



NEWS

News Release

Media Contacts: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Press Office, (512) 389-8030,

news@tpwd.texas.gov

June 22, 2023

Partnership Adds 515 Acres to Honey Creek State Natural Area

SPRING BRANCH— Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) announces 515 more acres of pristine land and water in Central Texas will be protected and stewarded for future generations of Texans.

TPWD has partnered with The Nature Conservancy in Texas (TNC), Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF) and landowners Ronnie and Terry Urbanczyk to protect the Honey Creek watershed and wildlife habitat in a rapidly growing area near San Antonio in the Texas Hill Country. The \$25 million purchase was made possible by the Land and Water Conservation Fund, state appropriations for land acquisitions and private donations.

“This acquisition is a wonderful example of what we can achieve through public-private partnerships and conservation-minded landowners who want to help preserve the last, best places in Texas for future generations,” said David Yoskowitz, Ph.D, executive director of TPWD. “We could not have accomplished this without the assistance of The Nature Conservancy and Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation in partnership with Ronnie and Terry, who wanted to see their family land create a legacy for the greater good.”

Honey Creek is considered a pristine stream that supports a healthy and diverse ecosystem and meets an exceptional aquatic life-use category based on samples of water quality, periphyton levels and aquatic life taken by researchers at Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

“Honey Creek is one of the most pristine streams not only in the Hill Country, but in all of Texas,” said Zach Spector, who is director of conservation programs for TPWF. “During the Texas State Parks Centennial year, we’re so pleased to not only be conserving one of our state’s finest streams, but also growing our state parks system by expanding the Honey Creek State Natural Area. This is truly a win for fish, wildlife and people.”

The land acquisition builds on a history of collaborative conservation efforts in the region by adding 515 acres of protected land to the conservation blueprint of Honey Creek State Natural Area (HCSNA) and the Honey Creek watershed.

“The Nature Conservancy has been working in this area since the 1980s, when we first collaborated with TPWD to create Honey Creek State SNA,” said Suzanne Scott, state director for TNC in Texas. “We’re thrilled that years later, thanks to the dedication and hard work of landowners, partners, funders and passionate residents, our work to safeguard this vital Hill Country ecosystem continues.”

In 1981, TNC acquired 1,825 acres in Comal County, which were transferred in 1985 to TPWD to create the 2,294-acre Honey Creek State Natural Area. Later, an easement in 2022 protected an additional 621

acres around HCSNA. The 515 acres now acquired through the Urbanczyks helps complete the mosaic of ecologically protected lands around the Honey Creek watershed.

The Urbanczyks said they are eager to see the property's new owners protect and cherish it as they have for the past three decades.

"This sale marks a new era for Honey Creek Ranch, and we are confident that it will be in good hands under the careful stewardship of Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Nature Conservancy," Ronnie Urbanczyk said. "We are gratified that the state of Texas and its residents will have the opportunity to enjoy this pristine piece of land as we have cherished it for the past three decades."

The property, located adjacent to HCSNA, will expand access to outdoor recreation and nature education, and existing event facilities on the property will provide a beautiful venue for special events like weddings and family reunions. TPWD looks forward to opening this new property and event venue to the public but has not yet determined a date.

"Together with the adjacent Guadalupe River State Park, these protected lands encompass nearly 5,000 acres of habitat that sustain plants and wildlife, benefit water quality and provide opportunities for people to spend time in nature," said Texas State Parks Director Rodney Franklin. "It will be our privilege to plan for a future of family picnics, nature walks and educational programming that will support stewardship of this special place."

Ongoing commercial and residential development poses a threat to the integrity of this landscape's unique hydrology and biological diversity. Numerous native and threatened species – including the Comal blind salamander, golden-cheeked warbler, black-capped vireo and at least six invertebrates found in only a few caves in central Texas – make their home on the property and in nearby Honey Creek Cave.

Considered the largest cave system in Texas, Honey Creek Cave consists of several miles of underground river that serve as the primary source of Honey Creek, an important tributary of the Guadalupe River that feeds Canyon Lake. It is also in a drainage area for the Edwards Aquifer, which supplies drinking water to nearly two million Texans and the City of San Antonio.

HCSNA and the new property are home to a variety of habitats ranging from live oaks, agarita and Texas persimmon to cypress trees adorned with Spanish moss, junipers and Mexican buckeye. The diversity found across the land brings together species like wild turkeys, armadillos, leopard frogs, along with several species with limited ranges including Cagle's map turtle, Guadalupe bass (the Texas state fish), four-lined skink, green kingfisher, Texas salamander and the Honey Creek Cave salamander.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, TPWF, and TNC thank our partners for helping preserve this land, water and wildlife for all Texans:

- Horizon Foundation
- Karen Hixon
- Knobloch Family Foundation
- Mays Family Foundation

- Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation
- Kronkosky Charitable Foundation
- The Meadows Foundation
- Amy Shelton McNutt Charitable Trust

The [Texas Parks and Wildlife Department](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov) mission balances outdoor recreation and sustainable use of resources with conservation and management of natural and cultural resources. The department operates 89 Texas state parks, natural areas and historic sites, 50 wildlife management areas, three saltwater fish hatcheries and five freshwater hatcheries. TPWD game wardens and wildlife and fisheries biologists work in every Texas county, enforcing laws and encouraging management to conserve fish and wildlife. To learn more, visit www.tpwd.texas.gov.

Since 1991, [Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation](http://www.tpwf.org) has raised and invested more than \$235 million to advance Texas' proud outdoor traditions and conserve our state's wildlife, habitat and natural resources. Our vision is for all Texans to have access to the wild things and wild places of our state, both now and for generations to come. For more information, please visit www.tpwf.org.

The [Nature Conservancy](http://www.nature.org) is a global conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We are tackling climate change, conserving lands, waters and oceans at an unprecedented scale, providing food and water sustainably and helping make cities more sustainable. To learn more about our work in Texas, visit www.nature.org/texas or follow [@nature_tx](https://twitter.com/nature_tx) on Twitter.

The Urbanczyks are community-oriented Texans and conservationists. Over the past 30 years, they have raised their family on Honey Creek Ranch. They've watched their children grow up on this precious land and are now privileged to experience Honey Creek Ranch through their grandchildren's eyes. Ronnie and Terry are not only good stewards of this unique Texas treasure, but are also invested in their community. The Urbanczyks recognize the significance of the historical value that Honey Creek provides to area residents and the state of Texas. They are eager to see the new owners protect and cherish it as they have for these last three decades. The Urbanczyks have worked with TPWD, TPWF, TNC in Texas and Comal Independent School District to write the next chapter in the life of Honey Creek Ranch while preserving this natural treasure for future generations.

