

Our Planning Goals

The Texas Hill Country Conservation Network is developing the **Land, Water, and Natural Infrastructure Plan** to:

- 1 Create a collaborative vision for the future of Hill Country conservation;
- 2 Develop data-driven solutions informed by both extensive community engagement and the best available science; and
- 3 Catalyze increased funding for the critical work of protecting, restoring, and enhancing the Hill Country's unique lands, waters, and natural infrastructure.

Natural Infrastructure is the waterways and wetlands, woodlands and forests, grasslands and rangeland, and other natural systems and features that enhance water quality, recharge aquifers, protect drinking water, support wildlife and biodiversity, prevent soil erosion, clean the air, reduce flood risk, and minimize the impacts of extreme weather. Urban forests, rain gardens, and open space in parks also represent natural infrastructure. Protecting, restoring, and enhancing natural infrastructure provides critical and cost-effective environmental, health, social, and economic benefits.

"The Texas Hill Country is the most beautiful place in North America. Keeping its natural infrastructure should be a matter of civic pride for all Texans. Clean and sustainable water is tantamount to survival for over a million Texans in this region and the diverse wildlife. We need to do all that can be done to sustain its long-term health."



Community Engagement + Survey Results

Community engagement is a big part of the Network's planning process. At the center of that engagement is a public survey to get the broadest possible perspectives on the key issues facing residents and our natural infrastructure.

Between May and August 2022, 2,815 community members responded to the survey. The survey was available in both Spanish and English. Survey outreach was conducted through social media outreach and newsletter posts by Network members and partners; distribution of flyers and in-person outreach in San Antonio and more rural communities; amplification by community-based organizations that were compensated for their work; and posting announcements in five newspapers to reach rural and Spanish speaking residents. The survey found that:

- **There is very strong support for increasing public funding to protect land, water, and natural infrastructure.** Nearly 85% of survey respondents said they would definitely support increasing public funding and only 2% said they would not support funding.
- **Protecting water is survey participants' highest priority conservation goal.** This includes both protecting water supply (a top priority for 48%) and protecting water quality (a top priority for 44%). The highest priorities after protecting water were wildlife habitat and reducing the risk of wildfires.
- **Most residents are only somewhat satisfied with their access to outdoor recreation and nature.** Rural residents were generally more satisfied with their existing access to outdoor recreation and nature. Connecting with nature is the most popular reason that respondents would like access to parks, trails, waterways, and open spaces (followed by exercise, relaxation, and recreation).
- **Most community members do not yet fully understand natural infrastructure as defined by the Plan.** There is a lot of room for more education. The survey included a question that provided many examples of natural infrastructure that were expanded from the Plan's definition. Slightly fewer than 46% of respondents indicated that all of the options presented represented natural infrastructure. Hispanic/Latinx respondents were mostly likely to see all of the options presented as aspects of natural infrastructure (59%). Rural residents were by far the most likely to identify "well-managed rangeland" as natural infrastructure (51% of rural residents versus 29% of urban residents).
- **There are differences in the ways that various groups see conservation goals.** Importantly, Hispanic/Latinx residents rated all of the conservation goals from protecting water quality to preserving rural farms and ranches as more important than other ethnic/racial groups did. Rural survey participants and Black and Native American survey participants are more likely than others to say that preserving rural working lands is one of their top priorities. Climate resilience goals are less likely to be top priorities for rural residents and those with the highest household incomes.

