



Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust

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www.gbrtrust.org

Change Service Requested

Trust Works with Hays County Landowner to Protect Blanco River Frontage

More than 1,000 feet of Blanco River frontage is being preserved through a conservation easement with the Braniff family and the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (GBR Trust). The easement, executed Dec. 23, 2010, assists in preserving more than a half mile of contiguous Blanco River and creek frontage.

The Braniff family placed a conservation easement on a 20 acre tract of land that is situated along the Blanco River just three miles from Wimberley, Texas. The tract historically had been used for grazing, and other agricultural practices. The current landowner has been engaged in active wildlife management since the land was purchased. The property provides both active and passive aesthetic enjoyment to the landowners with wildlife management and family-oriented recreation as the primary current uses.

The Braniff property lies along the Blanco River and consists of riparian woodlands along the river banks and a mixture of improved pastures and juniper along the flood plain paralleling the river. The riparian woodland provides roosting sites for Rio

Grande wild turkey and the pastures and brush provide habitat for mourning dove and white-tailed deer. There is also a creek that runs along the west side of the property. The general area is important for a wide variety of wildlife as the Blanco River lies at a geological and climatic confluence that has produced a wide variety of habitats.

This property by itself is special, but has added value because the adjacent property owners donated a conservation easement on 664 acres in 2009. The neighboring conservation easement combined with the Braniff easement is conserving a half-mile stretch of Blanco River frontage in perpetuity.

“Mr. Braniff has a unique tract of land that sits next to a conservation easement that the GBR Trust acquired in 2009, and he has preserved over 1,000 feet of Blanco River Frontage and Shelton Hollow which empties into the Blanco River,” said GBR Trust Board President, Roger Welder.

Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust

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Preservation Matters

Spring 2011

Design

Connie Rothe – Board Relations and Publications Specialist

GBR Trust retains the right to determine the editorial content and presentation of information contained herein. Articles or opinion written by guest writers do not necessarily reflect official views of the Trust or its Board of Trustees.

The Trust is a charitable, non-profit 501(c)3 organization that was founded to conserve the land and water of the Guadalupe River watershed for its natural, recreational, scenic, historic and productive value. The mission of the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust is to preserve the unique natural heritage of the Guadalupe watershed for future generations, by protecting open landscapes, working farms and ranches, and wildlife habitat through conservation easements, education, and outreach that connects people to the water and the land.

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Preservation Matters

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Wildlife and Land Conservation Veteran Hired to Lead Trust

The Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (GBR Trust) Board of Trustees hired Steve Jester, a 20-year veteran in the fields of wildlife and land conservation, as the new executive director for the organization.

Jester, who earned his bachelor of science degree in agriculture at Texas State University and master of science degree in wildlife and fisheries sciences at Texas A&M University, will be responsible for the operation and management of the GBR Trust under the direction of the Board of Trustees.

“It’s great to be back in Texas, but more importantly, I am back here in a position where I will have an impact in land conservation and preserving areas that will protect habitats for wildlife for years to come,” said Jester, who recently completed a four-year stint in Wyoming as the Southwest Wyoming Program Director for Nature Conservancy after five years with the same organization in Texas and seven with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD).



Photo by Connie Rothe

“Steve brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in wildlife and land management, as well as a fresh perspective to the Trust, and we are looking forward to his contributions,” said Todd Votteler, Ph.D., executive director emeritus of the GBR Trust.

“We feel very fortunate to have

been able to recruit Steve back to Texas,” said Roger Welder, president of the Board of Trustees for the GBR Trust, adding, “All of the trustees are looking forward to working with him and getting him involved in protecting these sensitive, precious areas that we value so much within the Guadalupe River Basin.”

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From the Executive Director

It is good to be back in Texas. After several years working in western Wyoming, my appreciation for both the need and the challenges of conserving Texas’ precious natural resources, open spaces and agricultural heritage has never been greater. Wyoming is a relatively large state and lightly populated (560,000 people) compared to Texas at 25 million. Even in Wyoming, people are dealing daily with trade-offs between preserving their natural heritage and providing the resources they need and the raw materials needed by the rest of the country.

Texas has much larger challenges in finding the balance between providing for a rapidly growing population and preserving the things that make Texas, Texas. Providing ample habitat for wildlife, wide open spaces, and working farms and ranches is important, not just today but also for generations not yet born. Important not just to those who farm, ranch, hunt, fish and otherwise enjoy the outdoors, but for all Texans because when these things disappear life’s basics, such as clean water and food, can be much harder to obtain.

In the end, the future of these things will depend on the decisions of thousands of individual landowners. And providing interested landowners with information, tools and strategies to conserve and preserve their land is crucial. That is why the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust was established. And that is why I am very glad to be here.

Conservation Easement Preserves Wildlife Habitat in Blanco and Comal Counties

More than 400 acres of property along the Little Blanco River in Blanco County are being preserved through a conservation easement with the Wallace family and the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust (GBR Trust). The easement, executed Dec. 27, 2010, became the first conservation easement in Blanco County secured by the GBR Trust.

Roger and Mary Wallace used a conservation easement to ensure that the property maintains its natural, scenic, historic, agricultural, and open space values in perpetuity. The easement prohibits any use of the property that significantly impairs or interferes with these important conservation values subject to the terms of the conservation easement that has been agreed to by both the owners and GBR Trust.

“The GBR Trust is very excited about the conservation easement that crosses the Blanco and Comal county borders,” said GBR

Trust Board President, Roger Welder. “This 406-acre tract of land sits next to a conservation easement that the GBR Trust completed in 2009. “With these two conservation easements combined, more than 800 acres of wildlife habitat and recharge area will be preserved.”

The land is managed to benefit of native wildlife and the Wallace family is restoring the habitat to a healthy condition. A diverse mixture of native grasses forbs, as well as rushes and sedges in moist areas, can be found on the property. Trees include pecan, elm, and bald cypress. Seasonal creeks flow into the Little Blanco River and provide a reliable source of water for a number of species. Various bird species including summer tanager and yellow-billed cuckoo are frequent visitors. The property is home to a variety of wildlife due to the mixture of habitat types and abundant water sources.

Partnership Completes First Phase of Wetland Enhancement Project

A partnership between the Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust, Ducks Unlimited (DU), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Supplemental Environmental Projects program of Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) recently resulted in the enhancement of 176 acres of wetland as well as the development of a detailed engineering, construction and

water management plan for an additional 230 acres of wetlands. The work was completed at the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge’s Myrtle Foester-Whitmire Unit in Calhoun County.

The Supplemental Environmental Project program within TCEQ allows for the voluntary contribution of funds to an environmental project as part of a settlement of an enforcement action brought by TCEQ, the State’s environmental agency. The Trust and DU entered into an agreement to provide wetland enhancement planning and implementation on lands managed by USFWS at the refuge.

While the project was initially delayed by wet weather, the project was completed in early 2011. Work completed included the replacement of two older water control structures on one of the largest impoundments in the Whitmire Unit. Additionally, DU completed an infrastructure improvement plan for 5 of the wetland basins that included in the Whitmire Unit. The development of this plan also required an elevation survey of existing conditions within the wetland basins.

Completion of this project will provide more management flexibility within the Whitmire Unit which should result in improved wetland habitat condition for the many waterfowl and other wetland bird species that call the Texas Coast their winter home.



Photo by Janée Reneaud

Congress Renews Tax Incentive to Help Conserve Property Owners Land

Congress recently renewed, through 2011, an incentive that enhances the tax benefits of protecting your land by donating a voluntary conservation agreement. If you own land with important natural or historic resources, donating a voluntary conservation agreement can be one of the smartest ways to conserve the land you love, while maintaining your private property rights and possibly realizing significant federal tax benefits.

These new incentives make it easier for average Americans, including working family farmers and ranchers, to donate the development rights on their land. The incentive:

- Raises the maximum deduction you can take for donating a voluntary conservation agreement from 30% of your adjusted gross income (AGI) to 50 percent;
- Allows you to deduct up to 100 percent of your AGI if you qualify as a farmer or rancher; and
- Increases the number of years over which you can take deductions from 6 years to 16 years.

These changes allow many modest income landowners to deduct much more than they could under the old rules, bringing increased fairness to the tax code. Unless Congress acts, these enhanced tax benefits will expire Dec. 31, 2011.

What do you need to know to enter into a voluntary conservation agreement? Here are the facts:

- A voluntary conservation agreement, also known as a conservation easement, is a legal agreement between a landowner and a nonprofit land trust, like Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust, or government agency that permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect important conservation values. It allows you to continue to own and use your land and to sell it or pass it on to heirs.
- When you enter into a voluntary conservation agreement with a land trust, you give up some of the rights associated with the land. For example, you might give up the right to subdivide your land or build additional houses, while retaining the full right to grow crops. Future owners also will be bound by the agreement’s terms. The land trust is responsible for making sure the terms of the agreement are followed.
- Voluntary conservation agreements vary widely. For example, an agreement to protect rare wildlife habitat might prohibit any development there, while one to protect the scenic and historic



values of a farm might allow continued farming and the building of additional agricultural structures. An agreement may apply to just a portion of the property, and need not require public access.

■ A conservation donation requires not only a willing donor, but a qualified conservation organization to accept the donation. That

organization needs to be able to show that the donation closely fits its particular charitable mission. A land trust will not accept a donation that does not fit its mission and purposes.

■ A voluntary conservation agreement can help a landowner pass land on intact to the next generation. By limiting the land’s development potential, the agreement lowers its market value, which in turn lowers estate tax. Whether the agreement is donated during life or by will, it can make a critical difference in the heirs’ ability to keep the land intact.

■ If a conservation agreement benefits the public by permanently protecting important conservation resources and meets other federal tax code requirements, it can qualify as a tax-deductible charitable donation. The amount of the donation is the difference between the land’s appraised value with the agreement and its value without the agreement.

■ To qualify as a charitable donation, a conservation agreement must be permanent and meet other specific requirements discussed at: www.lta.org/incentive-faqs. A landowner should get professional financial planning and legal advice before making such a major donation.

■ The Land Trust Alliance and many other organizations are working to make this important conservation tool permanent, but under current law it will expire on Dec. 31, 2011. Deductions for easements donated between 2006 and 2011 will continue to carry over even if the incentive expires. Visit www.lta.org/easementincentive to learn how you can help make the incentive permanent.

To learn more about protecting your land with a voluntary conservation agreement, call Steve Jester, Executive Director, Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust, 830-372-5077.

The Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust does not provide legal or tax advice. However, the Trust encourages individuals to obtain legal and tax consultation in connection with all charitable land gift and estate planning. The Trust can provide a list of third-party professionals who can provide advice regarding giving decisions.