



PEDERNALES RIVER PROJECT

Community-based conservation of a Texas Hill Country treasure

conservation profile

Ecoregion: Edwards Plateau

Focus: Pedernales River; tributary streams; springs, seeps and aquifers; bottomland forests and wooded canyons; upland grasslands, savannas and shrublands; rural quality of life; and native species such as golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo, Pedernales River Springs salamander, Guadalupe bass, greenthroat darter, Texas map turtle, swamp rabbit, Texas almond, canyon mock-orange, chatterbox orchid, Correll's false-dragonhead.

Stresses: Future water demand, habitat loss, invasive plants and animals distribution, overabundant white-tailed deer populations, suppression of natural fire regime.

Strategies: Protect groundwater, minimize habitat fragmentation, research the condition and capacity of the river and tributary streams, collaborate with resource management agencies and landowners to deliver information on and assistance with sustainable land stewardship.

Partners: Private landowners, the River Systems Institute, Texas State University, other non-governmental organizations, local communities, state and federal natural resource conservation agencies.



Pedernales River (© Lynn McBride)

The Pedernales River rises from springs in Kimble County and winds through more than 105 miles of Texas Hill Country before flowing into the Colorado River at Lake Travis. Named after the Spanish word for the flint rocks that line the riverbed, the Pedernales is an important Central Texas water system that supports a vast array of human and wildlife communities on its path.

Although the Pedernales River still sustains many historic, large-scale ranching and agricultural operations,

portions of the watershed have become parcelled into smaller recreational ranches and homesites. The river crosses through five protected areas, including the Lyndon B. Johnson National Historic Park, before its confluence with the Colorado River, where it provides water for consumption and recreation for citizens of Austin and the surrounding communities.

In addition to its springs, the Pedernales River is also fed by a series of seeps and perennial, tributary streams that are important not



Pedernales River (© Ryan Smith)

only as water contributors, but also as habitat for terrestrial and aquatic species. These hidden and scenic corridors add to the area's natural heritage and allure and help draw outdoor recreation and wildlife enthusiasts to the area.

In many ways, the beauty of the area indirectly poses the greatest threat to the Pedernales watershed. The Hill Country is one of the most desirable locations in Texas, and the rate of new home construction is rising dramatically. If the area experiences the rapid growth and development that some project, the Pedernales River may face a number of challenges. These future challenges could include non-point source pollution, unsustainable surface and groundwater withdrawal, a loss of plant and animal diversity and drastically altered fire regimes.

The Conservancy is joining with partners to conserve the diverse natural heritage within the 812,000-acre Pedernales River watershed while helping the area communities find ways to live productively and sustainably in this delicate environment

Conservancy scientists are working with the River Systems Institute at Texas State University San Marcos to better understand the function and condition of the Pedernales River, as well as its tributaries and the wildlife within them. These studies will reveal the inventory and status of aquatic species, as well as water quality, river flow and habitat conditions. This data will add to the existing body of scientific knowledge and help design effective conservation strategies to protect and conserve the river and its associated systems.

The Pedernales River Project will help interested businesses, landowners, and other stakeholders practice ecologically sustainable land management that conserves natural resources while maintaining the aesthetic and economic benefits of their property. By distributing printed materials such as our riparian habitat manual and hosting landowner field days and workshops covering a number of topics, the Conservancy can share best practices of land and water stewardship.

These practices include the application of prescribed fire, native and

exotic deer population management and invasive species control. The careful use of prescribed fire can help address woody plant encroachment and create better habitat for wildlife and a healthier, better-balanced ecosystem for humans. The Conservancy's Edwards Plateau fire crew shares equipment and expertise with area landowners and local burn co-operatives and conducts prescribed burns on private lands in cooperation with partners.

Controlling exotic and white-tailed deer populations not only benefits the land, but also ensures sustained numbers for area hunters. Controlling invasive plant and animal species ensures the vitality and survival of native species that are integral to the overall health of the area. Together, these strategies help maintain not only the ecological integrity of the area, but its rural character, as well.

The continued conservation of this healthy watershed is a vision shared by many people. By collaborating on our common goals, the Conservancy will add to the work of private landowners; local, state and federal land and water agencies; and other non-governmental organizations in the watershed. By working now to plan for the future, the Conservancy will strive to be a contributing member of the local community and to help ensure that the Pedernales River watershed remains one of Texas's natural treasures.

contact information

The Nature Conservancy of Texas
P.O. Box 1440
San Antonio, Texas 78295
tel (210) 224-8774
fax (210) 228-9805

nature.org/texas