

THIS IS A VERY SPECIAL GIFT!

There have been some very dear responses to last month's anticipation of the season of giving and the pondering of alternative gifting. Appropriately I was asked, "did you want to say something about those who do set aside land/acres for future generations?" Of course!

The conversation may begin around a family table amidst the fellowship, laughter, tearfulness about all the adventures and misadventures on a Texas Hill Country ranch. That's likely one of the legacy or heritage homesteads that may reach a century or more of generational care and tending. For some others with the good fortune of land acquisition, the acreage may be a parcel more recently acquired. In either case, the question about "preserving, protecting, making available for future generations" leads to a commitment to explore *conservation*. A "conservation easement" is one way to preserve and protect property. Another gift option would be for parkland with the local, county or state authorities.

Such a scenario inevitably leads to quite a conversation about land values, areawide development, family plans and most likely, "the young ones" as well as those "on the way" and "yet to come." Legacy is a key component for the family and/or general public. Informed by deeply held values and the honoring of heritage, observations about "care of the land" and "careful use of water" lead to fascinating memories. Lots of "remember when?" "Did you ever think what they were doing was showing such care about soil, crops, grasses and water availability?" Then someone points out that there is a process for protecting and setting aside acreage in a way that might be positive for the aquifer, wildlife, fresh air and more. The resolve arises, "let's investigate this!"

Key steps ensue as family circle members take on various assignments when considering a conservation option. Specialists may be contacted to assist. Research assignments can proceed as an agenda begins to unfold in earnest. Some of the bases to be touched and then secured include:

- Contacting and interviewing Land Trust organizations and/or public authorities who can answer key questions (Refer to Texas Land Trust Directory @ www.tpwd.state.tx.us/thc).
- Consult legal and tax advisers regarding options along with advantages and disadvantages
- Establish consensus among the legacy holders/owners to proceed.
- Prepare for costs involved in presenting a clear title, a current market value appraisal, an up-to-date survey of the property under consideration, professional fees for assistance.
- Identify a Land Trust to assist and guide you as stewards through these steps and in securing helpful professionals.
- If unable to make an outright gift of the property assistance may be possible through the non-profit and/or public sources available.

Should the direction be public set aside for parkland or wilderness trails those steps would be pursued with the appropriate public staffers and decision-makers.

Protecting for the future parcels of land "to remain green" can be a high level for giving and impacting far into the future. There is no harm in doing the exploration and taking the early investigative steps.

Thanks to those who prompted, "taking giving in this direction." It is at the heart of the impressive efforts being made by the Comal County Conservation Alliance (www.comalconservation.org). If you wish assistance, contact for help with an informed participant.

May our fresh new year bring us several such conversations and efforts to achieve protections in our precious Comal and surrounding counties blessed to be the Texas Hill Country!