




2013 Success Stories

Our Growing Alliance: As stated in our mission, HCA is an “ever-expanding alliance” of diverse individuals and groups, and in 2013 we saw record growth of that network. The HCA Board of Directors grew from 12 to 15, and the family of volunteers associated with our advisory board, technical board and issue teams grew to 167.

Each individual involved in HCA brings an inspirational personal story—a passion for the Hill Country and a wealth of knowledge and experience to add to this summary—and yet collectively we are able to do so much more. Like the natural systems we are striving to heal and sustain, HCA is a thriving system of people, ideas, energy, intelligence, passion, wisdom and creativity.

The Alliance creates a way to enhance intellectual capital, reduce redundancy, and share resources. The HCA volunteer board, technical and advisory boards, and issue teams are made up of ranch owners, scientists and attorneys, locally elected officials, environmentalists, citizens and business owners who represent the region’s conscience and best interests.

Following are some highlights of our teams’ efforts in 2013. 



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Water Supply:

The Water Team, led by Milan J. Michalec of the Cow Creek GCD, grew to include 27 water experts this year, and contracted with a dedicated water team coordinator. This team stays actively engaged in all water planning processes and current issues, with the coordinator attending and reporting on many of the key water planning meetings affecting the Hill Country region. The team submitted numerous position papers and comments regarding the State Water Plan, groundwater management, river basins and infrastructure decisions.

A core goal of this team is to advocate for the long-term health of Hill Country springs through proper groundwater management. HCA collaborated with partner organizations, such as the Wimberley Valley Watershed Association, to propose a regional Groundwater Conservation District concept to the TCEQ. The proposed GCD would cross county lines and provide much-needed groundwater management in Western Travis, Northern Hays and Western Comal Counties.

The team actively supported Bat Conservation International to prevent the development of sensitive lands near Bracken Cave. They also worked closely with the Cow Creek Groundwater Conservation District to promote conservative and holistic groundwater management of the Hill Country Trinity Aquifer.

The Water Team co-produced two

Texas Water Symposium programs—one focused on healthy springs and one examined the fine line between protecting private property rights and effectively protecting our shared water supply.

Members of the Regional Water Quality Protection Planning Group were re-convened with facilitation and support from HCA for the “Next Wave” to give involved jurisdictions the opportunity to share successes and challenges since the program was completed in 2005.

TexasWater SYMPOSIUM



The Team collaborated with and supported the Cow Creek Groundwater Conservation District in the publication of *Water: Yours, Mine and Ours*, a public resource about Hill Country hydrology, stewardship and conservation.

Water Team members also contributed to the writing of issue papers and web content for wide distribution on key issues, including: Groundwater/Surface Water Integration, Hill Country Groundwater Supply, GCD Myths and Truths, Healthy Riparian Areas, Population Growth, Native Landscaping, The Day Case—what it does and doesn’t do, and County Tools for Reasonable Development Rules.

The Pedernales and Healthy Water Catchment Areas:

HCA convened our “Pedernales Team” to allow partners such as land trusts, landowners, LCRA, TPWD, and others a chance to compare notes and collaborate on projects throughout the basin. Through a partnership with TPWD, a new staff position was created and Katherine Romans, HCA Project Manager, was hired in October. Katherine is expanding HCA’s landowner outreach and healthy watershed program. A review and assessment of all conservation plans, maps and programs on the Pedernales basin has been assembled to help identify the most needed tools to advance conservation practices. So far, HCA has partnered in four land stewardship educational events in the basin.

Through illustrations, such as maps and educational materials, HCA is delivering the message that where once we saw “watersheds” we now can see “water catchments;” natural boundaries to capture, cleanse and store our water supply. These are more logical boundaries for managing water resources than the political jurisdictional boundaries we use today such as county lines.



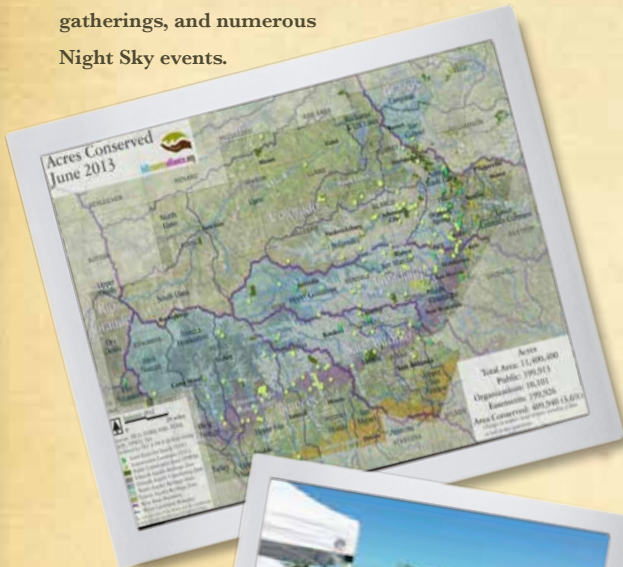
Land Conservation:

One way all of the Hill Country Land Trusts collaborate is through the HCA Land Conservation Team, chaired by Carolyn Chipman Evans of the Cibolo Conservancy and Carolyn Vogel of Conservation Connection. They have assembled data to create an "All Conserved Lands" inventory including public lands, parks, and easements. Only 3.6 percent of our 17 county/11 million acre region is currently held in permanent conservation. The inventory map they created will provide a way to measure success as the conservation movement grows in the Hill Country.

We finalized a Conservation Finance Feasibility Study with the Trust for Public Land and the Texas Land Trust Council. The study area includes our seven highest growth counties and demonstrates how public referendums can help fund land conservation.

We regularly distribute our issue paper "Working with Land Trusts" to educate the public about easements and what land trusts do. A new version of the paper is now being vetted to better illustrate exactly where each land trust works and highlighting their unique area of conservation interest.

We worked particularly closely with the Hill Country Land Trust on outreach events such as the Round-up and Green Energy Fair, Lavender Fest, various landowner gatherings, and numerous Night Sky events.



Protecting the Night Sky:

Our Night Sky Team, led by Bill Neiman of Native American Seed, is the largest issue team, with 31 regional leaders engaged in regular communication about reducing light pollution in the Hill Country. The Team hosted 13 Night Sky educational programs throughout our 17 counties, and with substantial media attention, the attendance reached more than 100 citizens at some of the events. Around two thousand copies of the second edition Night Sky issue paper have been distributed.

In Junction, HCA support resulted in more than 101 city lights being retrofitted to more night-sky-friendly fixtures. The result is clearly visible as one drives through the town at night.

Our Night Sky Co-op, a volunteer pledge to eliminate sky glow from businesses, ranches and homes, sits at 150 members, and growing.

Rainwater Harvest:

The fourth annual Rainwater Revival was a huge success in Boerne with 550 attendees, ten educational seminars, and about fifty exhibits. This signature event is designed to encourage rainwater harvesting as viable water supply solution for the Texas Hill Country and is led by HCA board member Karen Ford.

With funds from the 2012 art barrel auction, HCA provided \$1,000 grants to three Hill Country schools for rainwater and rain garden projects.

The Rainwater Team consists of 17 experts and advocates who are active in legislative and rule-making processes to make rainwater harvesting more accessible and feasible for homeowners and developers.



Outreach and Education:

HCA hosted two "Interpretive Guide" training classes, graduating 24 students with newly honed skills of speaking from the heart, dynamic storytelling, and ways to more effectively connect with audiences about the importance of protecting Hill Country resources.

Four new video products were developed that feature land stewardship for water, working with groundwater conservation districts, rainwater harvesting, and the why and how of native plant landscapes. All are available on the HCA YouTube channel, with more than 3,000 views so far.

Additional maps have been added to our resource library and are available for sharing.

Throughout the year HCA distributed 19 press releases to our list of Hill Country media partners promoting timely issues and events. We met our electronic media goals to expand our database to 6,000 supporters and friends and 1,000 individuals in our social media network.

Our popular, annual photo contest produced another spectacular HCA Calendar for 2014, which our board members and staff hand-deliver to all Texas legislators and Hill Country county officials during an HCA day at the Capitol in December.

The robust HCA website consistently provides current news and information about regional issues and events and serves as a resource library for all to share.

Our Neighbor to Neighbor newsletter is distributed to our 6,000-strong friends list about three times a month in an email format that is visually pleasing and easy to read.



The HCA Leadership Summit:

More than 100 HCA leaders gathered north of Fredericksburg at our second annual Summit to learn and share ideas about the work we do at HCA. This year's featured keynote speaker was Evan Smith of the Texas Tribune. Other speakers included TWA President Greg Simons; new HCA board members Garry Merritt and Sharlene Leurig; writer/historian Scott Zesch; and a preview of the filmed water story of the San Marcos River, *Yakona*.



This Summit has turned out to be one of HCA's most successful and gratifying collaborative events where our leaders can find inspiration in the works and passions of other like-minded Hill Country citizens.

HCA made great strides in carrying out our mission in 2013. Reflecting on our successes over the past year is most productive in that it reinvigorates us to expand our efforts in the year to come. Here's to a successful 2014!



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