WORKING WITH YOU TO PROTECT THE LAND YOU LOVE  by Blair Fitzsimons

Whether a generational landowner, a new landowner, or a retiree getting back to your roots, you may worry about a day when your family has no option but to sell or subdivide the land you love. Rising land values and punitive estate taxes are the leading cause of rural land loss in Texas. What if there were another, voluntary option that helped to protect your land and pass it down to future generations?

At the Texas Ag Land Trust, we partner with landowners to protect in perpetuity those farms, ranches and hunting lands that are so critical to our quality of life as Texans. The only land trust in Texas whose sole focus is working lands, the Texas Ag Land Trust believes that the best stewards of Texas are private landowners. With a Board of Directors who are farmers and ranchers themselves, our goal is to keep you on the land and keep the land working for Texas—forever.

The tool we use is an agricultural conservation easement. Individually tailored to meet the needs of each family, this type of conservation easement provides relief from estate taxes or rising land values while enabling you to continue farming, ranching or

BILL MOORE MITIGATION BANK  by Lorie A. Woodward

“Our family’s philosophy of land management has been constantly evolving since the original ranch tracts were acquired in the 1880’s,” said Wilson Sands, who along with his brother Storm and the family’s long-time ranch manager Kenneth Braddock oversees the Ennis Ranch, one of three Rosewood Ranches located in the Trinity River Basin of north Texas. “Today, we manage at the intersection of production agriculture, conservation and bottom-line business.”

The Bill Moore Mitigation Bank, with its attendant conservation easement held by the Texas Ag Land Trust, encompasses 262 acres of the 11,000-acre Ennis Ranch.

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MISSION
To conserve the Texas heritage of agricultural lands, natural resources, and wildlife habitats.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

STEWARDSHIP
requirements stewards.
Keeping productive rural lands under private management is one of the most effective ways to conserve Texas’ natural resources.

FOCUS
only on private lands.
From inception, TALT has been singularly focused on private working lands.

HELP
landowners conserve their lands.
TALT works with landowners to achieve their visions of productivity, sustainability, and legacy.

TRUST
the landowner to manage.
The landowner knows best how to manage his or her property.

RESPECT
landowners’ rights.
The donation of an agricultural conservation easement to TALT does not require the landowner to provide public access.

CEO’S LETTER

Texas has a rich history of working lands stewardship. Farms, ranches and forestlands comprise over 80% of Texas land – lands that provide the water we drink and the wildlife habitat we treasure. So it is the men and women plowing the fields or grazing the range who hold the keys to the future health of our natural resources in Texas. Whether farmer, rancher or hunter, whether fourth generation or new to the game, a love of the land unites them all. Texas landowners want to take care of their land! At the Texas Ag Land Trust, working with landowners and their families to achieve their visions of productivity, sustainability and legacy is at the core of what we do.

For many families, land is an integral part of their legacy. It is where memories are made, children baptized, holidays celebrated, and relationships deepened. A desire to protect this legacy leads many to innovate. The Sands family protected the family ranch with a conservation easement, thus generating wetland stream credits to sell to developers (Bill Moore Mitigation Bank, page 1). TALT serves as their partner, forever entrusted with ensuring that the terms of the conservation easement and the family’s commitment to stewardship are upheld.

Each family we work with knows best how to steward their land. Our job is to help them decide if the voluntary conservation easement works for them. Also found on page 1, Working With You to Protect the Land You Love, reveals how a conservation easement can be tailored to meet the needs of each family.

The conservation easement is only one tool. Our workshops feature other programs and options for landowners, and in these pages we celebrate other conservation heroes, such as Leon McNeil and his City Kids Adventures (page 3). No matter the tool or program, our goal is to keep working lands working. Private lands stewardship is a pillar of our Texas heritage, and together we can ensure that this legacy is passed down to future generations. With your support, we continue to work for the working lands that sustain us as Texans.

Thank you!

Blair Fitzsimons, Chief Executive Officer
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Leon McNeil has a passion for quail hunting. As a successful South Texas guide, he is busy with clients from November through February, while working full-time as a middle school coach. He also leads a nonprofit called City Kids Adventures, which mentors inner city kids through outdoor experiences.

Leon McNeil’s passion for the outdoors and passing it on to the next generation made him an ideal choice as an ambassador for Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation’s We Will Not Be Tamed campaign. TPWF is encouraging Texans to get involved in conserving the wild things and wild places of our state. We Will Not Be Tamed calls us to appreciate the wildness of Texas, the vastness of our Texas spirit and why we should be inspired to conserve it. Leon McNeil personifies that message.

Thanks to the support of sponsors and landowners, hundreds of kids have been introduced to camping, fishing, kayaking and hunting through City Kids Adventures. Earlier this year, a small group took part in a South Texas feral hog hunt. Because hunting hogs is not for the timid, Leon chose the most experienced to participate.

“These kids were mature and showed no trepidation,” said Pajarita Ranch owner Frates Seeligson, who has opened his gates to City Kids Adventures many times. “They really handled themselves well.”

The kids pitched in to help field dress the hogs, a hands-on wildlife biology lesson in a riveting outdoor classroom. Seeligson hopes the experience will help them understand the value of open land on ranches across Texas.

“There has to be an appreciation for open spaces, and that’s hard for people who live in a city to understand,” he said. “We need to be sure the next generation understands how valuable these open spaces are to the ecosystem that supports all of us.”

For Leon, the day’s hunt is what City Kids Adventures is all about.

“The kids we serve come from a world surrounded by concrete,” he said. “Experiencing the outdoors helps them understand that there is another world out there. They get to see the beauty of nature and how they fit in. It’s not just about the hunt, it’s about the experience.”

As part of the We Will Not Be Tamed campaign, Texans have a chance to live the wild life through a one-of-a-kind sweepstake featuring a Toyota Tundra as the grand prize. Enter to win at WeWillNotBeTamed.org.
Selling mitigation credits is the next logical addition to ranch’s operation, which includes an historic cattle business as well as wildlife enterprises and sand and gravel mining. A generation ago, under the leadership of Sands’ uncle John Bunker Sands, conservation became a hallmark of the Rosewood Ranches. Working alongside Braddock, he began balancing the needs of the livestock operation with those of wildlife.

“The wildlife is a point of connection for the extended family, so it plays an important role in the long-term sustainability of the ranch,” said Wilson who noted his interest in the ranch was fostered by childhood duck hunting trips with his uncles. Braddock also developed a commercial crawfish operation to maximize the usefulness of the wetlands when they were flooded and unable to be grazed. Braddock’s vision and involvement in the sand and gravel operations ensures reclamation of mined areas, transforming them into pristine wetlands and fishing lakes.

Bunker also had a keen interest in the wetlands along portions of the 4.5 miles of Trinity River frontage. In the 1990s, he evaluated the effectiveness of man-made wetlands as the basis for mitigation banking. His death shelved the plans for about a decade, but eventually the family constructed and restored almost 2,000 acres of wetlands in his honor.

“Creating a stream mitigation bank is not a quick or easy process, but it fit into our family’s conservation and business models,” said Wilson, noting the Bill Moore project started in 2012 and the first credits were released in 2018.

The completion of the Bill Moore stream bank doesn’t mark the family’s last foray into mitigation banking. “We feel like we have a few more opportunities on our Trinity River ranches if the demand for mitigation credit is there,” Sands said.

While no one can predict what the future holds, Wilson considers Texas Ag Land Trust a natural partner in the business of conservation. “Mitigation banking and conservation easements are complicated; TALT’s staff was incredible,” Wilson said. “Plus, TALT was founded to work with agricultural producers. We have been—and always will be—primarily beef producers. TALT understands what we do.”

Visit www.txaglandtrust.org to learn more about the Bill Moore Mitigation Bank.
Join us in conserving Texas’ working lands. Please consider using the enclosed envelope to make a gift to the Texas Ag Land Trust. Together we can make an impact by keeping working lands productive for years to come through conservation, sustainability and advocacy.
hunting — just as before! Not only that, it is your way of telling your future heirs that you loved the land so much, you couldn’t stand to see it developed or fragmented. The conservation easement “runs with the land,” meaning that all future owners must honor the easement donor’s good wishes.

It works like this. We sit down with the landowner to determine what rights he or she wants to preserve, such as how many times the property can be subdivided or how many additional houses or barns to build. Once we finalize those “reserved rights”, an appraisal determines the value of the conservation easement. This value then determines a charitable donation (in the case of donated conservation easements) or the purchase price (if the landowner is selling an easement). The final document is recorded at the court house.

In the case of a donated easement, a landowner can realize significant tax savings. In addition to reducing the property’s value for estate taxes, the value of a donated conservation easement can be deducted against 50% of adjusted gross income (AGI) and carried forward for 16 years. If the bulk of the landowner’s income comes from agriculture, he or she can deduct the value of the conservation easement against 100% of AGI.

Many have argued that a conservation easement runs counter to private property rights. But if land ownership is thought of as a bundle of sticks that includes the right to sell, lease, or allow access, then a conservation easement is just one of those sticks. It is the exercise of a property right. A conservation easement does not work for everyone. But it could be a good fit for you if:

- You want your heirs to continue to enjoy the land after you are gone without the threat of selling to pay estate taxes.
- You and your heirs want the flexibility to sell the land but would like to restrict non-agricultural development.
- You have no heirs but want your land to remain productive open space after you are gone.
- You want your land stewardship ethic to live on after you are gone.

To date, we have partnered with landowners to conserve over 226,000 acres of Texas wide open spaces. If you are interested, let us help you determine if a conservation easement works for you. For more information, visit www.txaglandtrust.org, or contact us at (210) 826-0074.
“By this time, I hoped that the next generation of our family would be ready to take on the joy and responsibility of stewardship. They’re not quite there yet, but that didn’t stop me from taking steps to keep the ranch intact. This land is too important for its future to be left to fate.”

Sarah Harte, Owner – Prairie Dog River Ranch

“The conservation easement formalized our commitment to keeping the river and the land pristine and wild. My sons, who now own the ranch, share my pride in our stewardship. There are few things better than conserving unique, important land for the future.”

Ruthie Russell, Owner – Sycamore Canyon Ranch
YOUR LEGACY TELLS YOUR STORY.

The Texas Ag Land Trust works with you and your advisors to make a lasting impact. We can help determine which giving vehicle will fulfill your goals:

- A multi-year pledge
- A gift of Securities
- A gift in your will or living trust
- Charitable Remainder or Lead Trust
- Life Insurance
- Beneficiary designation of retirement funds such as IRA or 401(k) plans

If you have already included TALT in your estate plans, please let us know so we may acknowledge your generosity. Please contact Lesly Bosch Annen, Director of Philanthropy & Communications to discuss your giving plans.

The conservation world lost two heroes last year. Tim Hixon and Bob Ayres, Sr. We are grateful to them for all they did for working lands conservation in Texas.

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