



**MAY 2023**

**We promote the advancement  
of land stewardship through  
ranching, science, and education.**

## FROM THE CEO

# The Land Belongs to the Future

NEAL WILKINS

“The land belongs to the future... that’s the way it seems to me... We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it – for a little while.”

*Willa Cather  
O Pioneers*

You might have seen this often-quoted line from Willa Cather’s 1913 book, *O Pioneers*. The situation included the story’s main character, Alexandra, as she was talking to her future husband, Carl. Alexandra had spent most of her life restoring productivity to the Nebraska farm she inherited from her father in the late 1800s, and she was reflecting on what would happen to the farm after her.

Alexandra’s outlook clearly expresses the principle of land stewardship. Her father’s generation had immigrated west and settled the land following the 1862 Homestead Act. They invested everything in the land and everyone they knew did the same. While Willa

Cather’s work is fiction, it reveals the reality of living in the Great Plains approaching the turn of the century.

In Willa Cather’s day, it was easier to see that farming and ranching were relevant to the country. In 1900 the U.S. population was about 76.3 million, of which 60% lived in rural areas. Most people lived close to the land. Growing up on the land, kids were exposed daily to farming, ranching, wildlife, and the outdoors in general. While technology and science were not as well developed, the basic knowledge that comes of a life spent outdoors was more common. Most of these people knew where their food came from.

Fast-forward to 2023 as the U.S. population has increased four-fold (over 330 million), with only 17% living in rural areas. This means that only a small part of our population lives close enough to the land to easily encounter those things that have anything to do with agriculture, wildlife, or spending time in nature. This doesn’t mean we are destined to lose the basic

understanding that comes from working on the land – but what it does mean is that we must put more work into bringing people to the land.

This year (2023) our Texas population is due to reach 31.44 million; this is up by almost five million from just ten years ago. Texas is largely an urban population with almost 90% living in cities and suburbs. We have seven of the 15 fastest growing cities in the U.S., and over 75% of our population is in 25 counties that make up only 10 percent of our state’s land area. Our population is rather young with over 75% below the age of 55. Yet, those that own and operate the 140 million acres of farms, ranches, and forestlands of Texas are increasingly older – the average age is 57.<sup>1</sup>

So, what does all this mean for the future conservation of rangelands, ranching, and private land stewardship? It means we have some work to do!



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### LOCATIONS

#### Hebbronville

310 East Galbraith Street  
Hebbronville, Texas 78361

#### San Antonio Viejo Ranch

474 East Ranch Road  
Hebbronville, Texas 78361

#### El Sauz Ranch

37216 Highway 186  
Port Mansfield, Texas 78598

#### San Antonio

200 Concord Plaza Drive, Suite 410  
San Antonio, Texas 78216  
(210) 447-0126

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*Land con't.*

If we are going to have Willa Cather's "people who love it and understand it" tomorrow, we need to work hard today to train and prepare future leaders. We need to intentionally develop future ranchers, future scientists, and future educators. It is also essential that we develop all kinds of other people to value the importance of ranching, rangelands, and private land stewardship. It's okay if they live in a city if they understand the value of working ranches.

### WHAT ARE WE DOING ABOUT IT?

We are taking on the challenge of developing future leaders just as seriously as we take on the day-to-day challenges of land management. This edition of our newsletter focuses on some of the work we are doing – along with our partners – to make certain that the future of ranching is just as important tomorrow as it has been in our past. Here's what's included:

- Tina Buford presents news about our Behind the Gates program that has brought thousands of South Texas school kids onto a working ranch for lessons on ranching, wildlife conservation, land stewardship, and South Texas history.
- Masi Mejia details the Land Stewardship Ambassador program that has involved 144 high school students within a 10-week session that introduces them to the importance of ranching and land conservation.
- Molli Foxley introduces us to the First Battalion of the South Texas Ranch Brigades – a week-long camp for high school students that immerses them into hands-on experiences with livestock production, rangeland management, and other

elements of practical ranch management.

- Andrea Montalvo discusses our ranch internships where we employ university students in practical field experiences for developing future ranch managers, rangeland ecologists, and wildlife biologists.

We spend a lot of time working on the science and management needed to sustain native rangelands. We work closely with university scientists to learn how to manage ranch-based resources – soil, vegetation, wildlife, and cattle – in the face of challenges like recurring drought, unpredictable markets, invasive species, and animal diseases. This work matters for maintaining productivity of ranchlands. Productive ranchlands are more profitable, and profitable ranches are likely to be in business tomorrow. But, just as important, we will need a new generation of smart and dedicated people to take over.

I can't find any wiser words to end with than a quote from Gary Price. Gary, along with his wife Sue, own the 77 Ranch in Navarro County. When talking with David Langford for the book *Generations on the Land*, Gary summed it up with a warning:

*"If we don't get kids on the land and make some connection, there will be consequences."*

<sup>1</sup>Many of these statistics are drawn from the Texas Land Trends project of Texas A&M's Natural Resources Institute. <https://txlandtrends.org/>



# Branding Behind the Gates

TINA BUFORD

Where has the time gone? It feels like just yesterday when we partnered with the Texas Wildlife Association to bring natural resource education into the classrooms across South Texas. Now, here we are, nine years later, having engaged more than 150,000 students, asking ourselves what comes next.

It just feels right that during our 10<sup>th</sup> year we examine what is under the hood and tweak for increased efficiency but most importantly for greater impact. By establishing the Foundation, the East family gifted South Texas with a one-of-a-kind learning laboratory. As stewards of this gift, we must constantly be learning from our past and adjusting to ensure we are in fact making a difference.

Since 2014, we have hosted students *Behind the Gates* (BTG) of the El Sauz and San Antonio Viejo ranches while collecting data along the way. Teacher survey results consistently show they value the experience for their students, while test scores indicate students are retaining key messages that are TEKS-aligned, and more importantly, aligned to our mission.

To sharpen the spear, the education team has undergone an exercise to identify the hits, remove the misses, and design a timeline that will serve as our guide to brand all educational efforts as *Behind the Gates*. To some, branding sounds like a marketing tool. To us, it means integrating what makes *Behind the Gates* a success across all education programming we deploy to make the most out of each and every student interaction.

Why is *Behind the Gates* valued by both student and educator? By asking ourselves that question, we identified five principles that we believe answers that question.

- Promote the advancement of land stewardship. *Behind the Gates* demonstrates how land stewardship in both urban and rural settings provides quality of life for both people and wildlife.
- Use science-based curriculum. *Behind the Gates* uses science derived from research conducted on East Foundation's learning laboratories to incorporate analytical thinking into the curriculum.
- Mentor the educators. *Behind the Gates* educators not only introduce students to the natural world, they provide guidance to those who express interest in professions related to land stewardship.
- Implement testing methods to document comprehension and retention. *Behind the Gates* curriculum starts and ends with testing methods to ensure students are comprehending the core messages taught.
- Utilize partnerships for increased success. *Behind the Gates* is a multifaceted approach that includes fostering partnerships with like-minded nonprofits, academic institutions, and businesses who aspire to connect students to the land.

Texas Farm Credit and East Foundation have worked alongside each other for the past four years to inspire students to think critically about how we care for the land. Texas Farm Credit's leadership recognizes that investing in our youth's understanding and appreciation of the land is critical to finding balance in how we use our natural resources. For this reason, Texas Farm Credit has signed on to be the lead sponsor for *Behind the Gates* in 2023 and we couldn't be more thrilled. Integrating all five *Behind the Gates* principals across all our programming will not happen overnight and having a partner like Texas Farm Credit means the world to us.



Twice a year over 1,500 students visit the San Antonio Viejo and El Sauz ranches. We provide hands-on learning experiences using science-based curriculum to engage students and help connect them back to the land.

The future is bright for education in South Texas, and East Foundation and our partners are leading the way through *Behind the Gates*.

If you are interested in partnering with East Foundation to connect students to the land, contact Tina Buford at

[tbuford@eastfoundation.net](mailto:tbuford@eastfoundation.net).

# Upcoming Events

MAY 25

Lone Star Land Steward Awards  
in Austin, Texas

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MAY 25

Alamo Area Master Naturalists  
Awards Ceremony in San  
Antonio, Texas

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JUNE 4

Land Stewardship Ambassadors  
Graduation Ceremonies in Bexar,  
Webb, and Cameron Counties

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JUNE 12-13

Board of Directors Meeting in  
San Antonio, Texas

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JUNE 24-28

South Texas Ranch Brigade at  
Duval County Ranch in Freer,  
Texas

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JULY 13

Private Land Summit and Three  
Minute Thesis Competition in  
San Antonio, Texas

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JULY 13-16

Texas Wildlife Association  
Convention in San Antonio,  
Texas

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## EMPLOYEE PROFILE



MARGARITA DELEON

Margarita is a native Texan, born and raised on the south side of San Antonio. She graduated from St. Mary's University with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Accounting.

Prior to joining the Foundation, she worked for Rackspace Technology as part of the payroll team, processing payroll for over 3,000 employees. In addition, she worked for Southwest Airlines, as part of the financial reporting team.

As Accounting Manager for the East Foundation, Margarita is responsible for managing multiple accounting functions and operations. She leads daily accounting operations, which includes maintaining the general ledger system, preparing monthly, quarterly, and annual financial statements, processing payroll, working with the external auditor on the annual audit, assisting with the annual tax return, and helping to prepare the annual budget.

Margarita works with just about everyone at the Foundation. Having exposure to all the financial data gives her a greater appreciation for the work being done at each of our ranches, from

education to science projects, where we impact students from all over the country who come to study on our lands.

During her free time, Margarita likes to spend time with family and friends, as well as sewing, exercising, and traveling, especially to see her family near Monterrey, Mexico.



## FROM THE FIELD

# Empowering the Next Generation

MASI MEJIA

“Be who you needed when you were younger.”

East Foundation has incredible resources to empower the next generation with the best science, like-minded partners, mentoring professionals, and opportunities to exceed in being land stewards.

In 2018, in partnership with the Witte Museum, we debuted our *Land Stewardship Ambassadors* (LSA) program. We created this partnership with the goal of increasing awareness of land stewardship principles, promoting civic engagement in today’s youth, and inspiring students to obtain careers that support land stewardship.

This program was created because both organizations recognized the need to create land stewards who are well versed in the many facets of land stewardship. LSA is a 10-week reading and writing intensive program, where high school students are exposed to the writings of Aldo Leopold, scientific abstracts, and even tax issues as they relate to land stewardship.

Students are asked to summarize what they read in what we call a “TQC” - a thesis statement, a quote, and a comment as it relates to the week’s themed topic. Students discuss their takeaways and how to apply the readings in the real world.

At the end of the 10 weeks, students create a final presentation centered around land stewardship and present it to a public audience. Some of this year’s topics include algae blooms, greenhouse gas and cow farts, overhunting, invasive species (nilgai and wild hogs), light pollution, resacas, water, and soil.

Thanks to program sponsor Albert and Margaret Alkek Foundation, we provide a stipend of \$400 to each student who completes the program.

To date we have graduated 144 students since our first semester in 2019. We have 32 students who are or will be pursuing a career or degree in a STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) degree related to natural resources. Below are examples of successful current students and past alumni:

- Hannah Flores was awarded the Legacy Scholarship (\$10,000 annually for four years).
- Jessica Contreras placed second in the State for Veterinary Science.
- Cate Douglas was selected as a returning camper for Wildlife Conservation Camp.
- Jessica Alvarado was selected as a returning camper for Wildlife Conservation Camp.
- Cornelius Aguirre-Pineda has a full ride to John Hopkins.
- Sebastian Gomez is the CEO of Go Green Organization.
- Tyler Medina will be attending Texas A&M University Kingsville to pursue a wildlife degree.
- Sarai Sepulveda will be attending the University of Texas as an Impact Scholar.
- Tracy Quintana was an Education Intern with East Foundation.
- Juan Segovia Jr. received a Dental Assistant Certification.

I love watching each of these students grow into adults, and the Foundation is proud of these program students and alumni!

## SPECIAL FEATURE

# East Foundation Staff Day

Here at East Foundation, we find it vital for each department and team member to understand one another’s operations and how we work together to promote the advancement of land stewardship – our staff days take place each year for that very reason.

This April, East Foundation staff involved in other aspects of our operations gathered at the San Antonio Viejo and learned about branding, vaccination, and other cattle working activities from our ranch staff. It resulted in a day filled with new insights, memories, and further gratitude and respect for the East Foundation ranch staff who do the hard job of managing our cattle herd every day.

Nearing the end of the day, Neal Wilkins presented our Area Maintenance Foreman, Rafael Guerra, with the Brass Spittoon award, a new East Foundation tradition – signifying those who exhibit our core values.

Reflecting those values daily, Rafael strives for excellence, is optimistic, and encourages teamwork throughout his department. Congratulations to Rafael and his team for this special recognition.



## PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

# Museum of South Texas History

PAMELA MORALES

The purpose of the Museum of South Texas History is to preserve and present the borderland heritage of South Texas and northeastern Mexico for all generations. For more than 50 years, the museum has been the best first stop for local visitors, tourists, families, history buffs, school children, educators, and researchers to learn about this historic borderland culture, and its largely untold story.

The signature exhibition, Rio Grande Legacy, is a chronological three-part, walk-through time, starting from prehistory to the mid-20th century. The 1910 Jail, the museum's biggest and most important artifact, houses "The 1910 Jail: An Arresting Artifact and its Story" exhibition and a rotating exhibit space. Adjacent to the jail is the Margaret H. McAllen Memorial Archives, a unit that preserves archival materials such as photographs, historical documents, media, and more. Some of the documents and artifacts in the collections are used to teach children about land ownership and stewardship through Behind the Gates, which is hosted by the East Foundation. Virtually, the museum preserves and presents through the podcast Museum Pláticas: A Live Talk Show and Stories from the Rio Grande.

Gallery spaces and archival materials are showcased during community events such as Summer Saturdays at the Museum and the longstanding Sunday Speaker Series. Come visit Tuesday to Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. at 200 N. Closner Blvd. Edinburg, Texas.



## EMPLOYEE PROFILE



LILLY MORIN

Lilly is from Hondo, Texas. She studied at Southwest Texas Junior College and earned an Associate of Arts degree, then attended Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK) and graduated in May 2020 with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, Range and Wildlife Management.

She has worked with a variety of animal species, including avian species in the Oregon sagebrush steppe and white-tailed deer in South Texas. She anticipates graduating with her Master's degree in Range and Wildlife Management from Sul Ross State University in late 2023, where she researched pronghorn diet and cattle grazing system effects on plant communities.

Lilly is an Educator for the East Foundation. Her duties include visiting classrooms and setting up community events to teach land stewardship, range science, and conservation. In addition, she will assist with field lessons and other educational events on the Foundation's ranches.

Lilly is a proud dog owner and the coolest aunt to two nieces and two nephews.



## FROM THE RANCH

# The First Battalion

MOLLI FOXLEY

The sun is setting on day four. Truck lights illuminate the caliche road outside the Duval County Ranch's hunting lodge near Freer, Texas. It is the last event of the Ranch Competitions, and this is what the cadets have been waiting for – the rope off! The cadets partner up into header and heeler pairs within their herd. As pairs start eliminating each other, it comes down to two herds: the Angus and the Brahmans. It's a back-and-forth fight leading to a final elimination round. The last round showcases the winning herd, Brahman, with an experienced roper and an absolute novice. The night ends with the novice roper on her herd members' shoulders – excited by a triumphant victory.



South Texas Ranch Brigade cadets practice roping for their rope off, just one of the many hands-on activities they participate in during the five-day camp.

This historic rope off was the final night of the first battalion of the South Texas Ranch Brigade (STRB). STRB is one of nine camps offered through Texas Brigades. Texas Brigades is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to educate and empower adolescents with leadership skills and knowledge in wildlife, fisheries, and land stewardship to become

conservation ambassadors for a sustained natural resource legacy. High school age youth apply to attend the five-day camp as a cadet, focusing on ranch management and land stewardship.

SOUTH TEXAS



## Ranch Brigade

From sunup to sundown, the cadets partake in a range of activities including classroom presentations highlighting livestock production, grassland management, natural resource management, and more. The various hands-on activities include low-stress handling demonstrations, cattle workings, plant identification, marching, leadership activities, trivia competitions, public speaking, and communication exercises.

The first day, the cadets began camp with a necropsy of a yearling to learn about the anatomy and function of the body. The same animal will be utilized on day four for a fabrication demonstration educating them on skeletal anatomy, and the marketing of the products obtained from the animal.

When the opportunity to get involved with Texas Brigades presented itself a few years

back, I could not say no. Being a Texas transplant, my first interaction with Texas Brigades was in the summer of 2021, when I had the opportunity to visit the Ranch Brigade hosted in Santa Anna, Texas. I was there less than twenty-four hours and was hooked.

Witnessing a reserved young man find an unknown talent for T-post driving – and receive an instant boost of confidence with a wide smile as his fellow herd members cheered him on – sold it to me.

Texas Brigades and East Foundation both work to empower and educate the next generation in ranching, wildlife, conservation, and land stewardship. The list of similarities could go on and on, but the bottom line is partnerships like these expand our reach and ability to educate and instill a passion for stewardship in our future generations. It is our responsibility to ensure the work we do today will continue with the great minds of tomorrow, which are the students that visit East Foundation lands and the cadets that partake in Texas Brigades.



Cadets and mentors from South Texas Ranch Brigade including our own Molli Foxley on the far right. East Foundation is proud to participate in programs focusing on ranch management and land stewardship like STRB.

## RAINFALL REPORT

# No Complaints, Only Blessings

TODD SNELGROVE

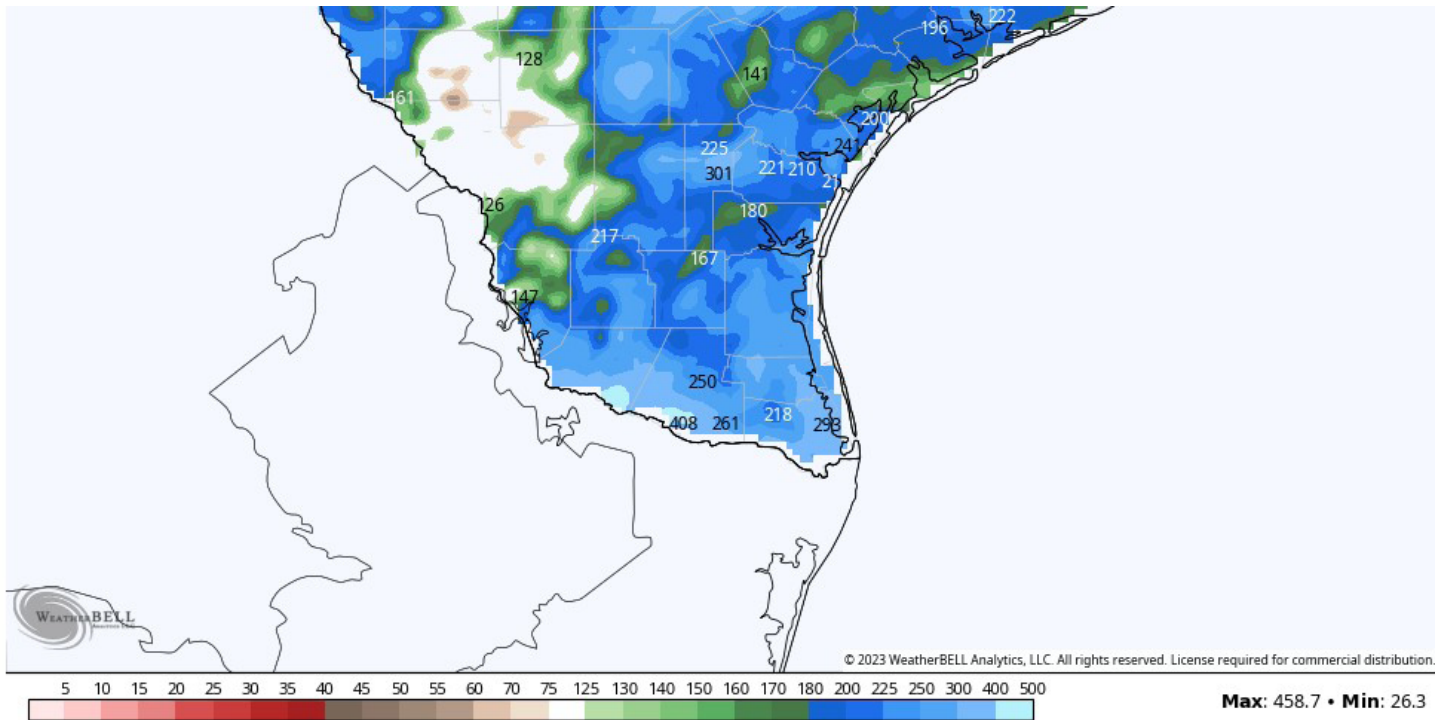


Figure 1. 60-Day precipitation anomaly (Percent of Normal) for deep South Texas as of May 16, 2023.

Spring has been good for us. Sea surface temperatures in the equatorial Pacific Ocean have warmed causing the exit of La Niña and the dry conditions she brings to South Texas. Since the last week of March, we have been blessed with ample rainfall across all the ranches. For example, the San Antonio Viejo Ranch headquarters received 5.8 inches of rain in the last 60 days. This is not an isolated occurrence as five to eight inches of rainfall fell across most of South Texas; including on East Foundation ranches. This is 150 to 250% higher than what we typically get this time of year (see Figure 1).

This brings us to where we are today. To no one's surprise, only hints of drought linger in South Texas. The grass is growing, wildflowers are blooming, cattle are in great condition, and quail have great nesting conditions—no complaints, only blessings.

The forecast through mid-June continues to call for an unsettled weather pattern across South Texas with a modest chance of above average precipitation. After that we'll keep our eyes on the tropics for summer rain and the anticipated return of El Niño later this summer and into the fall.

For more information on drought and other weather events or to view information specific to your part of the state please visit: <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu>.



## SCIENCE AT WORK

# Valuable Skills and Hands-on Experience

ANDREA MONTALVO

East Foundation began its internship program in 2013, with the goal of providing hands-on, quality experiences for college-age students on a working cattle operation and living laboratory on a large scale. Originally, we only hired for one type of position with a very broad job description. The intern primarily assisted with cattle and ranch operations but was also expected to assist wherever needed. Since 2020, we have refined the positions to allow applicants with specific interests to gain a targeted experience in their intended degree or career path. For example, the Ranch Management Internship, in spring and summer, is targeted at students majoring in range or agricultural sciences with an interest in range management as it relates to cattle.

The applicants are typically hoping to gain an understanding and hands-on knowledge of the day-to-day ranch operations. These interns participate in and gain experience gathering cattle on horseback in the pasture and working in the pens with large groups of cattle, where they help sort, brand, palpate, and vaccinate. Ranch Management interns work on windmill repairs, ranch facilities and equipment maintenance, welding, and chemical brush treatment. When possible, interns work on specific projects with the end goal of a public presentation to build their resume and public speaking skills.

In the past, interns have presented at the Texas Section of the Society for Range Management (TSSRM) on topics such as improving cattle forage estimations, ground truthing online forage databases,

and monitoring invasive grasses. A partnership we're proud of, TSSRM is an East Foundation Internship sponsor.

We feel this internship is a great opportunity for those with a career goal in the ranching and agricultural industry and helps to refine the next steps in their education or job choice – in fact, two of our interns have ended up as East Foundation employees!



© Emily McCartney  
Molli Foxley (left) and Zane Herrin (center) both completed internships at the East Foundation that led to permanent positions. Molli is currently a Unit Foreman for East Foundation and Zane was our Director of Cattle Operations until he moved up north to the 6666.

In the fall of 2020, we began another targeted internship program in Range and Wildlife Management. While we expect these interns also to have a good understanding of cattle and ranch management, their specific goals may be more related to gaining practical field experience in range and wildlife research.

Wildlife interns work closely with our range ecology crew in the fall to collect metrics on vegetation structure, composition, and forage availability inside and outside of a large-scale grazing study on the San Antonio Viejo Ranch. The intern, along with the technicians,

also plays an integral role in our deer capture study as they provide consistent help for East Foundation graduate student researchers to maintain consistent protocols in deer transport, sampling, and handlings with changing volunteers.

Other projects our wildlife interns have had the opportunity to participate in include assisting graduate students and employees with white-tailed deer telemetry, ocelot trapping, northern bobwhite trapping, rare plant inventory, and research activities related to exotic harvests. As a result of their hard work, these fall interns/technicians have ended up accepting master's positions on East Foundation-funded projects at Texas Universities. This year, we will combine our range and wildlife internship program with the range ecology crew to provide a more well-rounded experience for a larger group of recent graduates.

We are confident our interns will gain valuable skills and hands-on experience and create valuable networks in their intended field of study. If you or someone you know is interested in working with us, we provide internships and other technician positions in ranching, range, and wildlife to students enrolled in a two or four-year university, or recent graduates, each year. Check our website for open positions.





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[eastfoundation.net](http://eastfoundation.net)