An old saying tells us to invest in land because they aren’t making any more. That saying could now be updated to say: Invest in undisturbed natural land because each day there is less of it! Unfortunately, the updated version is very true, which is why we need to take advantage of opportunities to protect such undisturbed natural land when they become available.

Such an opportunity now exists in the former Boy Scout Ranch, El Rancho Cima. For more than sixty years, the Boy Scouts cared for this 2,523-acre parcel in the Blanco River Valley in both Hays and Comal Counties. The ranch was recently sold. The new owners have subdivided it into seven parcels. Five of those parcels are currently on the market. Hays County is moving ahead with plans to acquire at least some of the acreage in their county. They envision a limited public access reserve that would preserve the natural area on both sides of the Blanco River.

Comal County should acquire some of the land to preserve it for future generations. In particular, two parcels, 610 acres in total, along highway 32 in what is known as the “Devil’s Backbone” could be acquired to protect some of the most scenic views in all of the Hill Country.

This would mean the use of some public dollars. Many legitimate needs compete for those dollars, but some creative approaches might be used to reduce the county dollars required. For example, Hays County has partnered with at least two not-for-profit organizations to facilitate its planned acquisitions. Similar relationships could be available to Comal County. In addition, state and federal programs could be accessed for grants, which could also reduce local funding needs. All of these possibilities should be thoroughly explored. Finally, the cost of acquisition must be weighted against the cost of failing to act.

The first cost of non-action involves depriving our grandchildren of the opportunity to experience a large tract of undeveloped natural land. Few parcels like this exist. We may never have the chance to act again. Once land is developed, it is lost to the natural world.

Another cost relates to our local economy, which depends heavily on tourism. People come to Comal County and New Braunfels for a range of reasons: Great people; cultural events and opportunities; recreational opportunities, particularly those related to our rivers; and because of the natural beauty of the Hill Country. The area’s natural beauty would certainly be enhanced by protecting a large tract of undeveloped natural land. Tourists would certainly prefer to see a large nature preserve rather than subdivisions and shopping centers.

Another cost of inaction would accrue to a beautiful little creature known as the Golden-Cheeked Warbler. This bird is endangered and the area that might be preserved is prime habitat.

Finally, consider the cost of not protecting our water. Preserving this part of the Guadalupe-Blanco watershed would also help protect and feed the Edwards Aquifer, and provide flood control protection to down-stream areas.

For future generations, to sustain our economy, to save a beautiful little bird, to protect our water supply, and to guard against flooding, we should take steps to preserve part of the Boy Scout Ranch in Comal County. Such an opportunity may never again present itself. We need to act.

Ernie Wittwer