



FROM THE CEO NEAL WILKINS

SCREWORMS AGAIN?

In our [Winter Newsletter](#), we highlighted the historic work of Edward Knippling and Raymond Bushland in developing the Sterile Insect Technique, the primary method for eradicating New World Screwworms. Knippling and Bushland pioneered the use of sterile screwworm flies to eliminate screwworm infestations throughout North America. Last winter, screwworms had advanced into southern Mexico, with three reported cases in livestock in the state of Chiapas. This prompted the USDA to temporarily close the U.S. border to Mexican cattle imports. The most recent movement began when screwworms breached the containment barrier at Panama's Darién Gap in 2022. By November 2024, screwworm infestations had spread over 1,000 miles through Central America and entered Mexico.

Over the past five months (through June 17, 2025), the number of reported screwworm cases in Mexico has surged from three to 2,177, with the count increasing weekly. During this period, reported cases have spread

northward over 300 miles and are now present in seven Mexican states. In early May 2025, the USDA again closed the U.S. border to Mexican cattle imports after Mexico reported screwworms in livestock in Oaxaca and Veracruz—approximately 127 miles north of a secondary containment barrier at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, the narrow region of southern Mexico. As of now, the closest reported case is about 600 miles from the U.S. border (Figure 1).

WHAT ABOUT STERILE FLIES?

This progression through Central America and southern Mexico occurred despite the application of sterile screwworm flies from the sole production facility in Panama. At full capacity, the Panama facility produces approximately 100 million flies per week. During the previous U.S. infestation, three sterile fly production facilities operated in Mission, Texas; Chiapas, Mexico; and Panama. At their peak, these facilities collectively produced up to 700 million sterile flies per week for dispersal. This stark contrast highlights the need to restore greater production capacity for sterile flies. Efforts are underway to address this issue.



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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.

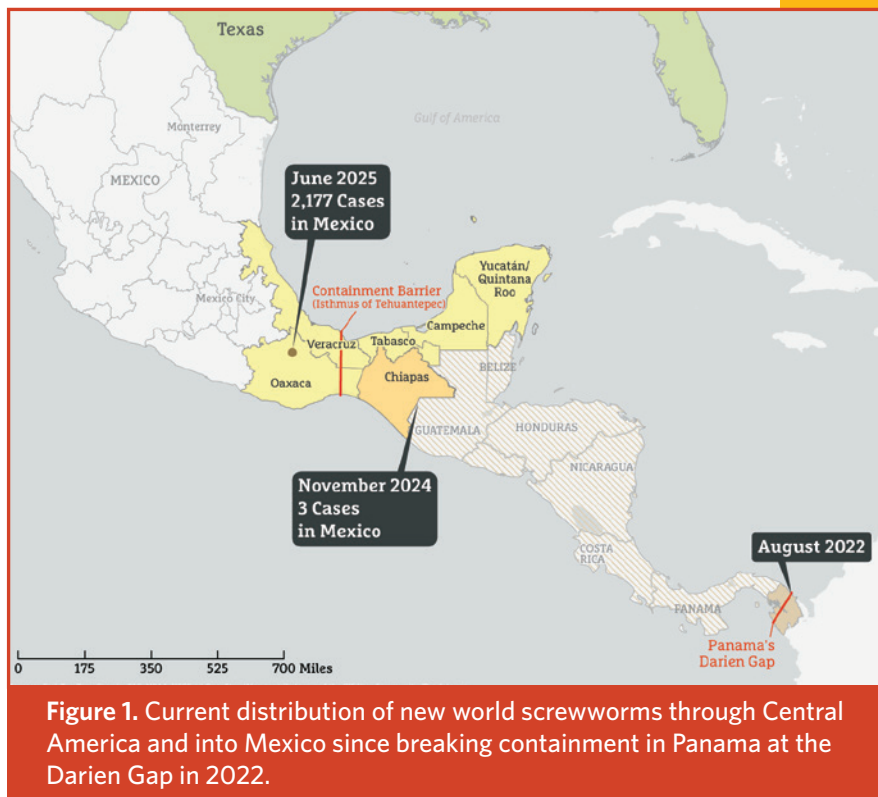
East Foundation was established with a bequest from the estate of Robert East in 2007. In pursuit of our mission, we use our resources to build future leaders through programs that introduce students to private land stewardship. We invest in future professionals through internships, graduate fellowships, 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.

Through the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, Texas Wildlife Association, South Texans Property Rights Association, and other groups, ranchers are urging Congress and the USDA to allocate funds for a new U.S.-based facility to produce sterile screwworm flies. Additionally, the Secretary of Agriculture has committed funding to equip an existing fruit fly facility in Mexico to produce sterile screwworm flies as well as a dispersal facility in Texas. It remains unclear how long it will take for these new facilities to become operational, but some estimate it could take two to three years to achieve the production levels needed to push screwworms back toward the former containment barrier. In the meantime, we must optimize the use of the limited sterile screwworm flies available.

At the USDA, there is growing attention to the looming risk of infestation in the U.S. Scientists at the USDA's Knipling-Bushland U.S. Livestock Insects Research Laboratory in Kerrville have been researching innovative methods for more effective screwworm control. One promising approach involves a genetically modified strain of screwworms that can be manipulated for a process that only yields sterile males. This method effectively doubles production capacity while reducing the radiation required for sterilization, as female flies require more radiation to sterilize. If authorized, this technology could significantly enhance screwworm eradication efforts. Other innovations, if implemented, could further strengthen the arsenal for screwworm control.




A group of scientists recently published an overview in the journal *Science* discussing the ethical arguments for using these new technologies to deliberately eradicate screwworms. [It is an insightful read.](#)

WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

While efforts to increase capacity for combating screwworms through both traditional and new technologies are encouraging, immediate action is still needed. Hoping screwworms do not cross the U.S. border is insufficient as a strategy. Ranchers who experienced the hardships of screwworm infestations through the 1960s are valuable advisors on the challenges we may face. In the short term, we need guidance on the legal and ethical use of drugs for preventive treatment in cattle and wildlife. Clear direction on surveillance, reporting protocols, containment, and response measures is also essential. For this, we must rely on agency officials at the USDA, the Texas Animal Health Commission and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. For education and outreach, the Texas A&M AgriLife network is critical. Additionally, we must stay engaged with USDA scientists and officials as they develop tools for control.

One initial step in preparation is delivering information through workshops for ranch managers, wildlife managers, and other livestock producers. One such effort is a workshop on June 25 in Kingsville, Texas.

We may not be able to completely prevent screwworm infestations, but through preparation, we can mitigate their impact while developing the means to eradicate them once again. With luck, we might avoid the worst. 





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 program alumni.



GILBERT LOPEZ

EMPLOYEE PROFILE

Gilbert Lopez is a native South Texan. He was born in Edinburg and grew up in Elsa. Gilbert is the Shop Assistant at East Foundation. He has a background in automotive technology and agriculture and grew up farming and ranching in South Texas.

His expertise includes operating and maintaining heavy machinery, with a focus on brush clearing, cotton and milo harvesting, and hay baling.

As Shop Assistant, Gilbert oversees and maintains the Foundation's diverse fleet of vehicles, from pickups and XUVs to heavy equipment and ranching implements. He ensures everything runs smoothly across the ranches. Safety is a big priority for Gilbert. He confirms that all vehicles have inspected fire extinguishers and first aid kits to ensure the safety of all the staff and partners who utilize our fleet.

Gilbert is a generational talent at East Foundation. His father worked on our ranches before the Foundation was established.

He enjoys hunting, fishing, playing video games, photography, and stargazing. Working on the ranch gives him the opportunity to take amazing pictures and see lots of stars at night. Gilbert also loves dogs. He has a labrador and a corgi.

In his own words, "What I enjoy most about the Foundation is our team. Having an opportunity to work with such an amazing staff is what makes it worth it to me."



DELANIE SLIFKA


ALUMNI PROFILE

Delanie is originally from outside Chicago but spent most of her childhood growing up in North Texas. Delanie's passion for wildlife began at an early age, growing up in and around zoos due to her mom's job as an animal nutritionist. Initially

wanting to pursue a job in the zoo field, Delanie started a degree at Texas A&M University-Kingsville in Animal Science with a minor in Range and Wildlife

Management with the hope of going on to study animal behavior. During the pursuit of her degree, her focus shifted to broader wildlife management, and she decided to pursue her master's in Range and Wildlife Management at Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute. Her master's research was part of an ongoing, ten-year project that focused on trends in avian populations on the three largest East Foundation ranches – San Antonio Viejo, El Sauz, and Santa Rosa. Delanie's work with East Foundation gave her a greater perspective on the importance of private landowner investment in conservation. Working with the Foundation prepared Delanie well for all the other jobs she has taken throughout the years. Through East Foundation, she learned how to communicate and work with both other scientists and the public.

After acquiring her master's degree, Delanie went on to jobs with Oregon State University, Idaho Fish and Game, and Western EcoSystems Technology, working with both birds and fish. Amazingly, everywhere she went, she met people who knew of East Foundation and the work that was being done here in South Texas.

Delanie is currently working for Texas Parks and Wildlife as a Fish and Wildlife Technician at the Marine Development Center in Corpus Christi, working with red drum, spotted sea trout, and southern flounder. Her job is primarily focused on researching southern flounder. While her focus transitioned from birds to fish, Delanie continues to use the research and writing skills she learned throughout her master's and her time at East Foundation. 



PROUD PARTNER



Our Texas Our Future



One thing every Texan has in common is our love for this state.

And as Texans ourselves at H-E-B, we couldn't agree more. That's why we are committed to ensuring that our state is just as great 100 years from now as it is today through H-E-B's commitment: Our Texas, Our Future.

This is a promise to you, our customers, that we will help preserve Texas' natural resources: through how we source products and what we carry, to how we manage surplus food and recycling efforts, to investing in renewable energy. Together we can have an impact and protect our treasured Texas land, water, and air for future generations.

At H-E-B, there are millions of reasons we care about conserving and protecting Texas' resources. That's because millions of families rely on us for their food, and as a company, we rely on the richness of Texas' land, water, and air to supply that food.

Preserving our land is a shared value with East Foundation and their Behind the GatesSM education program. After all, the Texas Landscape doesn't just provide beautiful views, but plentiful agriculture, too. Our partnership plays a vital role in promoting land stewardship through ranching, science, and education.

To learn more about H-E-B's sustainability commitment, visit <https://ourtexasourfuture.com/>.



FROM THE RANCH

TREY DYER

Fixed Assets are defined as assets such as land, buildings, and equipment which are purchased for long-term use and are not likely to be converted quickly into cash. Therefore it is important for an organization to manage and maintain those assets to realize the most value from them over a longer period of time. East Foundation operates across more than 217,000 acres in South Texas along with the necessary facilities, vehicles, and equipment required to manage those lands and support our mission of promoting the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education.

In addition to the physical management and maintenance of the land, landowners must also manage things like right-of-ways, easements, energy




leases, and any other agreements or contracts related to property. Property taxes also require a degree of management by the landowner working with the local appraisal district to ensure things like ownership, property valuations, and land use are accurately reflected in the tax rolls.

When it comes to facilities, vehicles, and equipment, preventative maintenance is paramount. East Foundation Shop Foreman, Andy Lopez, and Shop Assistant, Gilbert Lopez, ensure that all vehicles and equipment are regularly maintained according to manufacturer's standards. This includes things like regular oil changes, as well as replacing air filters, tires, and other parts that require replacement on a regular basis. However, no matter how diligent one is with preventative maintenance, things eventually break. Especially in a ranch environment. Andy and Gilbert do a great job diagnosing and fixing issues quickly to reduce down time.

Buildings and infrastructure are managed in much the same way. Performing scheduled maintenance and addressing issues quickly ensures that downtime is reduced, small problems don't become larger problems, and costs are controlled. This is accomplished either in-house, or, when necessary, using specialized tradesmen and contractors. Capital projects such as building and repairing roads, new construction, and fencing all need to be planned around each department's activities to reduce the number of conflicts the project might create.

Finally, managing the use of equipment and facilities requires constant communication with a team coordinating reservations and housekeeping for East Foundation's facilities.

The number of research partners, interns, technicians, students, employees, and guests on East Foundation properties continues to increase, and our programs, as well as our people, continue to rely on our land and fixed assets to help them accomplish their important work. Thank you to the talented team that keeps our operations moving forward. 





EDUCATION INSIGHTS

STRENGTHENING OUR BEHIND THE GATESSM PROGRAM THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

By Elisa Velador



Mother Teresa once said, “I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things.” This philosophy can be applied across different nations, cultures, families, teams, businesses, and organizations no matter what they are trying to accomplish.

At East Foundation, our mission is to promote the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education. East Foundation’s Behind the GatesSM education program impacts thousands of students and teachers every year by working to deliver quality, science-backed instruction that encourages land stewardship. When it comes to taking students Behind the GatesSM of our working ranches, we would not be able to accomplish our mission without the help of our valuable partners, most of whom have been with us for over 10 years! While we highlight a few key partnerships here, success relies on a much larger network of collaborators.

Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) has been a great, like-minded partner for many years. Their Conservation Legacy mission is “Educating generations of Texans about land stewardship through engagement in the natural world from classrooms to the outdoors, using land as the guide.” With TWA’s help, we have delivered science TEKS-aligned lessons and activities, Discovery Trunks, Distance Learning, and Teacher Workshops for educators in South Texas. Together, we bring natural resource education into classrooms and out on the land. TWA also offers a wide range of educational opportunities for Texas landowners and educates youth and adults on the important role hunting plays in conservation.


Land Stewardship Ambassadors, our immersive, 10-week leadership program for high school students, would not be possible without our partner, the Witte Museum. Students experience the best of two worlds while learning about science, conservation, history, and culture. Instructors from the Witte Museum staff lead a group of Bexar County students every year, while East Foundation staff lead students from Cameron and Webb counties. Together, we have certified more than 260 students as Land Stewardship Ambassadors who are equipped to advocate for our land, water, and wildlife no matter what career they choose!

Texas Master Naturalists (TMN) is a volunteer organization with chapters in different regions across the state. In the Rio Grande Valley, there are two chapters, the Rio Grande Valley, and the South Texas Border chapters of the TMN. These knowledgeable individuals collectively volunteer thousands of hours

of their time to help local nature centers, state parks, wildlife refuges and more. Some help with manual labor such as keeping gardens free of weeds and some help by educating the public or by leading interpretive nature walks. Our education team relies on Texas Master Naturalists to help with our Behind the Gates Field Days at El Sauz. They help with the set up and take down as well as with leading students in different activities and lessons. Students and teachers alike enjoy learning from these native plant and animal experts.



IDEA Public Schools has partnered with East Foundation since 2014. Through this partnership, close to 15,000 students have participated in a classroom presentation and Behind the Gates Field Days at El Sauz! With the focus being 5th graders, these students get to learn about ranching, wildlife, ecosystems, ocelots, watersheds and much more during their time with us, which will help them be successful on their state science STAAR test at the end of the school year. IDEA Camp Rio guides help East Foundation during the week-long Behind the Gates Field Days events to ensure that those days run smoothly. East Foundation also utilizes IDEA Camp Rio’s multipurpose room to conduct its Land Stewardship Ambassador meetings in the spring semester.

We value these and other partnerships and are truly grateful to work with such great organizations who care about the next generation of land stewards. Although Mother Teresa focused on humanitarian and charitable work throughout her life, encouraging people to show love and compassion to one another and to practice humility and selflessness, our work involves a lot of the same practices. Together with our partners, we teach our youth to practice love and compassion toward our land, water, and wildlife for the greater good. This will ensure that our working lands and private lands thrive for generations to come. 



EAST FOUNDATION'S ENDANGERED SPECIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The purpose of East Foundation's science team is to provide information to enable effective decision-making by stewards of working lands. To do so, we conduct research projects across our ranches in South Texas and communicate the findings of our research to other land managers. Our research spans the areas of livestock productivity, land stewardship, and wildlife management and conservation.

One topic of interest within our wildlife management and conservation area is endangered species. Research, management, and conservation activities on private lands are essential for the maintenance and recovery of endangered and other rare species nationwide. Just on East Foundation ranchlands, for example, El Sauz provides habitat for some of the last remaining endangered wild ocelots in the United States and serves as a living laboratory for the study of ocelots, and San Antonio Viejo is a planned site for reintroducing an additional ocelot population to help recover the species.



Within our endangered species management program, we have engaged in research focused on many endangered, threatened, and other species of conservation concern such as ocelots, Texas tortoises, and white-tailed hawks. In these projects, East Foundation's science staff partners with wildlife science and policy experts from various organizations—including state and federal wildlife agencies, universities, and conservation organizations. For example, our ocelot research and conservation efforts are conducted in collaboration with Texas A&M University and Texas A&M University-Kingsville, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden.

While private lands like East Foundation's are key to endangered species management, many private landowners around the country feel disincentivized to overtly engage in endangered species work on their properties. That's because the presence of protected species can expose landowners to legal liabilities



through Endangered Species Act regulations. Under the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's current regulations, indirect "harm" to species that occurs through modification of listed species' occupied habitats during land use is prohibited.

"Endangered species management on private lands requires a multi-disciplinary approach spanning ecology, policy, and economics. Successful collaboration also requires collaboration across organizations. Individuals pictured above represent the agencies, universities, landowners, and conservation organizations that have united to support ocelot recovery on private lands in South Texas."

These regulations can impact landowners' abilities to operate—though the Fish and Wildlife Service has recently proposed to rescind the regulations of harm.

Effective stewardship of protected species on private lands requires informed decision-making in light of the (sometimes changing) regulations for these species and the programs that landowners can use to obtain regulatory certainty. With that, East Foundation's endangered species management program studies policy relevant to managing the regulatory implications of harboring protected species on their lands. Working alongside research partners, we also seek to discover ecological information to inform on-the-ground management activities for endangered species and economic information about how landowners can obtain tangible value from endangered species.

We recently published the first entries in a series of Management Bulletins describing our research on the regulatory and economic dimensions of endangered species management on private lands. We hope that these bulletins provide valuable information from the perspective of a private landowner engaged in endangered species management on working cattle ranches in Texas. The bulletins can be found at: eastfoundation.net/media.



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