring two parcels. Comal faces the same challenge as the Scouts: Finding the money.

The two parcels that CCCA and others have urged Comal County to acquire total a little over 600 acres and include the iconic overlook known as the Devil’s Backbone. Public ownership would preserve the incredible view from the Devil’s Backbone. It would also preserve habitat for the endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler and many other creatures. In fact, the property has the potential to qualify as a “bank” for the Warbler. Under the rules of federal agencies, developers whose projects “take” Warbler habitat must purchase credits from approved banks. Comal currently has no bank, so developers send their dollars to other counties. As someone said: They get the dollars and Comal gets the asphalt.

The saga of El Rancho Cima is far from complete. Stay tuned and let your elected officials know that you value open spaces in the county.