Texas

2026 Impact Report



The Nature Conservancy

From the Director


© Konrad Obek

As I reflect on eight months of leading The Nature Conservancy in Texas (TNC), I am filled with gratitude, optimism and a deep appreciation for Texas' lands and waters—and the people who make our work possible.

Joining TNC has allowed me to enjoy the remarkable diversity of Texas' landscapes and communities from a new perspective. From East Texas pine forests to coastal wetlands, springs, rivers and prairies, I have witnessed both the beauty of these places and the dedication of those working every day to protect them. Most importantly, I have been reminded that conservation succeeds because of people.

Throughout my career, I have seen that lasting progress happens when science, policy and partnership come together as part of a sustained effort. That principle is at the heart of TNC's approach and one of the reasons I am honored to lead our work in Texas.

Since stepping into this role, my priority has been to listen, learn and build upon the strong foundation created by our staff, trustees, donors, partners, volunteers and landowners. No amount of experience can replace the wisdom gained from spending time with the people who know these landscapes best.

One highlight was visiting our Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary to understand the benefits of prescribed burns for the health of longleaf pine forests. I had the opportunity to meet our partners at the Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas, where TNC assisted with planting 139,328 longleaf seedlings across 224 acres of tribal land in 2026. This is just one example of how we're advancing on-the-ground conservation work while helping build capacity with critical partners.

That same spirit of collaboration and stewardship found in our longleaf pine work is woven throughout the stories you'll find in this year's report. You'll read about TNC's role in helping establish Palo Pinto Mountains State Park, the unique coalition that protected Skyline Ranch along the Devils River and the lasting benefits of oyster reef restoration at Half Moon Reef. Together, these stories illustrate how today's conservation actions become tomorrow's Lone Star legacy.

As we look ahead, I am excited about what we can accomplish together. The challenges facing nature are significant, but so is our unwavering commitment to conservation. Because of your generosity, support and belief in our mission, TNC is helping conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends while building a better future for Texas.

Thank you for being part of this work.

With gratitude,

James McGuire
Texas State Director, The Nature Conservancy



Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary. © R.J. Hinkle

2026 Bright Spots



© TPWD



© Claire Everett/TNC

JAN

Community-led conservation took center stage as TNC's "A Greener Gulfton" won Best Environmental Short and Audience Favorite at the Wild About Houston Film Festival.



© TPWD

© Stephen Alvarez

FEB

"Nature Conservancy Magazine" highlighted key West Texas preserves and partners in a feature story on the region's dark skies. Read it at **nature.org/darkskies.**

MAR

We secured 188 acres of land in Central Texas to nearly double the size of Lockhart State Park.

A black bear-monitoring partnership with the Borderlands Research Institute led to the exciting discovery of two male cubs at TNC's Independence Creek Preserve.



© Emily Thornton



© David Bezanson/TNC

APR

TNC helped the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service acquire 391 acres of old-growth forest, adding to publicly accessible protected land at the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge.



© David Bezanson/TNC

MAY

TNC accepted a 277-acre conservation easement from the Johnson family, protecting dramatic bluffs and expanding a network of more than 2,500 contiguous conserved acres along the Blanco River.

In North Texas, Clymer Meadow Preserve celebrated 40 years of prairie protection and stewardship.


© Judy Gallagher

JUN

The 17th annual Love Creek Butterfly Count drew 55 volunteers who documented 64 species, including a Henry's Elfin, a first for the TNC-led count.

OCT

TNC worked with the Texas Water Development Board to develop and publish Texas' first statewide guide to nature-based flood resilience solutions.



JUL

More than 50 undergraduate students completed internships with TNC's science team over the summer, contributing to conservation research, data management and special projects.


© Anne Zuparko/TNC

AUG

After showcasing the benefits of prescribed fire at Barton Creek Habitat Preserve to state leaders, TNC was invited to provide expert testimony to Texas lawmakers on improving wildfire policy.

150 acre-feet of water will remain in the Devils River watershed through TNC's first groundwater lease, helping preserve one of Texas' most ecologically significant rivers.


© Jacquie Ferrato/TNC

NOV

An open day and guided tour at our Davis Mountains Preserve helped cap off a year in which visitors had more than 75 opportunities to explore TNC's nature preserves.

SEP

Construction was completed on a breakwater designed to protect shoreline at TNC's Clive Runnells Family Mad Island Marsh Preserve, a critical coastal refuge in Matagorda Bay.


© Steven Goertz/TNC

DEC

Calling all birders! Consider wrapping up 2026 by joining a local Christmas Bird Count and contributing valuable data to track bird populations across the state.


© Harvey Payne



Tucker Lake at Palo Pinto Mountains State Park. © TPWD



The Search for a State Park

The Search for a State Park


© TPWD

After more than a decade of protection and preparation, Palo Pinto Mountains State Park opened to the public in April. The first new state park in North Texas in nearly 25 years, this protected landscape just 75 miles west of Fort Worth offers rolling hills, scenic waterways, prairies and woodlands designed for hiking, paddling, fishing, horseback riding and reconnecting with nature. But the story of this 4,800-acre park began long before its gates opened, when members of TNC's land protection team were tasked with finding the perfect parkland.

THE SEARCH BEGINS

The project began in 2010, when the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) asked TNC to locate suitable properties to help bring a future state park to life. TPWD had $9.2 million to spend from the sale of undeveloped land in Fort Worth. But finding multiple adjoining parcels from willing sellers was no small task. TNC staff visited about 40 properties before locating the first three tracts that would form the foundation of the new park.

The search took nearly two years and required collaboration with landowners and careful evaluation of each property's conservation and recreational potential. A number of prospective properties didn't work out. But when David Bezanson, land protection strategy director for TNC in Texas, visited what would become the future park site in 2011, he knew the team had found something special. Seasonal color, flowing streams, wildlife and sweeping views abounded, revealing a site capable of supporting both rare species and generations of excited visitors.

BY THE NUMBERS

4,800
acres of protected land now open to the public

90
acres of Tucker Lake for motorless boating and fishing

100,000
visitors expected annually

THANK YOU
TO OUR FUNDERS

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department;
Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation

RICH IN NATURE, ROOTED IN HISTORY

The park's ecological value is remarkable. This island of Hill Country in North Texas boasts Texas oak and Ashe juniper woodlands that offer nesting habitat to the endangered golden-cheeked warbler and rare black-capped vireo, while its prairies and savannas support quail and other wildlife. The landscape has also sustained human communities for thousands of years, with evidence of ancient campsites and tools that reflect its long history and cultural significance.

In the heart of the park, Tucker Lake invites visitors to canoe and fish across its 90 tranquil acres, while multi-use trails provide opportunities for hiking, mountain biking and horseback riding. Camping, swimming and stargazing round out the park experience. And because only nonmotorized watercraft are allowed on the lake, visitors can enjoy the sense of peace and solitude that first inspired efforts to protect this place.

It's no surprise that the park is expected to welcome as many as 100,000 visitors each year. Every trail, viewpoint and quiet stretch of water is a conservation achievement long in the making.

OPENING NEW DOORS TO NATURE

Palo Pinto Mountains State Park represents more than a new outdoor destination, though. It shows how public agencies, private landowners and determined conservationists can work together to keep wild places within reach. In assembling the park, TNC has helped create a place where nature, history and recreation converge, opening land to the public that might otherwise have remained inaccessible.



© TPWD


© Nick Simonite


© TPWD



Matagorda Bay. © Kenny Braun

Lessons from Half Moon Reef



Lessons from Half Moon Reef



© Claire Everett/TNC



© Claire Everett/TNC

More than a decade after TNC, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas General Land Office and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers restored Half Moon Reef in Matagorda Bay, research published this year is providing fresh evidence that oyster restoration delivers lasting results.

The report documents the reef's remarkable recovery and provides one of the longest records of oyster population dynamics ever collected from a restored oyster reef in Texas. This new data underscores what scientists have long suspected: through floods, droughts and changing environmental conditions, oysters at Half Moon Reef have continued to thrive, demonstrating the ongoing benefits of investing in healthy coastal waters.

A REEF REBORN

Over a decade ago, Half Moon Reef became the starting point for a broader effort to rebuild oyster reefs across Texas' bays. It also became the foundation for TNC's coastal conservation work in the Lone Star State and helped establish our organization as a leader in restoring one of the Gulf Coast's most important marine resources.

In 2014, TNC and partners restored the historic reef using 100,000 tons of limestone, rebuilding 54 acres of reef structure in Matagorda Bay. Today, 81% of the oyster shell cover on the reef is made up of live oysters, illustrating the long-term value of restoration backed by science and collaboration.

Monitoring has also shown that the restored reef quickly became a hotspot for marine life. Just four years after construction, biodiversity on Half Moon Reef was more than 1,000% greater than on the adjacent bay bottom. The latest 10-year monitoring report found an average of 344 oysters per square meter on the restored reef—one of the highest levels recorded since 2018—with oysters measuring from about 1 to 5 inches. This range in oyster size and age points to a well-established reef that continues to support a healthy, reproducing population.

SCALING SUCCESS ACROSS THE COAST

But the value of restoration extends beyond a mere increase in oysters. Oyster reefs improve water quality by filtering water, provide food and shelter for fish and wildlife, and support coastal economies that depend on healthy bays. Put simply, when oyster reefs thrive, their benefits ripple outward, sustaining both people and nature.

Ultimately, the restoration of this single historic reef has become a blueprint for coastal conservation across Texas. Building on the science, partnerships and lessons learned in Matagorda Bay, TNC has restored 165 acres of reef in Copano Bay, Galveston Bay and beyond. Together, these projects are advancing a vision for a network of sanctuary and harvestable reefs that support wildlife, fisheries and cleaner water. Looking back, Half Moon Reef proved that restoration works, and now, it remains a successful model for rebuilding oyster populations and strengthening Texas bays at a larger scale than ever before.

BY THE NUMBERS

10
years of monitoring to document the reef's recovery and success

81%
the percentage of oyster cover on Half Moon Reef in 2025

344
the average number of oysters per square meter supported by the reef in 2025, and the highest density recorded since 2018

Reviving Reefs Along the Coast

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal Impact Assistance Program; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Frank Klein



© Kathy Sweezey

2021 - BEEZLEY REEF

This 40-acre oyster reef complex is the first-ever sustainable oyster reef completed in Galveston Bay with TPWD and Galveston Bay Foundation. Like Lap Reef, a portion was designed for commercial oyster harvest, while another portion serves as a nonharvestable sanctuary reef.



© Claire Everett/TNC

2024 - RETT REEF

TNC, Texas Sea Grant and San Leon Oyster Fest restored the 10-acre Rett Reef in Galveston Bay—the first nonharvestable oyster reef restoration project led by a commercial harvester in Texas to support sustainable oyster populations.

HOUSTON

GALVESTON

VICTORIA

CORPUS CHRISTI



© Jerod Foster

2014 - HALF MOON REEF

TNC and partners collaborated on a multiyear project to restore Half Moon Reef in Matagorda Bay, using 100,000 tons of limestone to bring this 54-acre reef back to life. Today, oysters can be found on 81% of the reef's surface.



© Terry Palmer

2019 - LAP REEF

TNC's 60-acre Lap Reef, located in Copano Bay, uses a hybrid approach to restoration: Half was designed as a nonharvestable sanctuary reef and half was created for commercial oyster harvesting.

Saving the Skyline



The stark canyons of Val Verde County in West Texas. © Kenny Braun



Saving the Skyline



© Ian Shive

Across Texas, family lands are changing hands at a historic pace. As ranches are sold, subdivided and developed, some of the state's most iconic places are becoming increasingly fragmented. In 2026, TNC helped secure the future of a place where clear water, rugged canyons and wide-open skies still define the West Texas horizon.

BY THE NUMBERS

6,600+
acres protected at Skyline Ranch through a conservation easement

135,000
acres preserved around the Devils River through TNC and partner efforts

360+
bird species found migrating, nesting or wintering in the Devils River watershed

A FAMILY LEGACY AT RISK

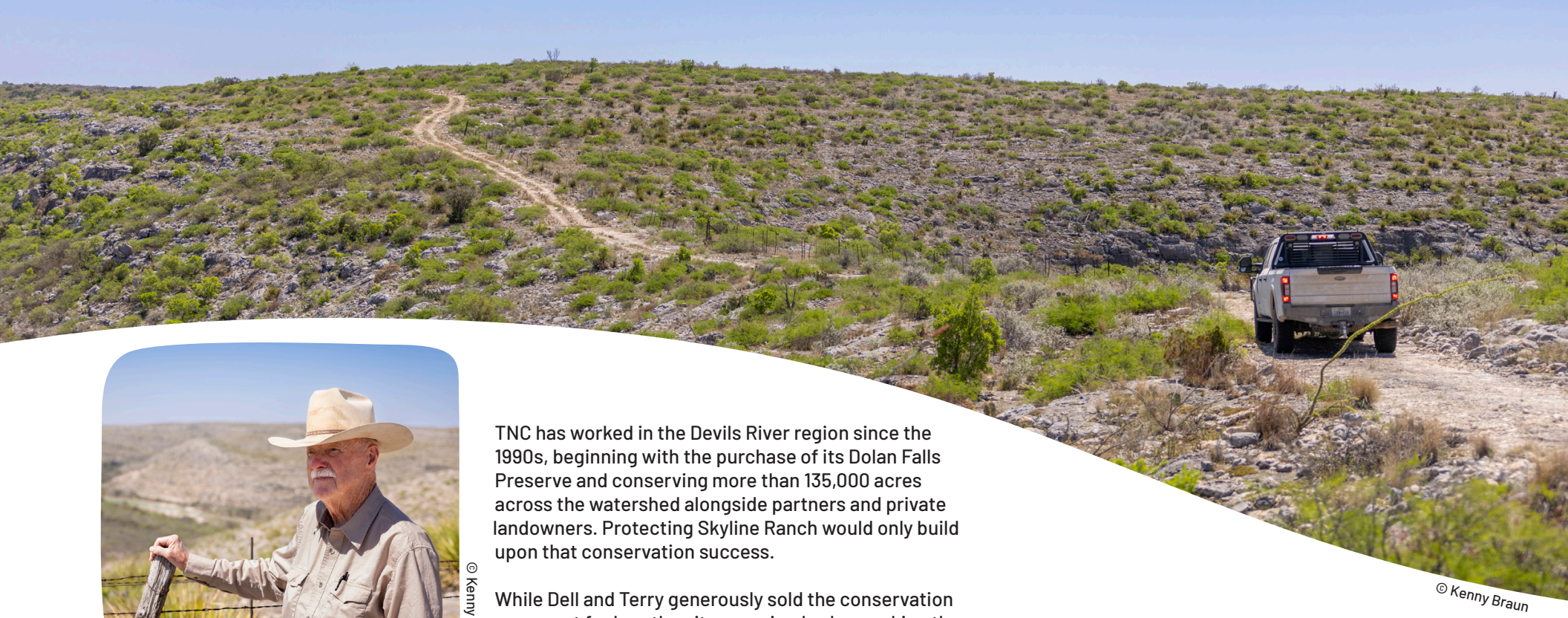
Along a remote span of the Devils River in Val Verde County, Skyline Ranch remains much as it has been for nearly a century. Here, it reflects a family legacy for brothers Dell and Terry Dickinson. Their grandfather first named the property decades ago, inspired by its sweeping views. Since then, Skyline has stayed in the family's care, shaped by a deep connection to the land.

Yet the surrounding area continues to change. Neighboring ranches have been sold off, often to buyers with different priorities. Dell and Terry began to worry about what might happen when family ties to the land faded and stewardship gave way to short-term interests.

Seeking a lasting solution, the Dickinson brothers approached TNC about placing a conservation easement on their 6,600-acre ranch—a significant opportunity to make a difference in a corner of West Texas that needs protecting.

PARTNERSHIP WITH A PURPOSE

The Devils River watershed is one of the most pristine in Texas. Over 360 bird species migrate, nest or winter here, while rare species such as the Devils River minnow rely on the river's clean, spring-fed waters.



© Kenny Braun

© Kenny Braun

TNC has worked in the Devils River region since the 1990s, beginning with the purchase of its Dolan Falls Preserve and conserving more than 135,000 acres across the watershed alongside partners and private landowners. Protecting Skyline Ranch would only build upon that conservation success.

While Dell and Terry generously sold the conservation easement for less than its appraised value, making the deal happen still required an extraordinary coalition. Along with their donation of the easement value, funding and support came from TNC; the Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program; Compatible Lands Foundation; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; The Horizon Foundation; the WoodNext Foundation, a fund of a donor-advised fund program; and John Eddie Williams.

Each partner saw something worth saving. Conserving the property safeguards one of Texas' most pristine rivers, preserves a scenic waterway enjoyed by paddlers, and prevents development in an area used for military flight training. The result: a conservation easement that permanently protects native habitat, water quality and the open landscape—all in Skyline's name.

A PROMISE THAT SPANS THE HORIZON

For the Dickinson brothers, the easement represents more than an agreement; it's a promise for the future. Today, they still see the same steep bluffs, hardy brush and life-giving waters that captivated their grandfather decades ago. And because of this collective effort to save Skyline Ranch, generations to come will experience a place just as wild, beautiful and enduring that stretches as far as the horizon.

THANK YOU
TO OUR FUNDERS

The Department of Defense's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) Program; Compatible Lands Foundation; Texas Parks and Wildlife Department; The Horizon Foundation; the WoodNext Foundation; John Eddie Williams; and Dell and Terry Dickinson.





View along the Rio Grande toward Santa Elena Canyon at Big Bend National Park. © Tim Speer/TNC Photo Contest 2019

Speaking Up for Nature

Speaking Up for Nature


© Pierce Ingram


© Erika Nortemann/TNC


© Kenny Braun

From hearing rooms to television screens across Texas, we're bringing conservation into public conversations, connecting with diverse audiences and building support for lasting policy solutions.

TURNING POLICY INTO PROGRESS

Protecting Texas' most treasured places requires action on many fronts and involves combining on-the-ground conservation, informed advocacy and strong partnerships at every level of government. To get this done right, TNC works with local communities to engage with state agencies and federal policymakers, helping bring science, collaboration and practical resolutions to the decisions that affect our shared future.

LOCAL INITIATIVES

This year, TNC continued advocating to protect Barton Creek Habitat Preserve from potential threats associated with multiple proposed developments. Through various engagements with local officials, state agencies, reporters and community partners, we built support to safeguard the wildlife, water resources and natural heritage that make this place so special.

We welcomed City of Austin staff in April to the preserve for a firsthand discussion of ongoing threats, conservation challenges and the property's continued success. Through its conservation easement, the City has been an important partner in safeguarding Barton Creek Habitat Preserve. The visit strengthened our mutual commitment to the people and nature of Travis County and demonstrated the value of local governments' role in conservation.

STATE-LEVEL ADVOCACY

Throughout Texas, we work with state agencies and lawmakers to ensure that conservation is considered in decisions affecting water, wildfire, energy, infrastructure and land use. Although the Texas Legislature did not convene in 2026 to pass legislation, lawmakers held hearings to examine pressing issues and develop recommendations for the next session. We weighed in this year on an array of important issues, including wildfire prevention, the Pecos River watershed, data center development and 765-kilovolt transmission lines.

In August, the Senate Committee on Natural Resources invited Shawn Benedict, fire manager for TNC in Texas, to testify about prescribed fire, its role in reducing wildfire risk, and policy changes that could make it easier to use this essential tool safely. Committee Chair Senator Kevin Sparks also visited Barton Creek Habitat Preserve to learn more about our prescribed fire work. The committee's interim report will draw on input from TNC and our partners as it outlines recommendations to reduce wildfire risks and effects around the state.

FEDERAL ENGAGEMENT

Some conservation challenges extend beyond state and local boundaries. At the federal level, TNC continued advocating for border infrastructure solutions that minimize impacts to the places we've worked hard to protect, including Big Bend National Park, Black Gap Wildlife Management Area, our Lennox Foundation Southmost Preserve and others.

While there is still much more to do, we remain dedicated to advancing conservation solutions at every level of government. Our science and conservation expertise makes us a trusted resource for Texas decision-makers, and our top priority is ensuring that conservation-guided decisions keep shaping Texas' future.

THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDER

H-E-B



DAYTRIPPING WITH THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN TEXAS

From the mountains of West Texas to our native prairies and vital freshwater rivers, springs and lakes, conservation came to life for millions of Texans in 2026 through "Making of a Million"--a three-part PBS series developed in collaboration with Texas storyteller Chet Garner of "The Daytripper." Made possible through generous underwriting support from H-E-B, the series highlighted the people, landscapes and partnerships that drive our work across Texas. It debuted during Earth Month, and each episode brought our mission to new audiences in an authentic, engaging format that elevated awareness of TNC and educated viewers about our conservation projects.

"Making of a Million" dramatically expanded our reach statewide. The episodes aired 100+ times on all 12 Texas PBS member stations, and the added visibility generated through digital and social media outreach resulted in millions of added views and impressions online. The series featured nine staff and board leaders and spotlighted 15 preserves and projects, providing an unprecedented opportunity to showcase the breadth of our conservation impact. A Lone Star Emmy Award nomination for the West Texas episode further raised the series' profile and served as a testament to its exceptional content and production.

Equally important, this series allowed us to celebrate TNC's incredible legacy and urge more people to join us. Texas Board Trustee Russ Waddill hosted an exclusive "Making of a Million" screening in Fort Worth, convening both new and old friends of TNC in North Texas. This event—featuring a presentation by Chet Garner—and additional screenings in other cities sparked meaningful discussions and strengthened emerging relationships. Together, the PBS series and related community events demonstrated the power of storytelling to inspire giving and instill a deeper appreciation for our lands, waters and wildlife.

BY THE NUMBERS

2.4M
YouTube impressions

101
airings on PBS

30M
estimated reach of Texas PBS

1
Lone Star Emmy Award nomination

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HAVE QUESTIONS OR WANT TO LEARN MORE?

Contact one of our philanthropy representatives directly:

For direct correspondence about making a philanthropic donation or supporting our conservation work in Texas, please send mail to The Nature Conservancy in Texas Headquarters at 2632 Broadway, Suite 201S, San Antonio, TX 78215.

RENEE KING
Chief Development Officer
rking@tnc.org
(210) 854-5615

JORDAN WIGGINS LOPEZ
Senior Associate Director of Corporate Relations
jordan.lopez@tnc.org
(979) 255-9969

VIRGINIA ANDERSON
Director of Individual Giving
v.anderson@tnc.org
(512) 584-1808

KARA KOKOTAS-SMITH
Senior Associate Director of Development & Campaign Manager
kkokotas@tnc.org
(630) 926-2808



LEAVE A LEGACY THAT LASTS BEYOND A LIFETIME

More than 1,300 Texans have already made an extraordinary commitment to conservation by including TNC in their estate plans. These visionary gifts help protect the lands and waters that sustain us for generations to come. By making a lasting gift through your will or by naming TNC as a beneficiary, you can become part of a movement that ensures people and nature can thrive together. Explore how you can make a meaningful impact at **nature.org/bequestgift**.

When you include TNC in your estate plans, you're invited to join the Legacy Club—a special group of supporters who share a deep commitment to protecting Texas' natural heritage. Legacy Club members receive exclusive updates, invitations to local events, and opportunities to connect with conservation leaders and fellow members who care deeply about the future of our lands, waters and wildlife. It's our way of honoring your dedication and keeping you connected to the impact of your gift. To learn more or to join the Legacy Club, contact Jeff Weigel, director of legacy giving, at **jweigel@tnc.org**.

Visit **nature.org/donatetexas** to make a gift online.



Attwater's prairie chickens at TNC's Refugio-Goliad Prairie Project.
© Sean Fitzgerald

SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT: JAMIE FAIRCHILD



© Courtesy of Jamie Fairchild

"Back in the 1980s, I discovered The Nature Conservancy and instantly appreciated the work this amazing organization does. I thought, 'How cool is that? TNC purchases the land and gets it done!'

Over the years, TNC's mission has expanded, and my husband and I have supported many TNC initiatives. TNC's effectiveness lies in the fact that they are a non-partisan, collaborative, science-based organization. We passionately believe that this is the key to protecting, preserving and saving our planet for future generations. What better way to make a lasting impact with TNC than by joining the Legacy Club!"

Jamie Fairchild,
Legacy Club Member



The Nature Conservancy

f natureconservancytexas
𝕏 nature_tx
in The Nature Conservancy in Texas

The Nature Conservancy
2632 Broadway, Suite 201S
San Antonio, TX 78215

Our Mission: To conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.
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