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## CCCA July 2023 Conservation Insider

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# Conservation Insider

July 2023

Hello, CCCA Friends, Partners, and Volunteers,

Good news! June brought several conservation wins which promise long-term benefits across the state and specifically to the Edwards Aquifer region. The recently-ended 2023 legislative session approved a constitutional amendment that establishes a New Water Supply for Texas Fund to pay for new water supply projects, and another that creates the Centennial Parks Conservation Fund to purchase land to create new state parks and improve existing parks. Both amendments will be on the November ballot for public approval.

And some really good news for Comal County, just released last week, is the announcement that the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) and the Texas Nature Conservancy reached an agreement with the Urbanczyk family to purchase the Honey Creek Ranch. After several years of difficult negotiations, the 515-acre ranch that was to become the Honey Creek Ranch subdivision will now be added to the Honey Creek Natural Area and managed by TPWD. Our thanks to the Urbanczyks, TPWD, Texas Nature Conservancy and all the members and supporters of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Authority (GEAA) who worked to make this happen. More information is provided in the "In Other News" section below.

Now, if we'd just get a little more rain and a little less heat . . .

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## CCCA News

[CCCA Welcomes New Advisory Board Member](#)

A lifelong conservationist and pivotal leader, Helen Ballew, has spent the past 35-plus years working to protect the Texas Hill Country.

Having been active in a number of successful environmental and conservation efforts, Helen brings an in-depth historical perspective and a well-respected scientific and collaborative approach to the CCCA. Helen's impactful work includes helping to create the Austin Regional Habitat Conservation Plan which resulted in the National Wildlife Refuge and the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve. She also served for many years as a director on the Boards of the Bamberger Ranch Preserve and the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and was founding Treasurer of the Great Springs Project.

Most recently, Helen served as founding Vice President of the CCCA, serving in the position for 3 years before becoming the nonprofit's Conservation Consultant. Previously, Helen was Director of Landowner Contact at The Nature Conservancy as well as the Executive Director of the Hill Country Foundation and Headwaters at Incarnate Word (San Antonio Springs).

Helen earned her A.B. Degree in English from Middlebury College, and an M.E.S. in Environmental Studies and Field Ecology from the Yale Forestry School. Utilizing her expertise in program development, policy analysis, community consensus building and conservation planning, Helen lives her passion to help deepen the connection between people and nature.

## Texas Water Safari

On June 10th-12th CCCA Board Member Heather Harrison participated in the 60th Texas Water Safari to raise money through sponsorships for CCCA! Way to go Heather! Heather's team, named "Four Guad's Sake" came in 10th out of 156 teams, in a time of 52 hours, 51 minutes of nonstop racing for over 260 miles. The race course began at the headwaters of the San Marcos River (at the Meadows Center on Spring Lake), continued to the confluence with the Guadalupe River in Gonzales, then along the Guadalupe River until its mouth at the Guadalupe Bay, crossing it and the San Antonio Bay, finally finishing in the small fishing town of Seadrift. Her three teammates: Wendell Smith of Seguin, Bobby Smart of Anacoco, Louisiana, and Courtney Martinez of Spring Branch, are all experienced canoe racers with 44 Safari finishes between them, but this was the first competition they entered as a team. Congratulations to Heather, Wendell, Bobby, and Courtney! Thank you for loving the Guadalupe River and for raising funds to help support the conservation of it!

*The following information comes from the Texas Water Safari website:*

Legend has it that in 1962, Frank Brown and Bill "Big Willie" George decided to take their V-bottom boat, without a motor, from San Marcos to Corpus Christi. They accomplished their mission in about thirty days and decided that other people should have the opportunity to experience the same journey. So, in 1963 they set up the first Texas Water Safari.

Today the Safari is a long, tough, non-stop marathon canoe-racing adventure, traversing 260 miles of challenging rivers and bay. Many participants enter the race with no intention of winning, but with the goal of joining the elite group of finishers and earning the coveted Texas Water Safari finisher's patch.

Entrants must have all provisions, equipment, and items of repair in their possession at the start of the race.

Nothing may be purchased by, or delivered to, a team during the race except water and/or ice. Each team must have a team captain (18 years old, or older) whose responsibility it is to follow the team by vehicle (car, truck, or bicycle) to keep track of their location and condition and to give them water and/or ice.

During the Safari, teams may not receive any assistance of any kind, except verbal. Teams must be prepared to travel day and night, nonstop, to be competitive but teams who occasionally stop for sleep have been able to reach mandatory checkpoint cutoff times and cross the finish line by the 100-hour deadline.

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# SAVE THE DATE

## CCCA Community Program

**WHAT:** Annalisa Peace, Executive Director of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance, will talk about why it's important for the future of Comal County to preserve open space in the county now, while there is still land to preserve. She will relate what other local governments in the Edwards Aquifer region are doing to preserve land to protect our water resources and will outline some options and opportunities that Comal County and local municipalities might adopt for this purpose.

**WHEN:** Tuesday, July 11, 6:00-7:30 PM

**WHERE:** McKenna Events Center, [801 W. San Antonio Street, New Braunfels, TX 78130](#)



### CCCA Community Program

**WHEN:** 11 July, 6:00 – 7:30 PM

**WHERE:** McKenna Events Center  
801 W San Antonio St,  
New Braunfels, TX

#### **Preserving Open Space in Comal County: *Challenges & Opportunities***

Guest Speaker

#### **Annalisa Peace**

Executive Director, Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance

The steady increase in population over the past decade has put Comal County at the forefront of development. What does this growth and development mean for its water availability future?

Since the Edwards Aquifer is our primary water resource, this steady increase in residential population has resulted in water management challenges for Comal County and its municipalities. They must meet increasing water demands while facing reduced water resources, and also deal with wastewater discharge issues that challenge water quality.

Learn what other counties and municipalities have done to protect their water source and manage growth. Hear about how private lands are part of the solution. Explore the challenges and opportunities that face Comal County and its municipalities now and in the future.



*Edwards Aquifer*

Annalisa is the Executive Director of the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance (GEAA), a position she has held for almost 20 years. She leads the effort to protect the Edwards and Trinity aquifers and their contributing watersheds, and is the "Go-to" person for aquifer-related issues in South/Central Texas.

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

Open to the public.  
All are welcome.

## Headwaters At The Comal- Water Watchers Summer Camp

July 17-21: Water Watchers Summer Camp

Session II

**WHEN:** Mon, 17 July — Fri, 21 July, 9:00 AM —12:00 PM

**WHERE:** Headwaters at the Comal, 78130

During this summer camp, 4th-6th graders will learn about the amazing water resources we have right here in New Braunfels and the Texas Hill Country. Young scientists will participate in lessons focusing on topics including: watersheds, groundwater, succession, geography, the water cycle, weathering, erosion, and deposition. Hands on activities will include: water testing, macroinvertebrate & microorganism sampling, watershed and aquifer modeling, seed balls, art, and much more. At the end of the week, students will be inspired to enjoy and protect our precious Springs for themselves, their friends and family, and future generations.

*This program will run daily from 9 AM -12 PM at Headwaters at the Comal in our Outdoor Pavilion.*

*Scholarships are available for students and families in need of support. For more information, please contact Headwaters at the Comal.*

*Have questions? Need more information? Contact Lauren Strack at [830-608-8937](tel:830-608-8937) or [lstrack@headwatersatthecomal.org](mailto:lstrack@headwatersatthecomal.org).*

## New Braunfels Parks & recreation Department Summer Camps

Learn more about and sign up for a wide variety of camps [HERE](#) offered by the New Braunfels Parks & Recreation Department, including day camps, sports camps, nature camps, and more!

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## IN OTHER NEWS

### Great Announcement from our partner GEAA

CCCA is thrilled and congratulates those who made it happen!

Dear GEAA members and friends,

Today it was announced that the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and the Texas Nature Conservancy have reached an agreement with the Urbanczyk family to purchase the Honey Creek Ranch.

Except for the two parcels that were deeded to the Comal Independent School District and the home of the Urbanczyk family, all 515 acres of what was to become the Honey Creek Ranch subdivision will now be added to the Honey Creek Natural Area.

We hope that the Urbanczyk's will enjoy many happy times to come surrounded by beautiful land and wildlife that will now be preserved in perpetuity and we thank them for making this wonderful outcome possible.

Thanks too, to Texas Nature Conservancy, Texas Parks & Wildlife, and all who worked together towards this felicitous outcome, and especially to all of you GEAA members who

supported our work early on, including the Texas Cave Management Association, the Amy Shelton McNutt Charitable Trust, S/M Hixon Family Foundation, Honey Creek Spring Ranch, the National Speleological Society, Bulverde Neighbors for Clean Water, the Dawson and Elmendorf families, Bulverde's Mayor Krawietz and City Council member Yvonne Chapman.

Lastly, were it not for funding allocated by the federal government through the Land and Water Conservation Fund this purchase might not have been possible. You will have a chance to approve more funding for Texas parks this November. Learn more about the Centennial Parks Conservation Fund [here](#).

We will be working with the Comal ISD to incorporate green infrastructure into the plans for the new schools on this site. How lovely that students will get the chance to learn while surrounded by a nature preserve!

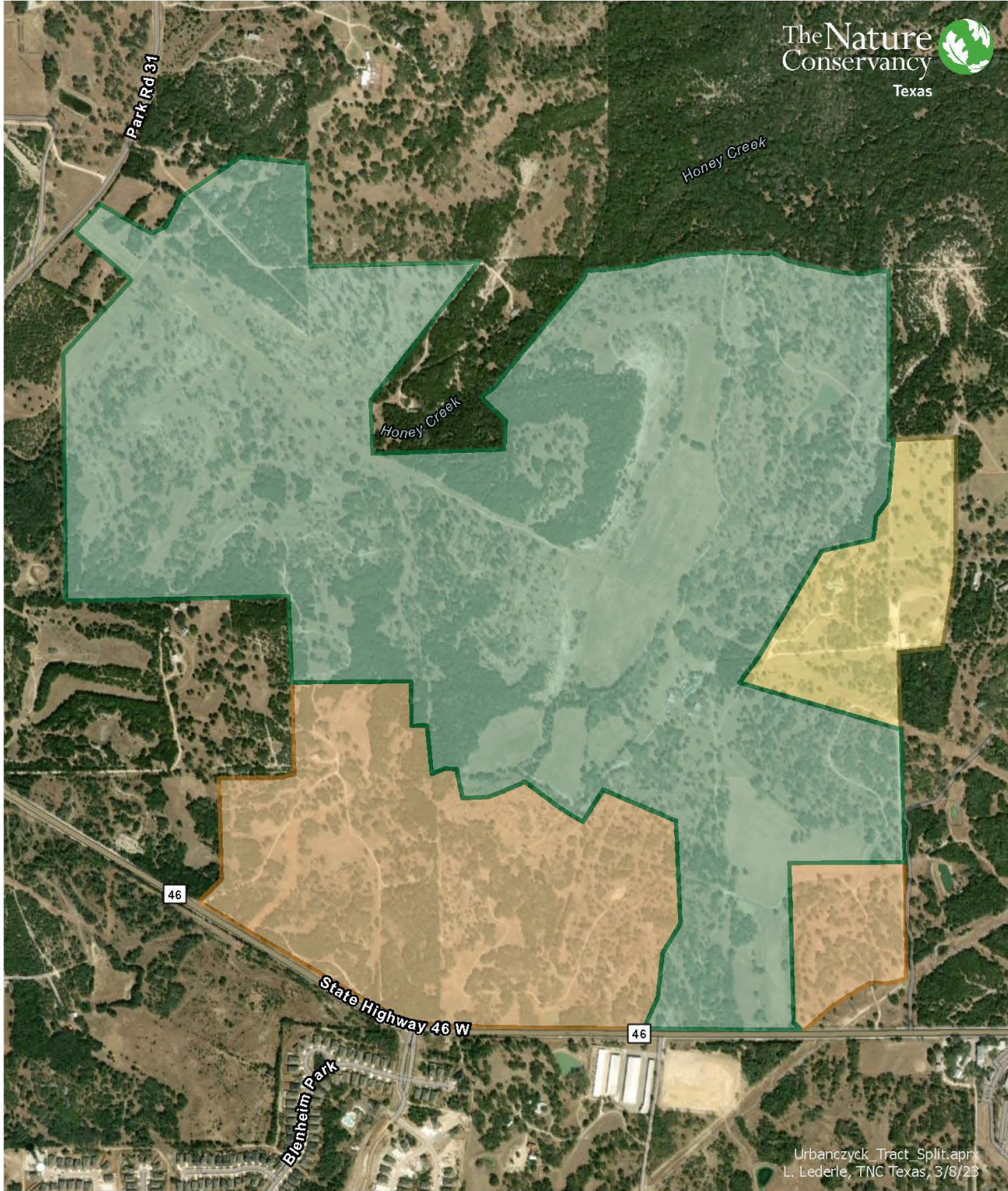
Would that all of the contentious issues we are involved in be resolved this happily.

Over the moon!

Annalisa Peace

Executive Director, Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance

Honey Creek Ranch



- TPWD Tract (515.10 ac.)
- Homestead Tract (43.589 ac.)
- School Tracts (165.58 ac.)

0 0.25 0.5 Miles

**The Hill Country Land, Sky, and Natural Infrastructure Plan Has Officially Launched!**

# LAND, WATER, SKY, AND NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

2023



texas hill country  
conservation network

The Hill Country Land, Water, Sky, and Natural Infrastructure Plan, developed by the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network, includes a shared vision for the Hill Country, collaboratively developed infographics, and objectives & strategies for achieving the Plan's vision. Through the development of this plan, the Network seeks to steward important natural lands and resources, sustain healthy farms, ranches, and working forests, and expand opportunities for connecting to nature.

Learn more [here](#)

## Drought Meets Development: Balancing Growth & Water Conservation in the Hill Country

If you love the Texas Hill Country as much as we do, then you know how important it is to protect the water supply in this region. And while we can't control what happens in nature (like drought or wildfires), we CAN control how we develop our land and use our

resources. It's so important for us to think about ways we can help protect our water sources during development and drought.

Click [Here](#) to watch this panel discussion presented by the San Antonio Report and streamed live on May 31, 2023

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## CCCA H-Z JULY COLUMN

### "A Recent Chat With Our New Leader, Ryan Spencer"

By Frank Dietz for the H-Z July 1, 2023

It was my privilege to listen to Ryan Spencer, first CCCA Executive Director, pause and reflect after his early months. My request was for Ryan to share from early experiences as one who has “waded vigorously into the waters of Comal County and taken a few deep dives” in this new venture.

Ryan reports that for him the “most exciting” part of our CCCA work is the growing number of people participating in community programs, usually held the second Tuesday in odd numbered months. Alongside this engagement he underscores the efforts of CCCA volunteers who reach out to curious inquirers attracted to “Keep Comal Wild!” He observes that old-timers and newcomers share an understanding that our communities and economies depend on the incredible natural systems we have as precious legacy. Through the growth of settlers into Texas, our Texas Hill Country and locally our Springs and Rivers have drawn many, particularly in the most recent decades. “These volunteers amplify our impact and make working for CCCA an incredible experience.”

When I observed that the rocky terrain of the region as it extends upward on the Edwards Escarpment serves as a metaphor for the decision-making and policy development required to achieve CCCA objectives he quickly replied, “Oh, yes!” Then in characteristic Ryan fashion he pointed to his many get acquainted conversations that underscore for him the shared values to “Keep Comal Wild!” Going further he explained that his approach is simple: “bring people together, highlight our shared appreciation for nature and work together to identify appropriate mechanisms that ensure these resources and treasures are available for our kids and grandkids.” Certainly, you can understand why there are interested neighbors ready to join with the CCCA Board in building effective team efforts with his energetic and informed guidance. He emphasizes time and again how the common idea of taking care of what you’ve been given and leaving it impressively enhanced gets reflected all over Comal County. That becomes an animating engine for building and shaping a caring future. One such illustration Ryan used was the urging that we reconnect our young with nature. He observed that the average American child spends less than seven (yes, that’s 7!) minutes a day engaged in unstructured nature play and activities. Indeed, he points out that this has to change if we want our kids to be happy, healthy and strong. Placing that alongside the efforts to expand trails, parks and conserved legacy acreage, it is a keen vision.

When I observed that the CCCA Board and partners are excited for his beginning efforts he noted that he has stepped into an effort that has been welcoming for the challenges and transitions ahead. He wants to be a “weaver” of conservation efforts across a wide range of community groups, neighborhoods and civic organizations, strengthening our voice with a view toward the future that helps “Keep Comal Wild!” When I sought to congratulate him that he and spouse Katie are becoming first time homeowners just north of Canyon Lake, he responded “we are gratefully entering this dream of ours and looking forward to being a force for good with our neighbors!” A Spanish expression I found helpfully expansive is to pursue “encuentro” which is descriptive of a meeting with consequences that builds ties between persons. I find Ryan to be such a builder and weaver!



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***Stay safe, stay healthy, enjoy Nature!***  
**Comal County Conservation Alliance**

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

[Info@comalconservation.org](mailto:Info@comalconservation.org)

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