

CCCA Feb 5, 2022 Column

“What about our legacy acres?”

Several months ago, a Comal County resident who was isolating on family acreage during the pandemic challenge of “working virtually” reached out to me. The description was of a homestead on legacy acres that remain “in the family” to manage, use, pass on or develop in some manner. Until the lengthy working away from offices the going assumption among heirs has been that the inherited acres would be marketed at some point.

It became clear in this conversation that some “different, alternative thinking” was underway as the comments and questions were based on a deepening appreciation for how the acres had been tended through many decades and how they might have a future more natural and less developed. I thought to myself, I’d like to savor these exchanges and share anonymously some of the thoughts explored. This is my attempt to do so.

My urging was that any heirs be on the same wavelength as the conversations proceed. If there are young folks of a next generation, make certain they have an opportunity to be heard as well. Then, together to the extent possible, have some pleasurable chats about memories with good stories and then move toward options that might be available. If the pandemic isolation provides some browsing and exploring times, do those together as well. I even suggested some writings of Wendell Berry and other writers that have nurtured my own heart and thoughts over the years. I explained where the sources for specific information can be found regarding land trusts, conservation easements, heritage farms and ranches, donations for public usage and more. Discover the incredible resources about our area’s watershed, aquifers and springs. Look to some models for both retaining open land space or finding a way forward to use parcels for earth friendly “footprints.”

It is amazing and wonderful to sense the depth of emotion and responsibility inside the fortunate folks with a heritage legacy land acreage. Of course, it pleased me no end when I was told that a previous column describing a stroll through areas of a family parcel with a grandson moved my inquirer to do the same. “The description of so many things I, and we, had taken for granted until we took the time to examine and appreciate” brought a heartwarming smile for me! Even more important were endeavors underway to study the specific drainage patterns and implications for future use.

The conversation remains open, respectful but hopeful we’d be in touch again and the family involved may become interested in working with some who can assist them along their way. One of our exchanges concluded with reference to a broadcast interview with David Gessner whose 2021 offering, **Quiet Desperation, Savage Delight** lifted up a thoughtful, helpful statement from one of his teaching colleagues. Mistakenly suggesting “we are all in this pandemic boat together” she corrected him to recognize that we navigate our way on the sometimes challenging, sometimes inviting waters of life in our very different boats. Even more vividly Gessner pointed out that Thoreau tried to help his followers and detractors to see that his comfortable jacket is not the one that will fit all. For some it will comfort and protect, for others, it will hang loosely while still others will burst the seams! I love the images and find them helpful in the discussions about acres to protect and possibly set aside from subdividing. Perhaps the way to put it is *“if this fits snug and comfortably, find a way!”*