

## FROM THE CEO NEAL WILKINS

### LAS NORIAS DE SAN ANTONIO

In 1806, surveyor Jose Antonio de la Garza, working on behalf of the Spanish officials in Mier, traversed the land grant to be called San Antonio Viejo. Included in his notes were stark observations on the lack of suitable water across the land in question.

Despite Garza's inspection, he could not have known about the vast groundwater resources that would one day support a thriving community. Nor could he have known of the innovations that would be used to access such water. Garza did find one small laguna he called San Antonio.

On later maps this same laguna was called El Guajolote – “the turkey.” Most notably, in the 19th century, El Guajolote was one of the few areas of surface water mapped between the Rio Grande and the Nueces River.

Over the decades that followed, the community of San Antonio Viejo grew nearby to El Guajolote and

served as a station along the major trade route to Mier through Roma and Rio Grande City. The community was sometimes referenced as Las Norias de San Antonio – the San Antonio Wells. The area was a military camp. A center of commerce and a waystation for travel between commercial centers of Corpus Christi and San Antonio to the north and Mexico to the south.

As the name Las Norias de San Antonio suggests, it was the wells at San Antonio Viejo that made it possible for the area to be such an oasis in the Wild Horse Desert. It was the innovations of early Tejano ranchers and merchants that transformed this area. And those innovations constantly involved water – how to get it, and how to move it. In the early years, it was shallow hand-dug wells that fed the community and the demands of livestock. As the community grew the water demands must have stressed the capacity of the few hand-dug wells in the area.

There is good evidence that those Tejano ranchers stayed on the edge of innovation, even though they were isolated in the remotest reach of South Texas.

About a half mile north of the old community (now known as Rancho Viejo) is an old hand-dug well that has all the signs of being well over 100 years



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## ABOUT US

**East Foundation promotes the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education.**

We manage more than 217,000 acres of native South Texas rangeland, operated as six separate ranches in Jim Hogg, Kenedy, Starr, and Willacy counties. Our land is a working laboratory where scientists and managers work together to address issues important to wildlife management, rangeland health, and ranch productivity. We ensure that ranching and wildlife management work together to conserve healthy rangelands.

East Foundation was created through the generous gift of the East family in 2007. To honor their legacy, we uphold their vision and values that were established more than a century ago. In pursuit of our mission, we use our abundant natural resources to build future leaders through programs that introduce students to private land stewardship. We invest in future professionals through internships, graduate fellowships, and close engagements with university programs.

We care for our land and are always exploring more efficient ways to get things done and are continuously guided by our values to conserve the land and resources.

**We do what's right for the land and the life that depends on it.**

old. Taken alone, this is not that unusual, for there are over a dozen such wells on the San Antonio Viejo. What is unusual are the other things in and around that well.

Next to the well is a heavy cast-iron pump. With a little research on the markings on this pump body, we discovered that it was manufactured in Beloit, Wisconsin, and was used during the 1870s into the 1890s – evidence shows this to be a pump (a working head) used for an original Eclipse windmill. The original Eclipse was a wooden windmill, and it was uniquely designed to adjust to changing wind speeds, as well as direction.

The Eclipse was invented by Leonard Wheeler, a Presbyterian minister serving as a missionary to the Ojibwe Indians near Lake Superior. Wheeler first patented his windmill in 1867. In 1901, when the patent ran out, other windmill companies began to use Wheeler's design. The hand dug well and the ancient windmill head is perched on a small presa (an earthen dam) on the downstream base of a dry arroyo (drainage) that has been dug-out and walled with sillar (caliche blocks).

This three-sided enclosure, just upstream from the well, is about 150 feet on each side, with the upstream side being open. This forms a big bowl in the middle of a drainage, with the hand-dug well centered above the downstream wall. The top of the wall, at its downstream base, is about eight feet above the bottom of the impoundment. The impoundment would have held a substantial amount of water – but it would have remained dry without some water from elsewhere. At the time, the project must have taken a huge amount of labor; for it was probably constructed during the time when an ox-drawn cart was the main method of moving the heavy caliche stone from quarries.

Nearby, but upstream of the impoundment, are the remains of another heavy pump-body. This is a

“Meteor” Double-acting Force Pump produced by the Gould Manufacturing Company out of Seneca Falls, New York.

The Gould's Catalog for 1885 explains that this pump is to be driven by steam or wind. Only yards away are the remnants of a live steam vertical boiler that would likely have been used to power the “Meteor” pump.

The evidence lines up. Before the turn of the 19th century, the Tejano ranchers of San Antonio Viejo had used the leading innovations of the day to assure their water security. They developed a small impoundment, then used a steam engine and a wind turbine to assure it retained water.



At the turn of the 20th century, the Eclipse windmill was one of the top two brands in the United States.

Shipping all this equipment to what amounted to a frontier outpost would have been all but impossible up until 1883 – that is when the Texas Mexican Railroad was opened. This narrow gauge “Tex Mex” railroad connected the port at Corpus Christi to Mexico through Laredo. The route swung south through Peña Station, connecting this South Texas center of overland trade to the merchants in Corpus Christi and Nuevo Laredo.

From Peña Station, near present-day Hebronville, wagons and oxcarts freighted goods south to Rio Grande City through Randado, San Antonio Viejo, and Guerra. This was likely the route that this equipment took from Wisconsin

and New York, so that the community of San Antonio Viejo could survive drought and build a stable ranching community.

We now have well-over 100 working water wells across the 150,000 acres of San Antonio Viejo Ranch alone. In much the same way as those Tejano ranchers of the 19th century, we pay attention to our water resources. Whether it is changing our water delivery to get better grazing distribution, installing up-to-date solar water pumps, or dealing with water quality problems – it is all water management, and there is no surviving without it. ◇

**Editor's Note:** This is a reproduction of a CEO Report from East Foundation's March 2016 newsletter.



# OUR PEOPLE

Just as the East Foundation mission drives our organizational focus, our people are the boots on the ground who work diligently to promote land stewardship through our ranching operations, science-focused research, and informative educational programs. Below are highlights on the foundation's recent hires and promotions, as well as news regarding recent promotions and awards.



**KATARINA JOHNSON**

## EMPLOYEE PROFILE

Katarina Johnson was born in Corpus Christi, Texas. She spent the majority of her childhood in Hebronville, Texas, but went to high school in Bruni, a neighboring town where she built

lifelong friendships and gained an appreciation for the agricultural and ranching community.

Katarina's family has deep roots in the Hebronville area, having been here for over a century. East Foundation's San Antonio Viejo Ranch is right across the highway from her family's land, making her work with the Foundation even more personally meaningful.

She earned a bachelor's degree in business management from St. Mary's University in San Antonio. Before coming to the East Foundation, Katarina worked at Enterprise Rent-a-Car as a Management Trainee, where she gained firsthand experience in customer service, business operations, and team management.

Working for the East Foundation has been incredibly fulfilling for Katarina and allows her to play an active role in various departments and projects that align with her interests and values. As the Hebronville Business Coordinator, she provides support for Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable by managing financial and contractual records

and monitoring credit card transactions. Katarina also assists with investments, where she maintains portfolio schedules, coordinates quarterly investment meetings, and prepares key documents for review.

In addition to her administrative responsibilities, Katarina is passionate about education and community engagement. She leads activities for K-12 students on topics like cattle ranching, wildlife, and land stewardship. These programs, offered in person at San Antonio Viejo, in the classroom, and virtually give her the opportunity to engage with young minds and share the importance of conservation.

Outside of work, she enjoys spending time outdoors with her husband and her German shorthaired pointer, Apollo. Katarina is also passionate about music. She plays a few different instruments and enjoys baking and sewing in her free time.



**MAKSIM SERGEYEV**

## ALUMNI PROFILE

Max was born in Belarus and grew up in Chicago, Illinois. Since a young age, Max had a passion for the outdoors and the wildlife that inhabited it, always enjoying

hiking with his father in the western United States and seeing the amazing native wildlife. These

interests, along with a desire to pursue quantitative sciences led Max to a career path in wildlife ecology. Max first got his undergraduate degree from the University of Illinois in chemistry and ecology. After a year working in the field, Max completed a master's degree in wildlife ecology from Brigham Young University, with research focusing on survival and habitat use of elk in central Utah. Max then relocated to South Texas to complete a Ph.D. in wildlife ecology from Texas A&M University-Kingsville, working with the East Foundation.

Max's research with East Foundation focused on the fine-scale habitat use and coexistence of ocelots, bobcats, and coyotes. Over several field seasons, Max worked as part of a team capturing these three carnivore species and fitting them with GPS collars, providing information on the animal's spatial use and activity patterns. Other aspects of Max's research included using LiDAR technology to assess habitat structure and use of black globe thermal sensors to quantify microclimate variations in temperature and relate these variations to space-use by ocelots and bobcats, with the aim of identifying thermal refuge and competition for thermal resources.

**“ My time at East taught me hands-on experience working with the endangered ocelot, valuable field skills, and the opportunity to work with dedicated professionals and local landowners and make friends that are dear to me to this day. In addition, I always greatly appreciated the emphasis that East placed on education and conservation awareness. Among my favorite activities were the Behind the Gates field day events where we would educate children about ocelot conservation, and it was heartwarming to see the kids get excited about wildlife and land stewardship.”**

Max completed his Ph.D. at the end of 2022 and moved to Fort Collins, Colorado, to continue a career in wildlife research. Max completed a postdoctoral research position focusing on the prairie dog grassland ecosystem across the central U.S., and is now completing a second postdoctoral position focusing on human recreation patterns in National Parks and Forests across the western U.S. In his free time, Max enjoys hiking and camping in the mountains, playing and watching basketball, and painting. 



**Life's better outside.®**

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is a statewide agency that provides outdoor recreational opportunities by managing and protecting wildlife and wildlife habitat and acquiring and managing parklands and historic areas.

East Foundation and TPWD are like-minded partners with a common goal to manage and conserve the natural resources of Texas and educate future generations on how they can get involved in natural resource conservation. Because TPWD is such a robust state agency, we partner with them in many ways, and especially as part of our Behind the Gates education program.

Each year during our two week-long Behind the Gates field days events, TPWD provides staff and resources to help us run our Predator and Prey and Law Enforcement stations that each student will visit while they are on the ranches.

At the Predator and Prey station, wildlife biologists Eric Garza and Ernesto Ortega teach about the many unique adaptations that native predator and prey animals have in Texas. At our Law Enforcement station, game warden Carlos Maldonado highlights wildlife laws (and even traffic laws) for the curious students! In addition, Carlos and Eric both assist with our Land Stewardship Ambassadors (LSA) program, and sometimes even adult education events that we host for teachers or county extension agents.

Students in our Cameron County LSA cohort visit Resaca de La Palma State Park every year and local TPWD Park Rangers Amanda De Leon and Lauretee Acevedo guide students on a nature hike and tour. In addition, students in our Webb County LSA cohort visit Lake Casa Blanca State Park where TPWD Interpreter Sydney Blackwell leads a kayaking expedition.

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and East Foundation both know how important it is to get students outside, on the land, and engaged with our Texas natural resources. Without the help of like-minded partners like TPWD, our reach would not be as far or as impactful, so we would like to thank the many TPWD agents who have assisted us in delivering conservation education programs this year.

**For more information about TPWD visit their website at <https://tpwd.texas.gov/>.**



# FROM THE RANCH

TODD SNELGROVE

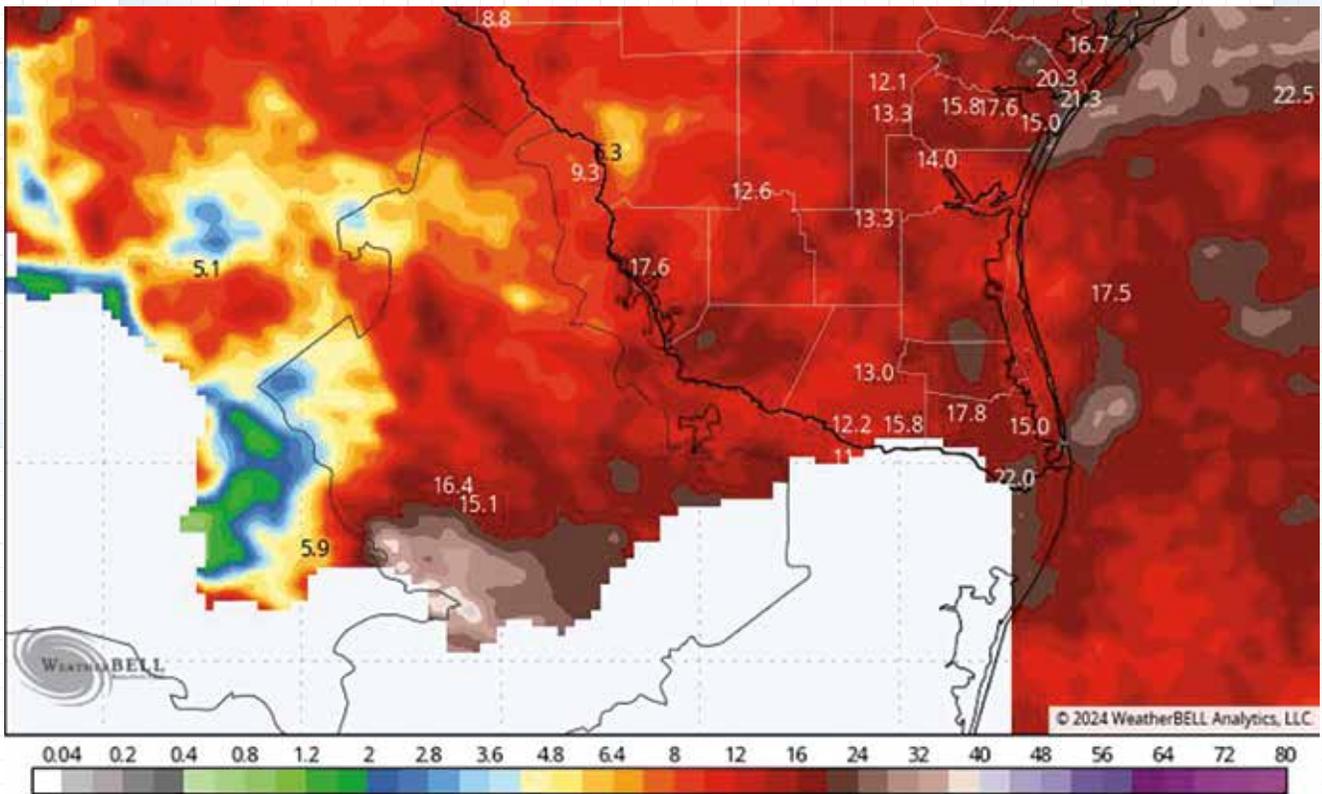


## Rain, Rain, Don't Go Away!

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urricane season starts for the North Atlantic, Caribbean Sea, and Gulf of Mexico on June 1 and runs through the end of November. September 15 is the peak of hurricane season and activity typically tails off from there. For Texas, landfall along our coast after October 1 is exceedingly rare with only 15 storms making landfall since record keeping began in 1851. At the start of the 2024 hurricane season every major forecast called for a very active and; and in some cases, a potentially devastating season. How's hurricane season gone so far? Except for hurricane Beryl which made landfall near Matagorda, Texas, and the recent catastrophic impact of Helene on Florida and the Appalachian Mountains the Atlantic hurricane season has been quiet with below average activity.

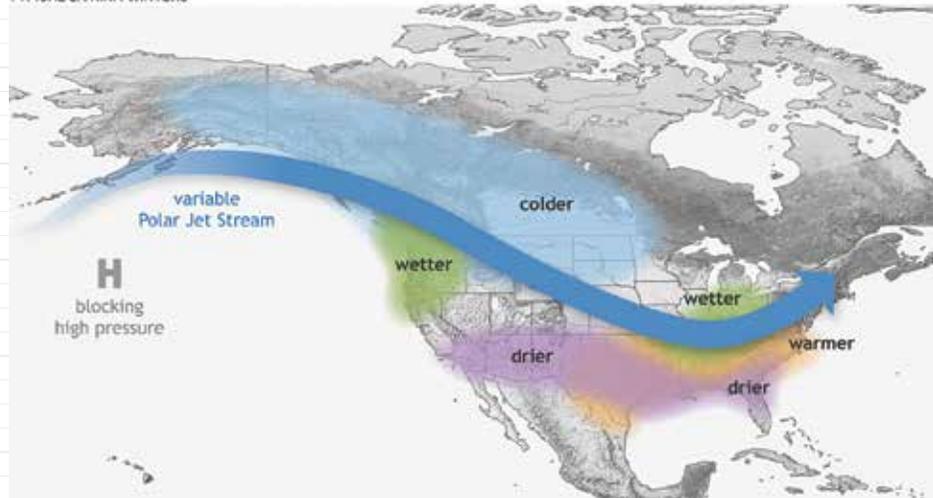
Although the forecast of a super-charged Atlantic hurricane season has not panned out, most of South Texas has benefited from above average rainfall resulting from a moist, tropical air mass in the Gulf of Mexico. Since June 1, East Foundation ranches have received 9 to 15 inches of rain. In some cases that is more than double what we could anticipate on average. This comes on the heels of a wet spring and winter and puts us in a good position heading into the fall.



If the current forecast holds, the wet weather pattern we have enjoyed should continue through the end of September. From there through the winter months, uncertainty starts creeping in. Most major forecast models are calling for a warmer and drier than normal fall and winter. This is driven by the expected emergence of La Niña later this fall. La Niña is a periodic cooling of the ocean's surface

temperature in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific. It's the cool phase of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle, while El Niño is the warm phase. When La Niña conditions form it typically leads to drier and warmer conditions across much of the United States.

TYPICAL LA NIÑA WINTERS



What can we anticipate this winter for South Texas if La Niña forms? Good spring and summer rains, paired with sound grazing strategies, have led to fantastic range conditions. There is plenty of forage, our cattle are in good shape; quail seem to be calling everywhere, and

the deer herd is healthy. With the onset of drier and warmer La Niña conditions, we can anticipate a deterioration in range conditions and an increased risk of wildfire. The good thing is though, going into what will likely be a dry winter in good shape overall makes our systems more resilient and quicker to rebound once conditions improve.

As recent long-term weather forecasts have shown, the future is inherently uncertain. Forecasting helps us plan for what we might anticipate. Additionally, building resilience in the systems we steward reduces the impact of an uncertain future. ◇



# CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE FUTURE OF NATURAL RESOURCE EDUCATION

## TEXAS BRIGADES

East Foundation has supported Texas Brigades, specifically the South Texas Ranch Brigade, for the last three years. The inaugural South Texas Ranch Brigade was held in 2021 on the Duval County Ranch in Freer. At the time, Molli Foxley, one of our Unit Foreman, took charge to help bring this camp to life.

Jumping forward to 2024, Katarina Johnson, our Hebronville Business Coordinator and part of our Education team, joined in on the Brigades fun. Katarina served as the Herd Leader for the Charolais herd. She oversaw five cadets and an assistant herd leader. Texas Brigades camps are comparable to that of a college-level class condensed into one week. In addition to the cattle knowledge, the camps sprinkle in activities including marching, cadence calling, plant ID, Quiz bowl, KP Duty, photography, journaling, and helping cadets take home a poster to showcase their favorite topic at camp.

Katarina shares that:

“South Texas Ranch Brigades was more than just a lesson in ranch management. It fostered a profound connection with the land and strengthened my advocacy for it. Each day presented new challenges and rewards, from sorting goats in pens to sharing stories over steaks. This experience provided me with a fresh perspective on the agriculture industry, conservation, and community.”

I feel fortunate to work alongside great committee members who bring knowledge and passion to share with cadets at camp. Everyone grows personally or professionally while at camp. This past summer we had an amazing group of cadets who brought great energy for the week. While there, I recruited several Land Stewardship Ambassador applicants for our upcoming cohort in 2025. Additionally, Elena Gonzalez, LSA Alumni – 2023, returned to camp as an assistant herd leader and was awarded a scholarship in the amount of \$8,500 supported by the Land.com Network and LAND



Masi Mejia and her cousin, Elyrck.



Silvana, one of our Land Stewardship Ambassadors 2024 alumni; Katarina Johnson; and Mr. Ed Bordovsky of La Paloma Ranch.

Magazine. Elena is attending Texas A&M University Kingsville this fall where she is a scholar athlete pursuing a degree in range and wildlife (and looking for summer opportunities).

Another fun fact about attendees at camp, is that this summer, my cousin, Elyrck Nieto, (second cousin once removed) attended camp as a cadet. I am excited to see him earn his way back as an assistant and apply to our Land Stewardship Ambassador Program.

Our educational reach as an organization goes beyond that of what we do in the classroom, on the land, and in partnership with like-minded organizations. Our participation in programs like Texas Brigades allows us cultivate relationships with the future of agriculture and natural resources. 



## WHY? EAST FOUNDATION, BOBWHITES, AND HARVEST?

As a scientist at the East Foundation, I have the privilege of sharing our unique research with landowners and managers across Texas. The East Foundation's structure and operations often surprise people when they first learn about us, sparking many interesting conversations. The most common questions I receive are: Why the East Foundation, Why Bobwhites, and Why Harvest?

To comprehend why we are studying the effects of harvest on bobwhite populations, you need to understand the mission and purpose of the East Foundation and our science programs, the aims and goals of our quail research, and some of the critical questions surrounding bobwhite management in South Texas, explained below.

### WHY THE EAST FOUNDATION?

The East Foundation's mission is to promote the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education. Our 217,000 acres of South Texas rangeland serve as a working laboratory, where scientists and managers collaborate with landowners

and stakeholders to address crucial issues in wildlife management, rangeland health, and productivity. Our science team has a defined purpose under our mission. We use science to enhance and enable effective decision-making by land stewards. We are committed to this goal in the long term, approaching it by discovering reliable information, developing management solutions, and documenting predictable outcomes.

### WHY BOBWHITES?

South Texas is considered one of the best regions in the world for quail, specifically northern bobwhites. This is due to favorable range management practices, contiguous habitats, plant species diversity, and vested interest from landowners and hunters. All these factors have also contributed to the long-term stability of the South Texas quail population. While our quail numbers fluctuate annually with rainfall, they have not declined like other populations in the Midwest and Southeast. In fact, wild quail densities in many states can no longer support hunting or an annual harvest, which has caused a surge of upland bird hunters to flock to South Texas. Because of this, the rural economies of South Texas

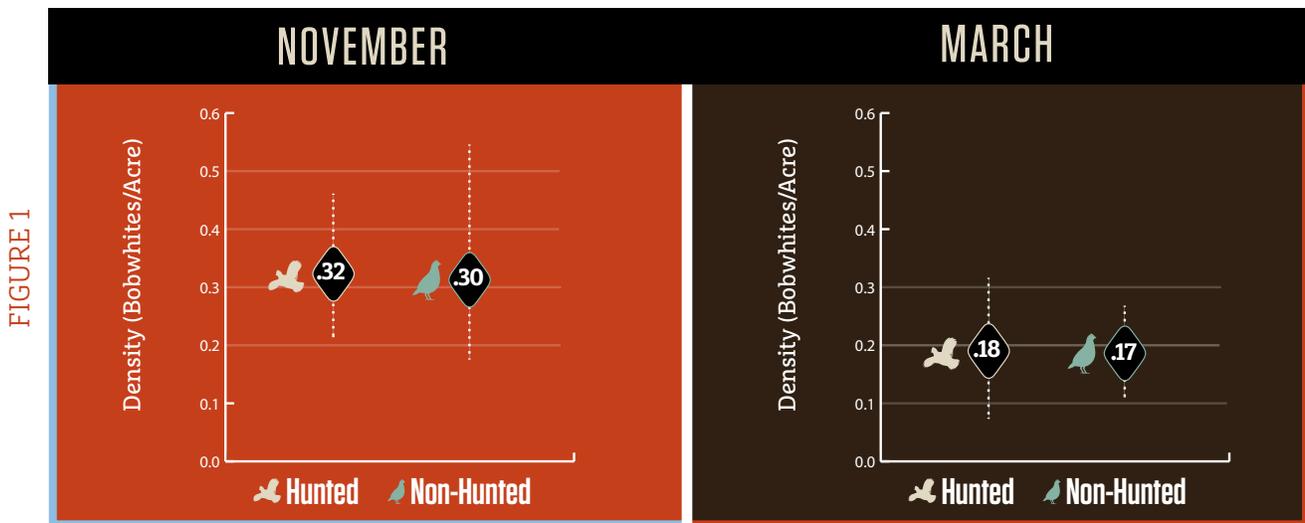
towns are heavily influenced by quail hunters and the expenses associated with local quail-hunting enterprises. Annual lease revenues for bobwhite hunting can yield up to \$20 per acre, generate more than \$75 million in income, and create over 1,600 jobs — all of which make the health of quail populations a critical economic concern for landowners and South Texas residents.

## WHY HARVEST?

Our quail research efforts are guided by a clear vision and goals. We aim to investigate fundamental principles of quail management and address the scientific questions that remain unknown. We were also challenged to address these questions at the scales relevant to stakeholders of South Texas, large spatial

bobwhite populations and their long-term viability. The investigations began with our baseline year in December 2017, with one control site (~11,000 acres) and one treatment site (~15,000 acres). Our experiment is designed for the long term, and we know that reliable results need to encompass the ups and downs of natural quail population cycles (> 10 years) in South Texas. After seven years, we are still collecting annual trends and responses to harvest. We have also grown the project, which now includes three control sites and four treatment sites, encompassing over 70,000 acres in Jim Hogg and Kenedy Counties.

So far, the average quail densities on our hunted and non-hunted sites are similar (Figure 1). More importantly, we have consistent differences in over-winter population declines (~from November to March) between hunted (49%) and nonhunted sites (38%).



scales (> 5,000 acres), and temporal scales (> 5-10 years), a feat not possible for most research projects.

As we evaluated various questions within bobwhite management in South Texas, one critical component stood out: the sustainability of populations subject to harvest.

With the national decline in bobwhite populations and an increase in the “demand” for bobwhite hunting in South Texas, the sustainability of our populations is a primary concern for landowners and conservation-minded hunters. The current recommendation for annual harvest is a maximum of 20% of the fall population, which includes crippled bobwhites. However, this recommendation is based on simulations of demographic data and, up until 2017, had not been empirically tested.

Therefore, we developed the Sustainable Bobwhite Harvest Project to determine if and how the harvest practices of South Texas hunters influence

We consider this a reflection of the complex relationship between harvest and natural mortality, combined with the underlying influence of quail density on reproduction rate and population dynamics.

Our preliminary results suggest that harvest is a sustainable management element in South Texas. However, we will continue our research efforts to include the entire cycle of quail populations, evaluating harvest effects in both “boom” and “bust” years. Our current recommendation for hunters and landowners is to apply a conservative approach when calculating a harvest prescription, such as a reduced harvest rate (e.g., 15%) or calculating harvest prescriptions using the lower confidence intervals of your density estimates.

For more information about our Sustainable Bobwhite Harvest Project, check out our 2024 Annual on our website at <https://eastfoundation.net/media/>. 



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