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The Nature Conservancy of Texas

Fair Oaks Ranch news release, April 4, 2006

Background: Fair Oaks Ranch Land-preservation Agreement

Brother and sister Richard Lucas and Leslye Weaver and their spouses, Kimberly Lucas and David Weaver, and the Weavers' children, Alexander and Suzanne, through the family's limited partnership, entered into a land-preservation agreement called a conservation easement on the family's historic Fair Oaks Ranch in South Texas on Sept. 6, 2005.

Specifically, the family donated two conservation easements on two separate parcels of their ranch, one on 10,259 acres in Goliad County and another on 584 acres in Bee County, to The Nature Conservancy of Texas. Conservation easements are intended to restrict development and subdivision of land to protect its conservation value, and stay permanently with the land regardless of whether it is passed to new owners through sale, gift or inheritance. Conservation easements may be donated or sold only to conservation organizations or agencies.

On the Fair Oaks Ranch, the easements will allow cattle-grazing and wildlife-management plans, and support the hunting-lease operation now conducted on the ranch while limiting hunting camps to the four now in existence. No exotic species may be released on the property, and there will be no commercial crop cultivation.

The family's traditional cattle operation will continue much as it always has. Oil and gas exploration on the ranch also will continue to be allowed; however, it will be conducted with a management plan in place to protect wildlife and habitat. The easements also accommodate the family's recreational interests: hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding and wildlife watching.

Although the details of all conservation easements are negotiated individually with landowners, the easements on the Fair Oaks Ranch are fairly typical for a Texas cattle ranch – with one exception: the easements address underground water issues.

The ranch sits atop the Gulf Coast Aquifer, which supplies water to all or part of 54 counties, including part of the greater Houston area. For this reason, the easements include a procedure for an approval process, which allows for future off-ranch water sales after a scientific investigation to ensure that any future groundwater sales do not affect conservation value of the land. This procedure to protect groundwater may be used as model for future conservation easements.