

What can YOU do to Help Take Care of Our Hill Country Habitat?

Recently, after I gave a talk about how to best manage Hill Country land to protect and improve the native habitat, someone came up and asked, "I live on a small lot in town, what can I do to help protect our habitat?"

It's a very good question, and my answer was, "Lots of things."

My concern about the Hill Country habitat is based on three factors: (1) We are losing farm and ranchland and an alarming rate, both nationally, statewide and in the Hill Country. (2) Land fragmentation as larger ranches are broken up into smaller parcels for folks like me to buy, results in poorer land management. (3) The population of Texas and the Hill Country is projected to double in a few years.

All of this makes the necessity of protecting and conserving every precious acre of native habitat we possibly can.

Obviously, if you own any rural property, even a small one, your management practices, the things you choose to do, and to not do, on your property, have a direct effect on your part of the native habitat in the Hill Country.

But even if you don't own any rural property with native habitat on it, there are still lots of things you can do to contribute to the conservation of the Hill Country. Our local Master Naturalist chapter has many members who live on small lots or in apartments who contribute greatly to the mission of Master Naturalists which is to "provide education, outreach and service dedicated to the beneficial management of our natural resources and natural areas."

And there are many other organizations that contribute to the effort to protect our Hill Country habitat. A partial list includes local Native Plant Society of Texas chapters in Kerrville, Fredericksburg and Boerne, Riverside Nature Center in Kerrville, Cibolo Nature Center in Boerne, Friends of Fredericksburg Nature Center, Hill Country Alliance, Hill Country Land Trust.

Back in 2002 I came across a quotation that has largely guided my life ever since. The quotation is from Baba Dioum, an environmentalist from Senegal, "In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught."

So, in my opinion, the first thing anyone, large property owner or apartment dweller, needs to do to make a difference is to learn about our native habitat, meaning the plants, the animals, the rocks, the soil, the water and their interactions. And the best place to do that begins with meetings, usually free to the public, sponsored by any of the above organizations as well as the local AgriLife extension service.

In these meetings you will not only learn things about our natural world but you will also meet folks like yourself who are interested and concerned about nature and the Hill

Country. And you might find opportunities to volunteer doing things you consider important and find out it can also be fun and the folks you meet are really fun to be with.

And pretty soon you realize that you are involved and making a difference and it doesn't matter where you live or how much money you have. You are still contributing to organizations that are also making a difference—and they couldn't do it without you.

Most of the volunteering activities available through these organizations do not involve physical labor (although there are some activities that involve that too). Many activities require skills that most of us have already acquired, and some may even be activities that you really enjoy—like helping kids of all ages learn about bugs and birds and plants etc.

Kids of all ages have very little exposure to nature in any form. How will they know to conserve it when they are adults? They need you to help them and Master Naturalist, NPSOT chapters, and nature centers offer many opportunities for you to do just that.

Of course, living in a way that conserves more and consumes less is something we can all do every day. And being mindful that water is a precious resource and should not be wasted in unnecessary ways is another way to help conserve our natural resources.

Get involved. You will be glad you did.

Until next time...

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