

Dear Editor,

In 1846 when Comal County was founded with an area of 575 square miles, it had a population of 1,700. The U.S. Census Bureau has estimated the 2018 population to be 148,373, a 37% increase over the last 8 years. Or, as the *Herald-Zeitung*'s April 20 editorial (Growth Requires Looking Forward Not Backward) points out, by over 7,000 people in the last year.

The paper's editorial states, "There are people in the community who must climb past the notion that it can somehow turn back the clock and instead turn their eyes forward to the future." I will posit that it is those who are now advocating protecting open spaces who have their eyes turned toward the future. They understand that protecting lands means protecting our water resources—the aquifers, springs, creeks, and rivers; the scenic beauty and cultural heritage of our farming and ranching county; and the diverse and precious wildlife and vegetation. These are resources that not only make the county enchanting but provide us substantive benefits—essential to our well-being, local economy, and recreational opportunities; once lost or degraded, they are not readily reclaimed. The best way to protect these resources is to preserve and protect land.

Comparison of Hill Country counties along the Edwards Aquifer shows Travis has 17% of its acreage in protected lands of various designations; Hays has 9%, Bexar 10%, and Uvalde at 9%. Matching Medina County, Comal County comes in with only 5% of its total acreage in some sort of protected land designation (source: Protected Area Database of the United States).

We are late in this effort. Just a few weeks ago, despite the efforts of a dedicated group of former Scouts and other individuals, the 2,400-acre Boy Scout ranch, El Rancho Cima, along the picturesque Devil's Backbone, was sold to a private developer. This undeveloped land bridges two watershed, the Blanco and the Guadalupe, and is home to diverse Hill Country species of plants and animals.

There are different ways to protect land, including vehicles by which the land remains with the private landowner and is preserved for generations to come. Letting our county and state officials know that there are citizens they represent who hold land protection as a priority is also necessary. If you are one of those citizens whose eyes are turned toward the future, visit www.comalconservation.org and learn about the Comal County Conservation Alliance.

Respectfully,

Eva Silverfine Ott
San Marcos, Texas