

Travis County Invests in Land Conservation

As the county population approaches an estimated 1.6 million in 2035, Travis County works to conserve land in advance of development. It is doing so to ensure that county residents continue to enjoy the natural and rural qualities that make Travis County a special place. Protecting prime farmland and local agricultural productivity is a major goal of this effort.

The County began using conservation easements to protect working farms and ranches in 2010 when members of the Wilbarger Creek Conservation Alliance asked the Commissioners Court to help establish conservation easements on their properties in a three-way partnership with landowners and the USDA Farm and Ranchland Protection Program (FRPP). The agreements consisted of the County contributing 25% of easement costs to match landowners' and FRPP's contributions (25% and 50% respectively), an arrangement that serves as a model for future agreements. As a result, approximately 530 acres of working farm and ranchlands are preserved in the Wilbarger Creek and Post Oak Savanna region of eastern Travis County.

The program solidified when voters approved \$8.3 million in 2011 for purchasing conservation easements. After adopting a policy for evaluating requests for participation, the County made its first call for applications in 2012 and is currently negotiating agreements with four landowners to protect approximately 1500 acres of agricultural land.

The next call for applications is not yet scheduled but questions about the program can be directed to Wendy Connally, Natural Resources Program Manager at wendy.connally@co.travis.tx.us or (512) 854-7214. Questions about Travis County's land conservation planning activities can be directed to Wendy Scaperotta, Planning Project Manager at wendy.scaperotta@co.travis.tx.us or (512) 854-7655.