



# 2018 ANNUAL REPORT



hill country alliance



# EDUCATION.CONSERVATION.COOPERATION.

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

The Hill Country Alliance family is growing! In 2018 we added a new board member, staff, subscribers, and partner organizations, and on a personal level, my family grew with the birth of our first child in July. Bringing Callie with me to landowner gatherings and potlucks has made HCA's work that much more personal for me. It is for children like her, and her future kids, that we are doing this important work.

Recent reports suggest that our Central Texas family may be growing more quickly than we could have even imagined. An average of 55,000 new residents arrive in the Austin area per year, and from July 2016-July 2017 San Antonio added more residents than any other city in the country. Those new residents are drawn to Central Texas by the strong economy, the quality of life, and the beauty of our region—all of which is underpinned by our natural resources.

We cannot assume that those resources will be here forever, unless we act to protect them. In 2018 we saw permit applications to dump more than 2 billion gallons of treated wastewater per year into Hill Country creeks and streams, a proposed 42-inch oil and gas pipeline that would cut straight across the Hill Country, 20 new or expanding rock quarries or sand and gravel mines, and several major groundwater export projects that would permanently impact the Hill Country as we know it.



At the same time, HCA reached more Hill Country residents and decision makers in 2018 than any other year. We hosted our most successful Kent Butler Summit ever, bringing together elected officials and engineers from up and down the I-35 corridor to talk about growth and our water resources. We worked across the Blanco, Pedernales, Sandy Creek and Guadalupe Basins to host restoration workshops and raise awareness of riparian health.

We kicked off a State of the Hill Country metrics report that will launch in 2019 to document change in conservation indicators over time. We supported the launch & reinvigoration of night sky friendly business recognition programs in Blanco, Wimberley, and Mason, and we hosted Texas Water Symposia to tackle the emerging issue of wastewater discharge and its impact on Hill Country creeks. None of this work would have been possible without the support of folks like you.

So I hope you consider helping the Hill Country Alliance grow our family further. Please share this report with someone who might not know about us yet. Use it as a conversation starter with a coworker or the landowner next door. Consider a donation to HCA so that we can continue to shape the conservation of our region. It's time to grow the tent—and bring greater awareness to the critical importance of the work we're doing, for the Hill Country.

**Thank you for being part of the Hill Country Alliance family,**

*Katherine Romans*

Katherine Romans  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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A misty coastal scene at sunrise or sunset. The sky is filled with soft, golden light and mist. In the foreground, there are dark, silhouetted rocks and some dry grass. In the middle ground, several large rocks are scattered in the shallow water. On the right side, a bird, possibly a heron, stands on a rock. The overall mood is serene and atmospheric.

# *BECAUSE OF YOU...*

**55,000** views for our Neighbor to Neighbor email newsletter.

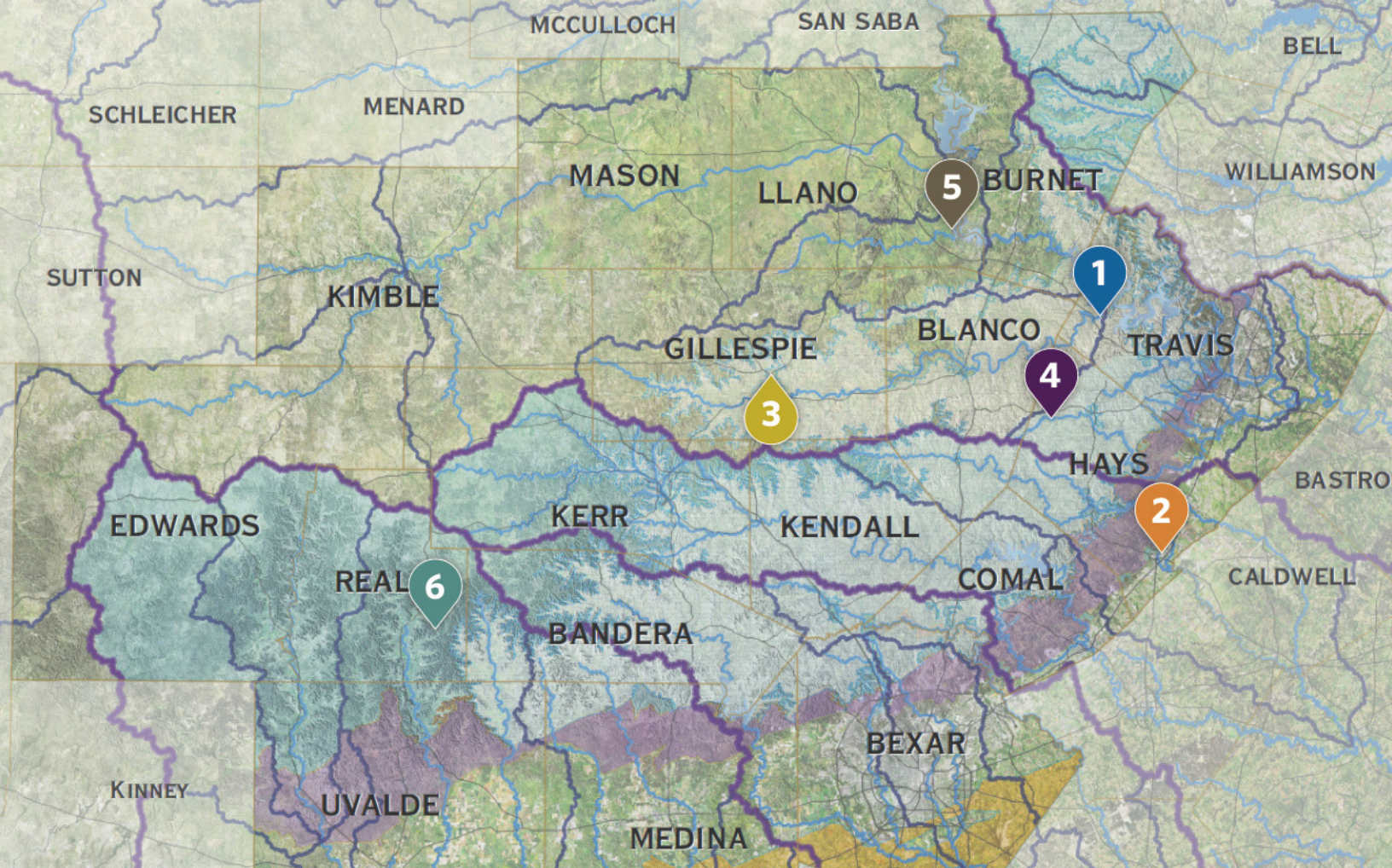
Hill Country residents engaged in river restoration efforts: **900**

**190** attendees at our Annual Leadership Summit.

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

**1** Hill Country—worth protecting for future generations.





# LEADING THE CONVERSATION

## EVENTS ACROSS THE REGION

HCA works tirelessly to advance new ideas and drive change through community forums and events. Our events inspire, motivate, and educate. The timeline below represents a small sample of the more than 50 community events and meetings hosted by HCA in 2018.







# COLLABORATION

## TEXAS HILL COUNTRY CONSERVATION NETWORK

Photo courtesy of: Katherine Romans



### Strategic Plan for 2018-2022

April 24, 2018



The Texas Hill Country Conservation Network adopted a draft strategic plan in May and has moved forward with implementing short term goals.



Supporting new and emergent partners allows HCA to have a greater impact across the region. These groups are visionary and deeply rooted in their communities.

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

HCA worked tirelessly in 2018 to advance the Texas Hill Country Conservation Network (the Network). The Network represents a more formal way of collaborating with longstanding HCA partners. With a shared vision and name for our collaboration, we will more easily be able to tell the story of the conservation successes happening in the Hill Country. Those successes include:

- Completing a draft Network Strategic Plan that includes six primary goals, as well as strategic action plans for making progress on those goals over the next 18 months.
- Launching a governance planning process to understand how to build the Network into an effort with resilience and true staying power.
- Implementing the USDA's \$5.1 million Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant by building criteria by which we will evaluate potential projects.
- Joining our partners at the National Wildlife Federation and the Meadows Center for Water and the Environment in building and securing funding for a project to advance One Water in Austin and the Hill Country.
- Convening 9 Network meetings to align focus and get work done!





# WATER PROGRAM

*EDUCATION, POLICY, SCIENCE, AND PLANNING*

Photo courtesy of: Mike Jones

The HCA Water Program, led by Charlie Flatten, is dedicated to the protection of water resources through leadership in regulatory, educational, scientific, and planning processes for the waters of the Hill Country. Here are some highlights of our water work in 2018:

HCA reached over 1,600 attendees through a broad array of Water Education & Outreach programs and events - including four Texas Water Symposia broadcast on Texas Public Radio.

We worked with partners to raise awareness of the need to formally confirm the newly formed SW Travis County Groundwater Conservation District.

We led the formation of a Hill Country One Water delegation, who represented Central Texas at the national One Water Summit. Our partners, including the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, New Braunfels Utility, and the Meadows Center for Water & the Environment, are advancing tangible examples of One Water practices in our region that will be on full display when the US Water Alliance brings the One Water Summit to Austin in September 2019.

HCA was appointed a voting member to the Plateau Regional Water Planning Group, and we are working to advance the designation of Ecologically Significant Stream Segments.

We hosted our 8th Annual Hill Country Living Festival + Rainwater Revival, connecting 1300 Hill Country folks to rainwater harvesting businesses, conservation nonprofits, and government entities.

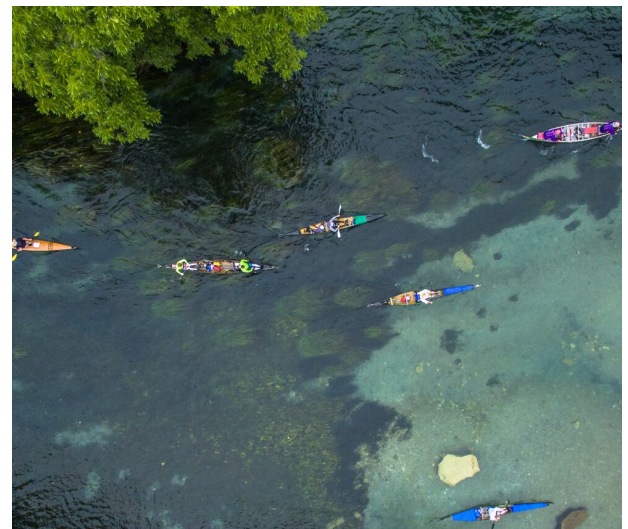


Photo courtesy of: Stephen Ramirez



We were happy to be a part of the Hill Country delegation at the One Water Summit in Minneapolis



# LAND PROGRAM

SOUND STEWARDSHIP + PERMANENT CONSERVATION



Photo courtesy of: Jordan Moore

HCA's Land Program works to share tools and regional resources to enhance stewardship of Hill Country lands, rivers, and tributary creeks. Under Daniel Oppenheimer's leadership, 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 2018 Land Program include:

HCA connected with more than 900 landowners, students, and practitioners by hosting, organizing and presenting at 34 in-person educational events ranging from workshops to potlucks to field days.

HCA worked with numerous agency partners to expand the Healthy Creeks Initiative to the Medina and Guadalupe River Basins, engage nearly 20 new landowners in the Pedernales River Basin, and conduct nearly 20 site visits in the Blanco, Pedernales, and Guadalupe Basins.

We supported four unique landowner networks through strategic planning to conserve the natural resources and heritage of the Texas Hill Country. These highly motivated groups include the Headwaters Alliance, Gillespie County Citizens Alliance, Comal County Conservation Alliance, and Wimberley Valley Riparian Recovery Network.

We worked with communities from Mason, Fredericksburg, Johnson City, and Blanco to enhance five demonstration sites on riparian health and pollinators.



Bringing partners together to learn about and enhance a pollinator garden at the Johnson City Library. Photo courtesy of: Daniel Oppenheimer

## OUR IMPACT

*"It's **amazing** how much can be accomplished with the correct tools / education. And, even more important, the peace of mind in learning that **waterways** change with time and weather conditions, but **can be restored** – is priceless! The knowledge and inspiration you've provided us has been passed on to numerous friends and neighbors along **Baron's Creek** in Fredericksburg, and to several others that live along the **Frio River** and its tributary Creeks. Like ripples on the water, the **benefits of your work** spreads!"*

-Tamesha Jumper, Fredericksburg, TX



# NIGHT SKIES PROGRAM

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

Photo courtesy of: Alicia R. Paparo

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 have helped an ever-expanding number of communities take steps to protect their view of the stars. Highlights of the 2018 Night Sky Program include:

HCA co-hosted the second annual Hill Country Dark Sky Conference in Fredericksburg, bringing together 17 communities from around the region for a day of education, progress reports, and goal setting for the year to come.

HCA helped the City of Bandera adopt its first outdoor lighting ordinance and supported Wimberley's successful application to become the third IDA Dark Sky Community in Texas.

We worked with Comal, Edwards, and Mason Counties to adopt Night Sky Resolutions that declare their dedication to dark skies and support for community preservation efforts.

We helped New Braunfels Utility adopt a similar resolution and improve their outdoor lighting protocols.

In the spring, we partnered with the Mason High School Pioneers on multiple efforts in the community - including the launch of a Night Sky Friendly Business Recognition Program through the Mason County Chamber of Commerce.



Mason High School Pioneers participate in a star party at the start of their semester-long project. Photo courtesy of: Cliff Kaplan

## OUR IMPACT

"The Hill Country Alliance is one of the few organizations that **recognizes and appreciates** the night sky as the wonderful and valuable natural resource that it is. More importantly, HCA is **actively working** with individuals and organizations throughout the Hill Country to **protect and preserve** this amazing treasure that is such an essential part of our 'sense of place' - our night skies."

-Wayne Gosnell  
President, Blanco County Friends of the Night Sky



# COMMUNITY PROGRAM

*THE VALUE OF TOWNS, RURAL COMMUNITIES, AND URBANIZING AREAS*

Photo courtesy of: Daniel Oppenheimer



Landowners coming together to discuss how to keep Hill Country springs and rivers flowing for future generations. Photo courtesy of Daniel Oppenheimer



TPWD, HCA, and families worked together at Pedernales Falls State Park. Photo courtesy of Daniel Oppenheimer

The Community Program at HCA exists to support our rural communities and urbanizing areas - which we believe to be just as vital to the character of the Hill Country as the land, water, and night skies. By developing and supporting grassroots leadership around the region, the Communities Program has strengthened its impact and deepened its connection to local issues. Highlights of the 2018 Community Program include:

HCA worked to address the growing activity of the aggregates industry—rock quarries, gravel and sand mines, and concrete and asphalt batch plants. HCA supported local efforts to challenge poorly-located aggregate sites in Llano, Burnet, Blanco, and Comal Counties, successfully turning away several projects.

We brought local aggregate opposition groups together to develop a collective strategy and policy agenda to make needed changes to the siting, permitting, operating, and monitoring standards that govern this industry in our region.

In Comal County, we worked with local grassroots leaders to create and partner with the Comal County Conservation Alliance, which promotes land conservation through public education and partnership development.

In Real County, we co-hosted a workshop on Rural Leadership that focused on strategic partnership development and fundraising.





## W H O W E A R E

### *THE TEAM*

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## HCA STAFF

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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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**Shannon Chambers**  
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**Leah Cuddeback**  
Online Outreach & Communications

**Gabriella Velasco**  
UT Sustainability Studies Program Intern



# THANK YOU!

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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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