

A full-page background image showing a vast field of bluebonnets in bloom. The flowers are a deep blue color, covering the foreground and middle ground. In the background, there is a line of green trees under a dramatic sky with large, golden-orange clouds illuminated by a low sun. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



hill country alliance

EDUCATION.CONSERVATION.COOPERATION.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

2017 was another fantastic year of growth and accomplishment for the Hill Country Alliance (HCA). With the addition of Daniel Oppenheimer as our Land Program Manager, HCA grew to six staff. With Daniel's background in riparian restoration on the Nueces River in the Hill Country and the Dolores River in Western Colorado, we have already bolstered our efforts to bring technical expertise and resources to landowners in the Pedernales River basin and beyond.

Over the past 12 years, HCA has come to be recognized as the go-to source for news, events and information about what's happening in our region. We are bringing our partners together to develop shared goals and metrics for understanding change in our region.

We are seeing huge successes across the region, measured by the acres conserved and stewarded, public engaged, water conserved, and communities acting to guide their future development. These successes, when considered cumulatively, will shape the Hill Country we hand on to future generations.

We are visionary, nimble, and responsive to the ever-changing landscape of the Hill Country. We finalized a new Strategic Plan in 2017 that will carry us into the next decade. With two years under my belt as Executive Director, I am confident that we are making great strides toward a regional vision that will yield long-term rewards for this place and its people.

I firmly believe that we could not do this work without the passion, enthusiasm, support, and guidance of our core partners. Thank you for being a part of the Hill Country Alliance family.

I'm for the Hill Country,



Katherine Romans
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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BECAUSE OF YOU...

40,000 views for our Neighbor to Neighbor email newsletter.

Communities involved in our Night Skies conservation work: **17**

200 attendees at our Annual Leadership Summit.

Hill Country residents engaged in river restoration efforts: **750**

1 Hill Country—worth protecting for future generations.



O U T R E A C H

AT THE FOREFRONT

OUR IMPACT

Photo courtesy of: Katherine Romans

*"Just a quick note to say **thank you** for all you and your team are doing for the Hill Country. **1600 miles away in Montana, I'm still reading your Neighbor to Neighbor news digests because I know they're well curated, I can trust the sources, and I can stay up to date on the most important issues affecting the region. It's never easy being this far away from Texas and the ranch, especially amidst constant growth and change, but I feel better knowing HCA is out there at the forefront of all of these important issues.**"*

-E. Ayres



Landowners gather along the banks of the Pedernales River.
Photo courtesy of: Katherine Romans

In 2017 HCA published 28 press releases that were picked up in publications across the region.

We distributed 19 Neighbor to Neighbor newsletters and a total of 43 email blasts to subscribers, with a total of 40,000 views.

Our website attracted over 100,000 page views and we maintained an average monthly reach of 35,000 through social media posts.

We created 30 Hill Country View Radio segments covering a broad array of issues, and four Texas Water Symposium events were aired in full on Texas Public Radio.

We published our 11th Hill Country Calendar and expanded our Rainwater Revival as the newly rebranded Hill Country Living Festival, reaching more than 1,300 attendees.

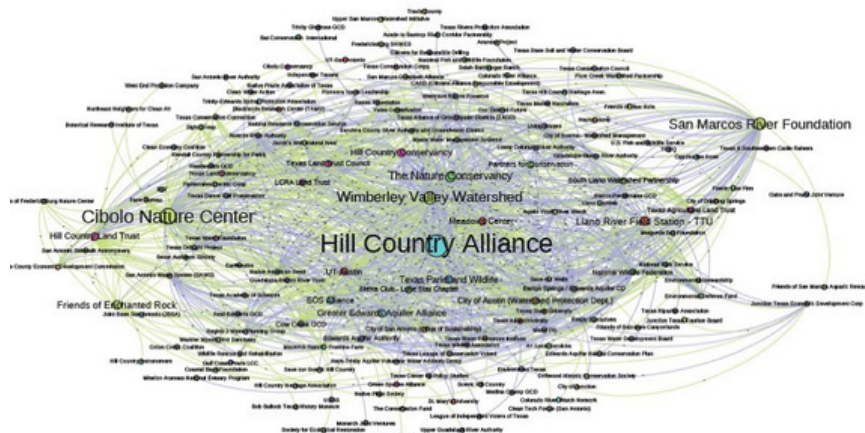


COLLABORATION

BUILDING BRIDGES

In all of our work, HCA strives to bring in partners, build bridges across traditional divides, and devise innovative solutions that leverage existing resources.

In 2017 we actively led the launch of the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network, a new effort to bring some of the more than 150 groups, agencies, and organizations working on land and water conservation in the Hill Country into a more collaborative method of partnering. HCA serves on the steering committee of the Network, and was part of a successful grant application to the USDA's Regional Conservation Partnership Program, securing \$5.1 million for land conservation and stewardship in the Hill Country. HCA also served as the fiscal agent for a strategic planning process which will finish in 2018.



A map of Network partners shows HCA as an important 'Hub' organization.

Photo courtesy of: Katherine Romans



Volunteers tag invasive Chinaberry trees in Mason. Photo courtesy of: Daniel Oppenheimer



HCA presents on efforts to protect the night skies of the Hill Country at a gathering at Patagonia in Austin. Photo courtesy of: Katherine Romans

WATER PROGRAM

REGULATION, EDUCATION, SCIENCE, AND PLANNING

Photo courtesy of: Rowdy Winters

The HCA Water Program is dedicated to the protection of water resources through our leadership in regulatory, educational, scientific, and planning processes for the waters of the Hill Country. Charlie Flatten has led our water program since 2013. Here are some highlights of our water work in 2017:

We shaped several key pieces of legislation during the 85th session. We supported and informed the passage of legislation to create a SW Travis County GCD.

We partnered with the Guadalupe River Association on the Upper Guadalupe River Basin Literature Review, compiling existing research, monitoring, and science.

We presented HCA's Water 101, Hydro-Geology 101, Conservation 101 lecture series to more than 200 people across the Hill Country.

We expanded the Rainwater Revival to the newly branded Hill Country Living Festival, reaching more than 1,300 with 75 exhibitors including tiny homes, rainwater harvesting professionals, local vendors, and green builders.

We maintained our active role as a voting member of the Region L planning area, participant member of Regions J and K, and active member of GMAs 7, 9, and 10, where we work to shape conservation-focused water management policies.

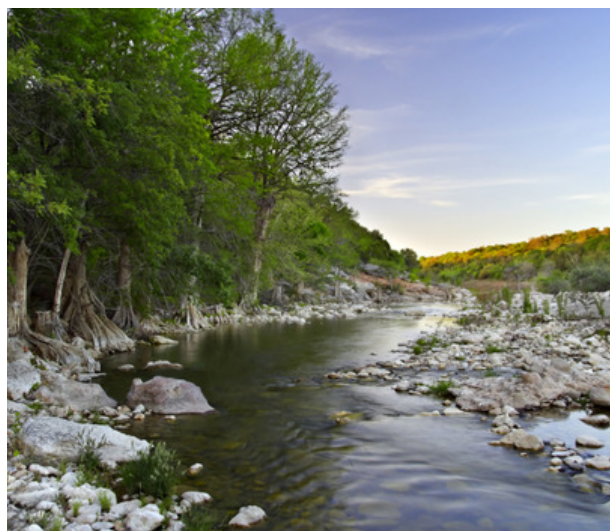


Photo courtesy of: Robin Gorrell



We hosted a Texas Water Symposium at Texas State University.
Photo courtesy of: Katherine Romans

LAND PROGRAM

SOUND STEWARDSHIP + PERMANENT CONSERVATION



Photo courtesy of: Albert Garcia

HCA's Land Program is strengthened by new leadership with the hire of Daniel Oppenheimer. We continue to focus on both permanent land conservation and sound land stewardship practices to ensure healthy, functioning river basins in our region. Highlights of the 2017 Land Program include:

In the Pedernales, Llano, Blanco and Medina River basins, HCA connected with over 750 people through stewardship workshops, river cleanup and planting projects, a film festival, and riparian training series.

HCA, in collaboration with Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, the City of Fredericksburg, and The Nature Conservancy, worked with 92 landowners to survey and control 6 acres of *Arundo donax*, a non-native, invasive plant, along the Pedernales River and several tributaries.

We catalyzed the creation of two new landowner networks, the Headwaters Alliance and the Riparian Recovery network, both focused on healthy creeks and rivers.

HCA convened two conservation easement workshops that engaged over 125 landowners.

We championed the successful passage of the largest public investment in land conservation in Travis County's history, with \$15 million for conservation easements in the county.



Volunteers set up protective caging around plants along the banks of the Llano River. Photo courtesy of: Daniel Oppenheimer

OUR IMPACT

*"After attending a BBQ and training hosted by HCA, I learned all about the **use of native grasses and plants to help protect my riverfront property from washing away during flooding.** Not only has the Hill Country Alliance taught me about being a **good steward of the land**, but through them I have found numerous local resources and **like-minded people.**"*

-W. Kleck, Stonewall, TX

NIGHT SKIES PROGRAM

*THE STARS AT NIGHT ARE BIG AND BRIGHT, DEEP IN THE
HEART OF TEXAS...*

Photo courtesy of: Todd Winters

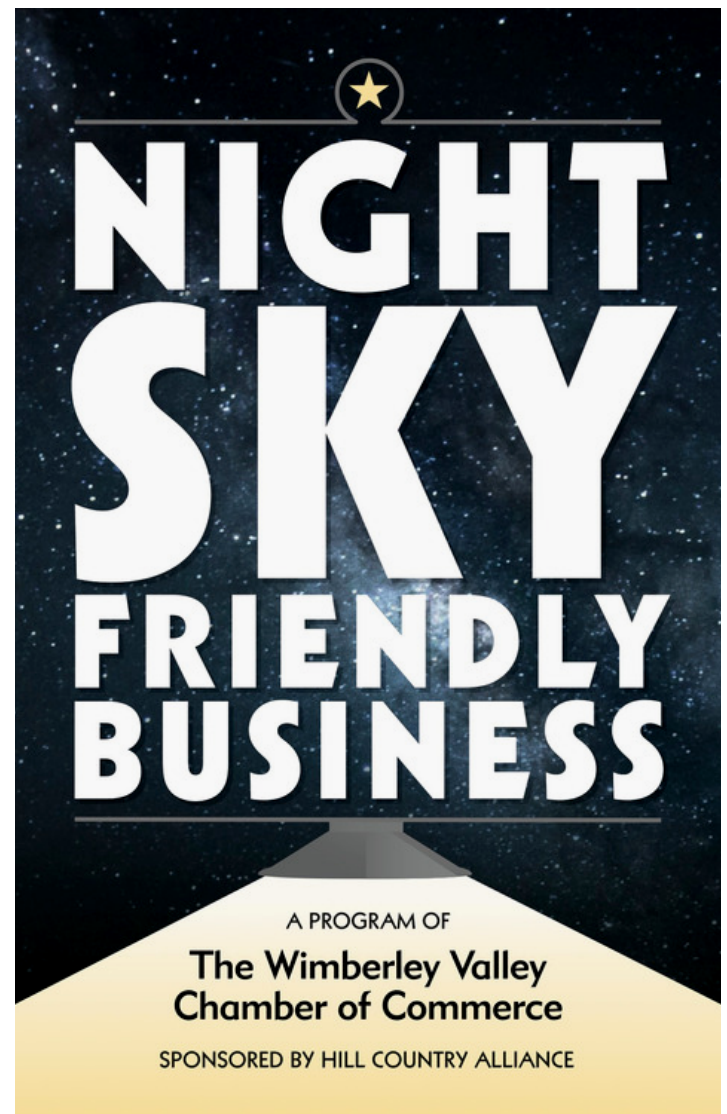
As the song goes, “The stars at night are big and bright, deep in the heart of Texas.” HCA’s Night Skies Program is working to maintain our views of the night skies for future generations, even as rapid growth and development threaten to erase that view. With Cliff Kaplan’s leadership, we are seeing more communities each year recognizing the value of outdoor lighting education, and taking steps to protect their view of the stars. Highlights of our grassroots outreach efforts in 2017 included:

We assisted local leaders in Johnson City in the adoption of an Outdoor Lighting Ordinance, as well as Boerne and Wimberley in updates to their ordinances.

We provided the infrastructure to launch a Night Sky Friendly Business Recognition Program in Wimberley.

HCA co-hosted the first Hill Country Dark Sky Conference, which helped grow interest in and understanding of dark sky issues in 17 Hill Country communities.

With our guidance, Lost Maples State Natural Area, Wild Basin Wilderness Preserve, and Reimers Ranch County Park are working on International Dark Sky Park designations.



HCA re-energized our Night Sky Friend Business Program in 2017, implemented across several rural communities.



COMMUNITY PROGRAM

THE VALUE OF TOWNS, RURAL COMMUNITIES, AND URBANIZING AREAS



Photo courtesy of: Sharon Carter

The Community Program at HCA launched with the recognition that our towns, rural communities, and urbanizing areas are just as important to the intrinsic character of this region as the lands, waters, and night skies. HCA seeks opportunities to support community leaders, build capacity among our partners, and lay the framework for successfully planning for our region's growth in the coming years. Highlights of our Community Program in 2017 included:

We hosted two Rural Planning and Development workshops, both successful in helping community leaders learn from one another and connect to state or national resources.

We convened elected officials from the I-35 corridor to discuss the creation of a Hill Country Endowment.

We provided organizational support to an emerging alliance of landowners in Comal County, who will advocate for more thoughtful land conservation.

We worked with partners in Junction to propose innovative water infrastructure concepts to their water planning process.



Photo courtesy of: Katherine Romans



W H O W E A R E

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Water Program Manager

Cliff Kaplan
Night Sky & Community Program Manager

Daniel Oppenheimer
Land Program Manager

Sheila Holt
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The mission of the Hill Country Alliance is to bring together an ever-expanding alliance of groups throughout a multi-county region of Central Texas with the long-term objective of preserving open spaces, water supply, water quality and the unique character of the Texas Hill Country.



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