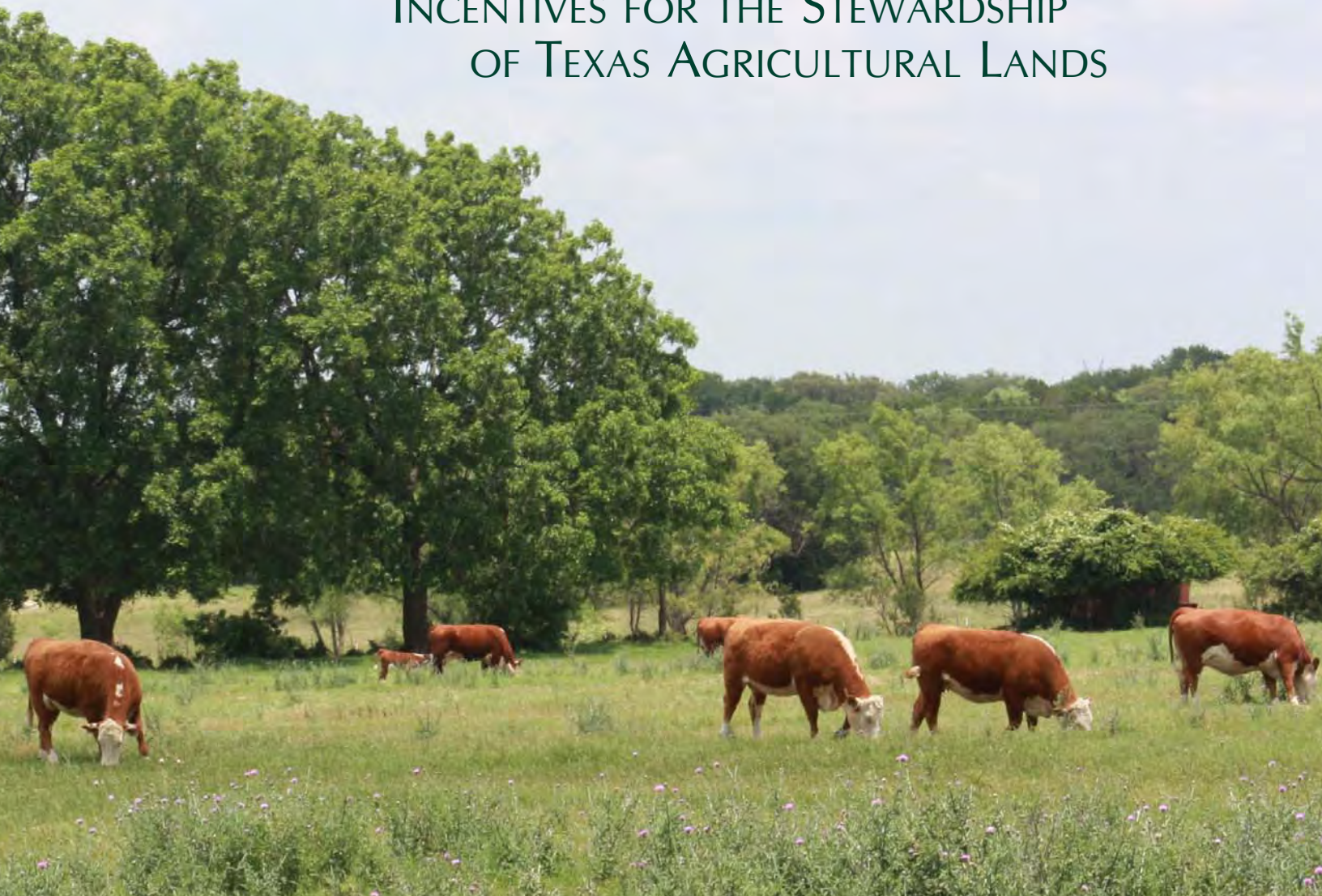


# PRIVATE LANDS PUBLIC BENEFITS

## INCENTIVES FOR THE STEWARDSHIP OF TEXAS AGRICULTURAL LANDS







David K. Langford photo

**About American Farmland Trust**  
 (800) 886-5170, [www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)

American Farmland Trust (AFT) is the leading national nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting America’s farm and ranch land, producing a healthier environment and building successful communities. Founded in 1980 by a group of farmers and conservationists concerned about the rapid loss of farmland to development, AFT has helped save more than three million acres of farm and ranch land from development and led the way for establishing sound environmental practices on millions more. Since 1999, AFT has worked in Texas to promote policies, programs and opportunities that offer voluntary incentives to promote the protection and stewardship of working farms and ranches.



**About the Institute of Renewable Natural Resources**  
 (979) 862-3199, <http://irnr.tamu.edu>

The Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources (IRNR) is a unit of Texas AgriLife Research and Texas AgriLife Extension. The Institute fosters research and extension programs focused on natural resource science and management. The IRNR promotes, coordinates and implements interdisciplinary programs and activities to meet natural resource needs in Texas and elsewhere. The Institute serves the faculty of Texas A&M University and is the host institution for the Gulf Coast Cooperative Ecosystems Studies Unit, a partnership among nine federal agencies and 23 universities and NGOs.

**Acknowledgments**

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*Cover photos:* Cattle Grazing – *The Cattleman* magazine ([thecattleman-magazine.com](http://thecattleman-magazine.com)), Hannah Tabor; Hummingbird – Texas Department of Transportation, Michael A. Murphy; Horses – David K. Langford; Bighorn Sheep – Texas Parks & Wildlife; Whooping Cranes – Texas Parks & Wildlife, Earl Nottingham

*Back cover photo:* David K. Langford

## INTRODUCTION

Texans take great pride in their land. The Lone Star State's farms and ranches provide food and fiber, wildlife habitat, and sources of drinking water. Moreover, these working lands connect all Texans—whether rural or urban—to their heritage, to that legacy of rugged independence, unlimited opportunities and wide open spaces.

In a state with one of the country's highest percentages of private lands, Texas farms and ranches also bolster the state's economy. Agriculture is the second-largest resource-based industry in the state at \$100 billion a year, while spending by hunters, fishermen and outdoor enthusiasts generates an additional \$16 billion annually. These dollars have a compounding benefit for rural communities by supporting local businesses.

This guide is for Texans who want to ensure a future for the state's farms and ranches: landowners who want to conserve, protect and steward their land and its resources; policymakers concerned about the costs to the state of the loss of rural lands; and all Texans who value the many benefits provided by working farms and ranches.

### Texas Land Trend Studies

[www.texaslandtrends.org](http://www.texaslandtrends.org)

In 2003 and again in 2009, the Institute for Renewable Natural Resources (IRNR) at Texas A&M University analyzed data and trends in rural land use for American Farmland Trust. The results reveal the accelerated rate at which Texas is losing rural lands, the challenges that development pressure creates for farmers and ranchers, and the public cost of losing these working lands. Highlights of the study include:

- **Loss of agricultural lands:** In the 15 years between 1982 and 1997, Texas led the nation in loss of rural land with 2.2 million acres of farm, ranch and forest land converted to other uses; during the next decade, 2.1 million acres of agricultural land were converted (Figure 1). Rising land values and an increasing population have exerted strong forces on productive rural lands in Texas, especially in the high-growth areas around the major cities. As the population grows and consumes more land in these areas, the outward pressure will increasingly threaten those working lands that sustain the urban areas.

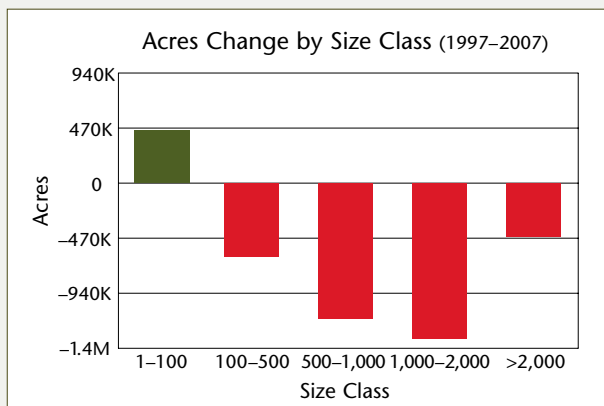


Figure 2. Net area of farm and ranch land either gained (green) or lost (red) by ownership class size in Texas, 1997 to 2007. (Data source: USDA Census of Agriculture, 2007)

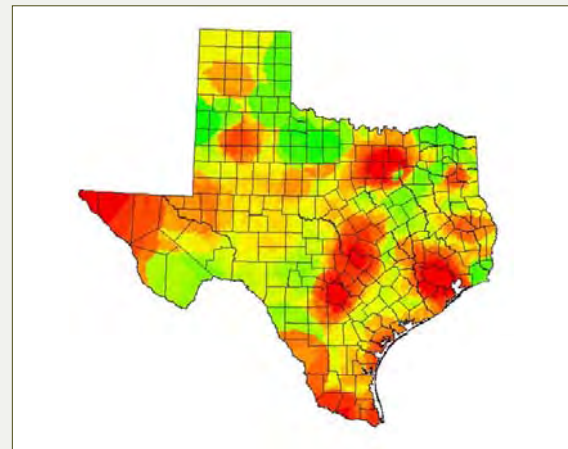


Figure 1. Loss of farms, ranches and forestlands in Texas, 1997 to 2007. Red areas indicate relatively high land conversion from agriculture to other land uses. (Data source: Texas State Comptroller of Public Accounts)

- **Fragmentation:** From 1997 to 2007, more than 2.8 million acres of agricultural land in the Trans Pecos, Edwards Plateau and South Texas regions alone were fragmented into mid-sized and smaller ownerships. Fragmentation into smaller operations threatens the economic sustainability of farming and ranching. In 2007, fewer than 50 percent of all agricultural holdings with less than 500 acres in the state reported generating a profit. As large properties splinter into smaller parcels, agriculture, wildlife and rural economies suffer.
- **Land values:** In 2007, the average appraised market value of farm, ranch and forest land in Texas was \$1,196 per acre—a 140 percent increase over the past 10 years. Such an escalation in land values forces many farmers and ranchers to make a hard choice between cashing out or hanging on, and discourages new farmers and ranchers from even trying.

## BENEFITS OF TEXAS WORKING LANDS: WHAT'S AT STAKE



From coastal rice fields providing Whooping Crane habitat to Panhandle cattle ranches hosting the Lesser Prairie Chicken, private lands are the state's richest source of biodiversity. Working farms and ranches provide unseen ecosystem services and societal benefits, such as nutrient cycling, carbon sequestration, storm surge protection, flood control, erosion control, buffering from environmental hazards, and scenic views. Such ecosystem services are public benefits—benefits enjoyed by all Texans—that typically are not appraised when assessing the market value of rural land.

While suburbanization plays a role in rural land loss, land fragmentation remains the single greatest threat to wildlife and the long-term viability of agriculture in Texas. Estate taxes, escalating land values, volatile markets—all contribute to the pressures on rural land, often forcing families to divide and sell properties that have been owned for generations. The resulting smaller parcels can no longer support farming, ranching and forestry uses. Fragmentation also leads to a decline in wildlife habitat, water quality problems, higher costs for county services and weakened rural economies. (For more information on how the loss of agricultural lands impacts county services, see AFT's Cost of Community Service Studies: [www.farmland.org/programs/states/tx/default.asp](http://www.farmland.org/programs/states/tx/default.asp).)

### Measuring the Public Values of Private Lands

As Texas' population grows, development consumes important farm and ranch land, often with little analysis of the trade-offs. Large infrastructure projects—highways, reservoirs, transmission lines—needed to sustain a burgeoning populace collide with the production of food and fiber, threaten wildlife species, diminish opportunities for outdoor recreation and hunting, and mar scenic vistas in pristine parts of Texas.

Appraisal methods typically only capture market and agricultural production values. Yet rural lands provide a multitude of benefits that traditional markets do not value. As part of the *Texas Land Trends* study, AFT asked Texas A&M to demonstrate how ecosystem services might be measured. Researchers focused on quantifying the economic value of just one benefit: groundwater recharge for the Edwards Aquifer in the eastern portion of Comal County, northeast of San Antonio. The study also determined the cost to the public if the land were developed.

- **Value of Ecosystem Services:** Using a "Willingness to Pay" analysis, researchers determined that the public would pay up to \$1,566/acre to permanently protect farm and ranch land for the suite of ecosystem services these lands provide in Comal County.
- **Costs of Development:** The development of land in eastern Comal County and the subsequent loss of groundwater recharge associated with agricultural lands would result in a \$221/acre cost to the public in perpetuity. Zeroing-in on the eastern Comal County city of New Braunfels, the researchers used *Texas Land Trends* data to estimate that 2,359 acres could be converted from agriculture to city development between 2006 and 2020. The cost to the citizens of Comal County: \$37,314 per year in lost groundwater recharge capacity.

Rural lands provide a multitude of benefits that traditional markets do not value.

While further work is needed to develop models for valuing ecosystem services, the results of this study provide a beginning rationale for the expenditure of public funds to protect and/or enhance ecosystem benefits. Keeping in mind that the analysis focused on only one benefit—groundwater recharge, the public's "willingness to pay" for the protection of agricultural land (\$1,566/acre) equals a significant portion of the cost of purchasing conservation easements to permanently protect this land. These funds could be used to match state and federal funds dedicated to protecting agricultural lands.



## Advancing Working Lands Conservation in Texas

In a private lands state with a prevailing property rights ethic, financial incentives for land conservation fare far better than zoning or regulation. One such incentive is the voluntary sale or donation of an *agricultural conservation easement*—a deed restriction that farmers and ranchers voluntarily place on their land to protect it from development. Landowners retain private ownership of the property and all the other rights that come with it, including the right to use the property, lease, sell and bequeath it, and borrow money against it. (For more information, see the Agricultural Conservation Easements fact sheet of the Farmland Information Center at [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org).)

Two new easement programs—one public, one private—provide additional options for Texas landowners.

**Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program (TFRLCP)** [www.glo.state.tx.us/res\\_mgmt/farmranch](http://www.glo.state.tx.us/res_mgmt/farmranch)  
Created by the Texas Legislature in 2005 and housed at the General Land Office, TFRLCP enables landowners to sell either perpetual or term agricultural conservation easements. Selling an easement allows landowners to monetize the development potential of the land that previously would have only been realized by selling the land. At the same time, TFRLCP helps to protect critical natural resources, such as water and wildlife habitat, that provide public benefits.

**Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT)** [www.txaglandtrust.org](http://www.txaglandtrust.org)

A private nonprofit 501(c)3 created by leaders of several statewide agricultural and landowner organizations, TALT is the only land trust in Texas whose sole mission is the protection of productive agricultural lands. With a board comprised of farmers and ranchers, TALT primarily works with landowners to realize the tax benefits from donated easements. Formed in 2007, TALT today holds agricultural conservation easements on almost 100,000 acres throughout Texas.

## STATE, FEDERAL AND OTHER CONSERVATION PROGRAMS

Shifting demographics, sprawling development and rising land prices all affect the viability of farming and ranching in Texas, where development consumes more than 210,000 acres of agricultural land each year. Faced with such threats, farmers, ranchers and other land managers seek information, tools and incentives to enhance their stewardship and profitability, thus ensuring the ongoing benefits to the public. Listed below is a selection of state, federal and other programs that help agricultural producers protect their land, pursue conservation options and improve the productivity of their operations.

### STATE PROGRAMS

**Landowner Incentive Program (LIP)**  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lip](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/lip)

Administered by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, LIP is a cost-share program that provides direct technical and financial assistance to landowners interested in conserving species and habitats of conservation concern on their properties. LIP can fund as much as 75 percent of a project with the landowner providing at least 25 percent, some of which can be labor and materials. Applications for LIP are accepted annually.

**Private Lands and Habitat Program (PLHP)**  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landowner](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landowner)

The PLHP of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department helps agricultural landowners assess the wildlife resources of their property and develop wildlife management plans that are consistent with their agricultural operation. Recommendations focus on increased ecological diversity benefiting a wide variety of native wildlife and the conservation of soil, water and related natural resources.



Texas Parks & Wildlife photo

## Texas Agricultural Finance Authority (TAFA)

[www.agr.state.tx.us](http://www.agr.state.tx.us)

Administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), TAFA programs are designed to bolster agri-business in Texas. Four programs provide financial assistance to eligible individuals and businesses that wish to enhance a current agricultural operation or to establish a new one. Special focus is given to incentives for young farmers. TAFA's four programs include:

- **Agricultural Loan Guarantee**, which provides loan guarantees and interest rebates up to \$5,000 per year. Guarantees are tiered from 70–90 percent and cannot exceed \$750,000.
- **Interest Rate Reduction** or assistance with the commercial lending process that may result in lower interest rates compared to current market rates on loans for land or operating expenses up to \$500,000.
- **Young Farmer Interest Rate Reduction**, which helps young farmers ages 18 to 45 obtain interest rates even lower than the Interest Rate Reduction program on loans for land or operating expenses up to \$500,000.
- **Young Farmer Grant**, which offers a dollar-for-dollar cost-share match to young farmers ages 18 to 45 who are engaged in creating or expanding agriculture in Texas. Awarded twice a year, grants range from \$5,000 to \$10,000.

## Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program (TFRLCP)

[www.glo.state.tx.us/res\\_mgmt/farmranch](http://www.glo.state.tx.us/res_mgmt/farmranch)

TFRLCP is a statewide purchase of development rights program that facilitates the purchase and donation of agricultural conservation easements, either in perpetuity or for a term of 30 years. Landowners receive a payment based on the land's fair market value minus its restricted value (the value once it can no longer be developed). Landowners who donate a portion of the agricultural easement may be eligible for tax benefits. With an advisory board comprised of representatives from the state's leading agriculture and wildlife organizations, TFRLCP is administered by the Texas General Land Office.

## Texas Prairie Wetlands Project (TPWP)

[www.ducks.org/Page1536.aspx](http://www.ducks.org/Page1536.aspx)

In 1991, Ducks Unlimited, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) partnered to create TPWP. The program works with private landowners to restore, enhance, and create shallow-water wetlands throughout a 28 coastal county focus area. TPWP provides financial cost-share and technical assistance to private landowners for habitat enhancement, levee construction and the installation of water control structures and delivery systems.



The Cattlemen magazine (thecattlemagazine.com), Hannah Tabor photo



## FEDERAL PROGRAMS

### Conservation of Private Grazing Land (CPGL)

[www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cpgl/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/cpgl/)

CPGL is a voluntary program that provides technical and educational assistance for conservation and enhancement of private grazing lands, including sustainable grazing practices such as rotational grazing. Eligible land includes all non-federally owned and tribal lands used to produce livestock or wildlife. CPGL does not provide any financial assistance. Applications can be submitted year round to NRCS at local USDA service centers.

### Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

[www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/crp](http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/crp)

Administered by the Farm Service Agency (FSA), CRP encourages farmers to convert highly erodible cropland and other environmentally sensitive land to vegetative cover such as wildlife-friendly native grasses, wildlife plantings, trees, filter strips, habitat buffers or riparian buffers. Participating landowners receive annual rental payments for the term of their 10- to 15-year contracts. CRP also provides cost-share funding for up to 50 percent for approved practices on eligible cropland and pastureland bordering waterways.

Payments are based on soil types with better soils receiving higher rents. The land must have been cropped in four of the six years between 2002 and 2007. Sign-ups for environmentally sensitive land devoted to certain conservation practices occur on a continuous basis. Producers may enroll all other eligible land during designated sign-up periods. FSA ranks applications according to an environmental benefits index (EBI) and extends offers based on an application's ranking. Counties have a 25 percent enrollment cap for CRP lands.

### Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)

[www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/CSP](http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/CSP)

CSP provides financial and technical assistance to support conservation efforts on tribal and private agricultural land and non-industrial private forestland. Administered by NRCS, the CSP provides an annual payment to producers to maintain existing conservation practices and to implement new practices that will provide additional levels of conservation benefits. Contracts are for five years and may be renewed once. Land under Conservation Reserve Program, Grasslands Reserve Program or



David K. Langford photo

Wetlands Reserve Program contracts or having animal waste storage or treatment facilities is ineligible. There is continuous sign-up for the program. Applications are ranked in consideration of priority resource concerns that have been identified for Texas.

### Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

[www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EQIP](http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/EQIP)

EQIP pays up to 75 percent of the cost for producers to implement structural and management practices on eligible agricultural land. Up to 90 percent cost-share assistance is available to limited resource, socially disadvantaged or beginning farmers and ranchers who can also receive up to 30 percent in advance payments to install practices.

EQIP is open to eligible producers engaged in livestock, forestry or crop production on eligible land, and provides technical and financial assistance to plan, design and install conservation practices that have been approved for use in the local area. Examples of such practices include manure management facilities, grassed waterways, prescribed grazing systems, livestock watering facilities, stream bank stabilization and conservation tillage to improve carbon sequestration. The 2008 Farm Bill increased EQIP funding for cost-share and incentive payments and expanded program purposes to include forest management, organic farming and energy conservation benefits.

NRCS in Texas allocates EQIP funding to every county. A state technical committee and local work groups determine natural resource concerns and practices that are eligible for financial assistance. Participating producers enter a contract containing an EQIP plan of operations; the minimum contract period is one year following implementation of the last conservation practice but cannot exceed 10 years. While NRCS accepts applications on a continuous basis, it evaluates applications and awards contracts during established ranking periods.

## Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP)

[www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp](http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp)

Administered by NRCS, the FRPP provides matching funds to help purchase agricultural conservation easements on qualified, productive farm and ranch lands. Landowners must work with eligible state and local governments or non-governmental entities to submit an application to NRCS. FRPP can provide up to 50 percent of the fair market value of the conservation easement. With NRCS assistance, participants develop a conservation plan outlining the management strategies that they propose to use on the enrolled land. NRCS accepts applications from eligible entities at any time.



Wade Dunkin, iStock photo

## Forest Legacy Program (FLP)

<http://texasforestservicetamu.edu/frd/legacy>

The Texas Forest Service administers the USDA Forest Service's FLP. The program was established to fund the purchase of conservation easements on working forestland threatened by conversion to non-forested uses. Private forest landowners within the Designated Forest Legacy Program Area may participate in the program. To qualify, landowners must prepare a multiple resource management plan. The federal government may fund up to 75 percent of the cost of the easement acquisition, with the remaining funds coming from the landowner, private or local third-party sources. Most FLP conservation easements restrict development, require sustainable forestry practices and protect other natural resource values. Applications are accepted from January 1 through August 31.

## Forest Stewardship Program (FSP)

<http://texasforestservicetamu.edu>

Authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, FSP provides technical assistance, through state forestry agency partners, to non-industrial private forest (NIPF) owners to encourage and enable active long-term forest management. A primary focus of the program is the development of comprehensive, multi-resource management plans that provide landowners with the information they need to manage

their forests for a variety of products and services. The plan is based on the owner's personal goals and objectives, and is designed to help the landowner manage his or her property for the future, while enhancing water quality protection, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

## Grassland Reserve Program (GRP)

[www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/GRP](http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/GRP)

NRCS administers GRP to protect, enhance and restore grasslands under threat of conversion to other uses and to help maintain the viability of grazing operations. Private or tribal lands historically dominated by grasses or shrubs for which grazing is the predominant use are eligible for the program.

Landowners with eligible property may receive compensation through 10-, 15- or 20-year rental agreements or through permanent easements. The annual rental rate is 75 percent of the grazing value of the land under contract with a limit of \$50,000 per year. All participants must implement a grazing management plan with strategies for enhancing forage vitality and preserving the viability of the grasslands. GRP provides cost-share funding of up to 50 percent of approved restoration costs with a cap of \$50,000 per year. Crops whose production is inconsistent with maintaining grazing land and wind power facilities for commercial off-farm power generation are prohibited.

NRCS evaluates and ranks applications based on selection criteria developed by the state technical committee. In Texas, NRCS administers permanent easements; the FSA handles rental contracts. Applications can be submitted at any time at USDA Service Centers.

## Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW)

[www.fws.gov/partners](http://www.fws.gov/partners)

PFW helps private landowners restore wetlands and other important fish and wildlife habitats on their land. A voluntary partnership program administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, PFW provides financial and technical assistance to private landowners through cooperative agreements. In Texas, PFW focuses on restoration of habitat for migratory birds and declining federal



trust species through restoration and management of degraded wetlands, native grasslands, streams and riparian areas. Landowners usually can achieve a dollar-for-dollar cost share by working with a host of nationally based and local entities such as federal, state and local agencies, soil and water conservation districts and private conservation organizations. Landowners must commit to maintaining projects for the life of the agreement, usually a minimum of 10 years, but otherwise retain full control of their land.

### Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP)

[www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp](http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp)

WRP provides landowners with technical and financial assistance to protect, restore and enhance wetlands on their property. Landowners can receive as much as 100 percent of the appraised agricultural market value of the property for permanent conservation easements or 75 percent for 30-year easements. They also can participate in a restoration cost-share agreement. These 10-year agreements pay for 75 percent of the cost of restoration activities and do not place an easement on the property. Eligible land includes wetlands cleared or drained for farming or pasture and must be restorable and suitable for wildlife. NRCS accepts applications for WRP on a continuous basis. Texas plans to enroll 50,000 acres per year in 2010–2012 in this program.

### Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

[www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip](http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/whip)

WHIP provides cost-share assistance and technical assistance to develop and improve habitat for fish and wildlife on private agricultural land, non-industrial private forestland and tribal land. Landowners work with NRCS to create wildlife habitat management plans that list the goals and practices needed to improve wildlife habitat. As part of their conservation plans, landowners

agree to implement habitat practices and maintain the enrolled acreage, usually for a period of five to 10 years. In exchange, NRCS provides up to 75 percent in cost-share assistance to implement the plan. Fifteen-year agreements provide a higher level of cost-share assistance.

Interested producers may file an application at any time with NRCS. In Texas, WHIP priorities address the restoration of prairie and savanna riparian areas, wood corridors and wetlands habitats with additional focus on pronghorn antelope, lesser prairie chickens, black-capped vireo and rolling plains quail habitat. WHIP is a competitively ranked program in which applications with the highest wildlife benefits receive priority for funding. Applications to WHIP are accepted year round.

### OTHER PROGRAMS

#### Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative (GLCI)

[www.glci.org](http://www.glci.org)

A nationwide collaboration, GLCI provides technical assistance to owners and managers of private grazing land to enhance its long-term productivity and ecological health. NRCS funds technical assistance and public awareness activities about the benefits of private grazing land.

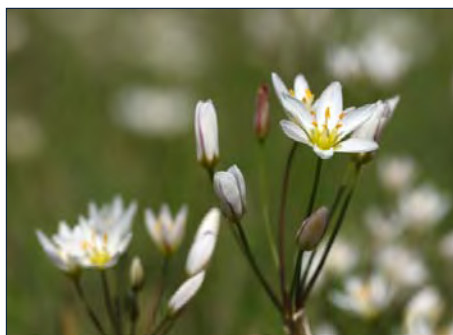
#### Texas Tree Farm

[www.texasforestry.org](http://www.texasforestry.org)

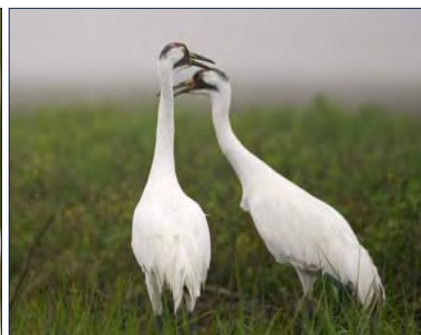
Sponsored by the American Forest Foundation, the American Tree Farm system is the largest forest certification program in the U.S., encouraging good management of private forestlands. The Texas Forestry Association administers and co-sponsors the program in Texas. To qualify, landowners must own at least 10 acres of forestland under management, with an implemented plan addressing water quality, soil conservation, biodiversity, wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities, as well as production of forest products.



Texas Parks & Wildlife photo



AnkNet, iStock photo



Texas Parks & Wildlife, Earl Nottingham photo



Texas Parks & Wildlife, Chase A. Fountain photo

## Policy Recommendations

Rural lands in Texas are undergoing a fundamental change, one that has implications for its rural economies, agricultural industry, and the conservation of natural resources. American Farmland Trust, working with its partners in Texas, has developed a set of policy recommendations to address the loss of farm, ranch and forest lands and to leverage existing state and federal program resources.

- Provide funding for the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program. A statewide purchase of development rights program, the TFRLCP enables the protection of critical natural resources and keeps lands on the tax rolls through the voluntary sale of agricultural conservation easements. Funding for TFRLCP would enable Texas to leverage federal funding available for the protection of agricultural lands.
- Continue support for the USDA's conservation programs, such as the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program and the Grasslands Reserve Program. The USDA programs require matching funds. States with well-funded farmland protection programs or sources of matching funds receive far more funding, regardless of the acreage needing protection. For example, since 1996, Maryland has received more than \$40 million in funding from FRPP; Texas just \$13.9 million.
- Create a "Rural Lands" task force to recommend state policies to address the economic, environmental and social impacts of rural land loss. The Texas Department of Agriculture, Department of Parks and Wildlife, Department of Transportation, Public Utility Commission, Comptroller of Public Accounts and General Land Office, as well as other agriculture, industry, real estate, rural development and environmental interests would work together to leverage and coordinate existing resources and efforts.
- Appoint an official state "land demographer" to assist policymakers at the local, county and state levels. By functioning as a clearinghouse for data collected by other agencies and as a source of ongoing data, land trends analysis and mapping services, a state demographer could provide information essential to sound policy decisions affecting rural lands and natural resources.
- Encourage policy innovations that provide incentives for private landowners to keep working lands in agricultural production. New market-based approaches should encourage watershed management, wildlife habitat conservation, and other stewardship activities on private land that provide a direct benefit to the public, such as ecosystem services. Keeping working lands in production can also reduce the need for costly public infrastructure and services to support new development.



## RESOURCES

### Federal Agencies

**USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service**  
Texas office  
(254) 742-9800  
[www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov)

**US Fish and Wildlife Service, Southwest Region**  
(505) 248-6911  
[www.fws.gov/southwest](http://www.fws.gov/southwest)

### State Agencies

**Texas Agrilife Extension Service**  
**Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources**  
(979) 862-3199  
<http://irnr.tamu.edu>

**Texas Department of Agriculture**  
(512) 463-7476  
[www.agr.state.tx.us](http://www.agr.state.tx.us)

**Texas Forest Service**  
(979) 458-6606  
<http://txforestservation.tamu.edu>

**Texas General Land Office**  
(800) 998-4GLO  
[www.glo.state.tx.us](http://www.glo.state.tx.us)

**Texas Parks and Wildlife Department**  
(800) 792-1112  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)

### Private Organizations

**American Farmland Trust**  
(800) 886-5170  
[www.farmland.org](http://www.farmland.org)

**Ducks Unlimited**  
(800) 45DUCKS  
[www.ducks.org](http://www.ducks.org)  
Conserves, restores and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. In Texas, Ducks Unlimited works with Texas Parks and Wildlife to conserve and restore wildlife habitat.

**Farmland Information Center**  
(800) 370-4879  
[www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org)  
A partnership between American Farmland Trust and the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Farmland Information Center is a clearinghouse for information about farmland protection and stewardship.

**Texas Agricultural Land Trust**  
(210) 826-0074  
[www.txaglandtrust.org](http://www.txaglandtrust.org)

### Private Organizations (continued)

**Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association**  
(800) 242-7820  
[www.texascattleraisers.org](http://www.texascattleraisers.org)  
Supports the cattle industry through advocacy, technical assistance and member services.

**Texas Farm Bureau**  
(254) 772-3030  
[www.txfb.org](http://www.txfb.org)  
Supports Texas farmers, ranchers and rural citizens through grassroots policy development, advocacy and member services.

**Texas Forestry Association**  
(936) 632-TREE  
[www.texasforestry.org](http://www.texasforestry.org)  
Enhances and perpetuates Texas forest resources through education, political action and promotion of forest conservation practice.

**Texas Land Trust Council**  
(512) 236-0655  
[www.texaslandtrustcouncil.org](http://www.texaslandtrustcouncil.org)  
Works to promote and sustain the conservation efforts of Texas land trusts. The council maintains a directory of land trusts in the state.

**Texas Wildlife Association**  
[www.texas-wildlife.org](http://www.texas-wildlife.org)  
(210) 826-2904  
Represents Texas private land stewards and managers, conservationists, hunters and anglers to advance long-term conservation policies.

**Wildlife Habitat Federation**  
[www.hmrtexas.org](http://www.hmrtexas.org)  
Maintains a Web site that helps landowners and land managers restore and manage native prairie, savannah and riparian habitats for upland game birds and other wildlife. Users can navigate to state, federal and private agency natural resource professionals.



## WHAT YOU CAN DO

The options described in this report are valuable tools to promote the conservation of working lands and protect the public benefits that they provide. But these options exist within a context of state and local policies. If Texans feel those policies need improvement, they can have a voice in those changes.

- Take the next step—learn more about the public and private opportunities described in this booklet. Contact American Farmland Trust and other organizations that can help you and your community conserve farm and ranch land.
- Speak up about the benefits working lands provide and promote financial incentives for good stewardship. Use the data from the *Texas Land Trend* studies to make the case for local policy changes.
- Support the Texas Department of Agriculture's *Go Texan* effort. Buy local farm products and encourage retailers and restaurants to buy local, too.
- Support public programs and financing, such as the Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program, that keep farm and ranch land in production.
- Prepare now for the future of your land, your business and your family. Consult with your legal, financial and tax advisors to develop your estate plan.

