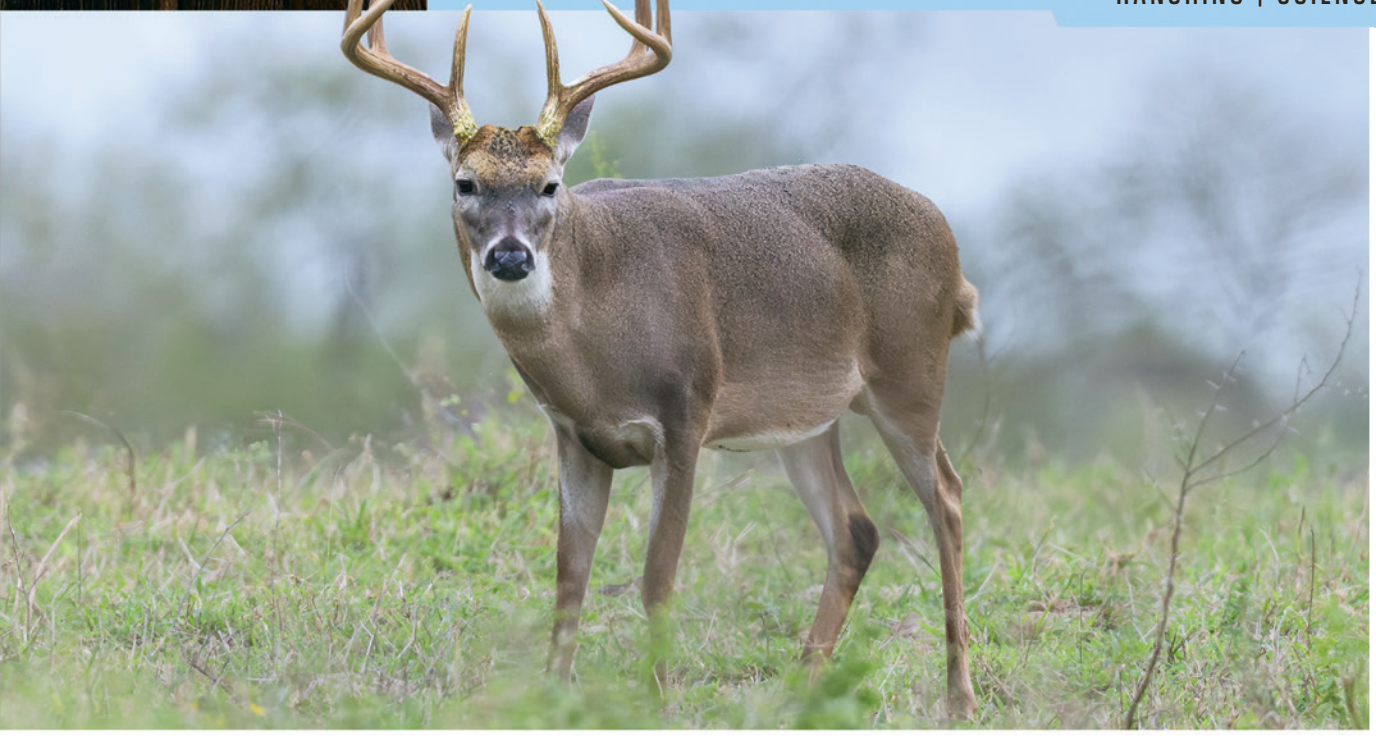
East FOUNDATION

WINTER 2026

# NEWSLETTER

RANCHING | SCIENCE | EDUCATION









# FROM THE CEO

NEAL WILKINS

## SIXTH LARGEST CITY

Like most people, the start of a new year focuses our attention on how we plan to allocate our time and effort. It's not a bad exercise, but in reality, much of our energy is often consumed by issues we didn't anticipate. For example, this time last year we did not expect to spend so much effort responding to the threat of the New World Screwworm. That threat is still with us, so it remains on our list for 2026 and beyond.

Looking back further into 2024, we also did not anticipate the extensive effort required to respond to the siting of transmission lines that threatened to impact much of East Foundation's ranchland. These proposals were part of the Public Utility Commission's (PUC) response to the state's 2021 power grid failure during Winter Storm Uri. After Uri, strengthening Texas's power grid became a priority for ERCOT, and the PUC began planning hundreds of miles of new transmission lines.

For us—and for our South Texas neighbors—this meant heavy engagement in the planning process to avoid poorly conceived routes that initially proposed to cross large expanses of otherwise unbroken ranch country. It was essentially our responsibility to provide the information needed to move dozens of miles of transmission lines to locations where they would cause the least damage to native rangelands, wildlife habitat, and ranch operations. This effort required hiring attorneys and preparing substantial expert testimony.

In the end, we largely prevailed and avoided major losses to our ranchlands. However, the expense in both time and money was considerable, including legal costs well into six figures. During this process, landowners are often reminded by the utility operator that route modifications and re-siting would increase their costs—and that those costs would be passed on to ratepayers, in this case roughly one million retail customers, primarily in urban growth areas. The unavoidable conclusion was that, without good routing decisions, dozens of private ranching operations were being asked to sacrifice value in exchange for slightly lower utility rates in urban areas. In other words, the transmission siting process tends to socialize benefits to urban residents while privatizing the permanent impact to land. Like most ranchers in similar situations, we agreed that the grid needed additional transmission capacity; we simply disagreed that ratepayer interests should be prioritized over the conservation of native rangelands, wildlife habitat, and viable ranching enterprises.

*Continued on Page 3*

East FOUNDATION



**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

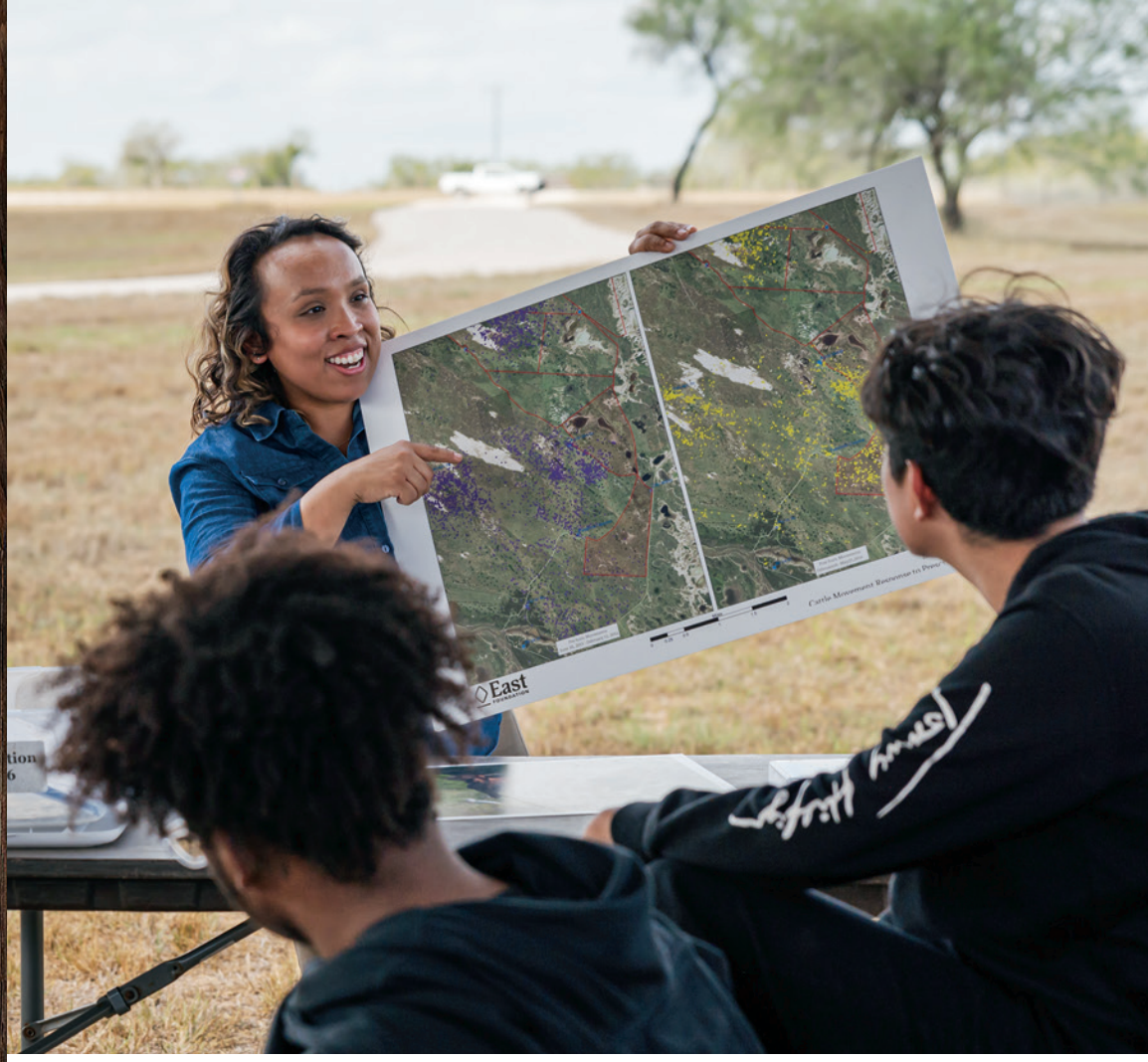
San Antonio

200 Concord Plaza Drive, Suite 410

San Antonio, Texas 78216

(210) 447-0126

eastfoundation.net




# 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.**

Texas has more than 50,000 miles of high-voltage transmission lines, including a rapidly expanding backbone of 345-kilovolt and proposed 765-kilovolt corridors. These lines traverse rural landscapes, fragmenting working lands and imposing permanent right-of-way impacts so that distant population centers can enjoy reliable power. Using conservative assumptions, existing transmission rights-of-way—combined with planned expansion over the next five years—will occupy roughly 180,000 acres of land. If "transmission lines" were a city, their footprint would make it the sixth-largest city in the state: slightly smaller than Austin, but larger than El Paso.

Would we develop our state's sixth-largest city with an approach that has no comprehensive plan, no early public engagement, and asks those most affected to bear the costs without sharing in the benefits?

## ARE CITIES THE ENGINE OF TEXAS PROSPERITY, OR THE EXPRESSION OF IT?

As Texas continues to confront the challenges of population growth, the narrative driving public policy too often suggests that the state should prioritize cities and suburbs—leaving many to conclude that working lands are either irrelevant or relics of the past. In January 2025, ahead of the 89th State Legislative Session, a well-qualified group of university-based economists and policy experts released The Texas Metropolitan Blueprint: A Five-Year Policy Agenda for Action. They emphasized the importance of their plan by stating that "Texas's 26 metropolitan areas, home to 90% of its population, are the engines of its economic growth."

While some principles and recommendations in this agenda seem reasonable, the report troubled me because it appeared to miss a fundamental point. In my view, the prosperity of the state is sustained by the 139 million acres of private working lands that exist outside those 26 metropolitan areas. This idea is perhaps best illustrated by a quote from William Jennings Bryan during his 1896 presidential campaign:

"Burn down your cities and leave our farms, and your cities will spring up again as if by magic; but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country."

Bryan was not dismissing cities; he was reminding us that cities are an outcome of prosperity, not its source. They concentrate people, capital, and transactions, but they do not produce the land-based essentials on which prosperity ultimately depends. Texas today illustrates this distinction at scale. Our metropolitan areas function as centers of coordination and value capture—corporate headquarters, finance, logistics, health care, and advanced services cluster there. GDP per acre in large metropolitan areas can exceed $100,000, while the statewide average is closer to $16,000 per acre. But GDP measures where value is recorded, not where physical production occurs or where ecological costs are borne.

To understand that difference, it helps to start with something concrete: beef. Texas produces roughly 2.6 billion pounds of beef each year at the ranch level, while Texans consume about 1.7 billion pounds. In other words, Texas ranchers produce approximately 50 percent more beef than Texans eat. That surplus does not come from cities—it comes from working lands.

The contrast sharpens at the county level. The top 25 beef-producing counties account for about 43 percent of Texas's ranch-level beef production, yet together they have a population of roughly 400,000. Meanwhile, the top 25 beef-consuming counties—home to nearly 24 million Texans—consume about 1.3 to 1.4 billion pounds of beef annually. In short, a relatively small rural population produces food for tens of millions of people living elsewhere. I have glossed over parts of the supply chain—feeders, packers, and retailers—but the point remains, and it serves as a useful illustration.

This is what we might call a burden—not in a negative sense, but as a description of where land, water, labor, and ecological risk are borne relative to where demand is concentrated.

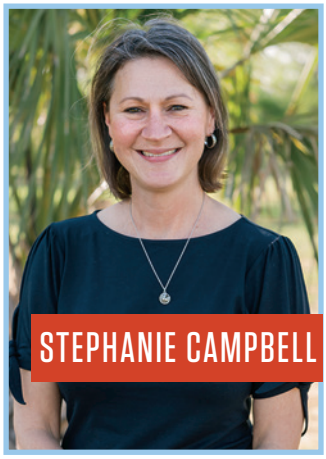
Once you see this pattern with beef, you begin to see it everywhere.

Water provides another clear example. About three-quarters of Texans live on about seven percent of the land, yet the reservoirs, aquifers, recharge zones, and wellfields that supply those cities are overwhelmingly located outside dense urban areas. Rural counties host groundwater pumping, face land subsidence risks, and bear long-term aquifer uncertainty, while metropolitan regions receive the reliability needed to sustain growth. Energy follows a similar pattern, as do the ecosystem services provided by native landscapes—along with wildlife habitat, hunting opportunities, and outdoor recreation.

Texas's working lands—farms, ranches, and forestlands—cover more than 139 million acres, representing over 80 percent of the state. From a real estate perspective, their value approaches $500 billion. If the working lands of Texas were a Fortune 500 company, they would rank among the world's largest corporations—currently around 18th, just behind Exxon Mobil. Even that comparison understates their importance when measured against the $2.8 trillion Texas GDP they help support. Enterprises of this size are usually engaged early and deliberately when major policy or infrastructure decisions are made.

# 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.




## EMPLOYEE PROFILE

A native Texan, Stephanie Campbell was born in Brady, Texas, and was raised in San Antonio and Kingsville along with her three brothers. She has a bachelor's and master's degree in plant and soil science from Texas A&M University-Kingsville. Throughout her life she's lived in Georgia, West Virgina, Florida, and Texas.

Stephanie Campbell is a Bookkeeper for East Foundation. In her role, she supports the Finance Team with payroll, accounts payable, and accounts receivable. In addition, she prepares benefits and retirement reports.

Prior to joining us at East Foundation, Stephanie was working in the real estate industry in residential appraisals. She was blessed to be a stay-at-home mom for 14 years, supporting her three kids Wes, Morgan, and Aubrey, and volunteering frequently at their schools.

As Bookkeeper, Stephanie has the opportunity to work with everyone, which she enjoys, especially the Finance Team, who are always helpful and supportive of her.

In her free time Stephanie enjoys baking, cooking, and crafts. She likes road trips, camping, and hiking with her husband, three kids, and her dog, Sally.


## ALUMNI PROFILE

Maggie Sinner is originally from Cody, Wyoming, and learned the value of wildlife conservation growing up near Yellowstone National Park. For her undergraduate education, she attended Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado, and earned her degree in Biological Sciences.

Wanting to further develop her skills and professional credentials, Maggie attended Texas A&M University to earn a master's degree in Rangeland, Wildlife, and Fisheries Science. While there, she

advanced East Foundation's long-term small mammal monitoring program through her work on the El Sauz and San Antonio Viejo ranches assessing small mammal response to prescribed fire. Additionally, Maggie gained leadership experience by supervising and mentoring a large monitoring crew of emerging young wildlife biologists.

Maggie is currently working as an Associate Scientist for Environmental Consulting and Technologies based out of Houston. In her current role, Maggie is responsible for conducting wetland delineations and performing surveys for threatened and endangered species related to solar and wind farm development. She regularly uses her knowledge and experience gained while working with kangaroo rats on Foundation ranches to perform habitat assessments for the Texas Kangaroo Rat, a species that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed for listing as threatened.

In her own words:

"Working with East Foundation gave me experience in managing a large field team, which has proven to be incredibly valuable for my career. I made lifelong friends with researchers working on projects on their ranches. I am grateful for the opportunity to live and work in South Texas – a region I knew nothing about before I arrived at the San Antonio Viejo for the first time. The biodiversity in this region is incredible and I'm thankful that East Foundation is committed to land stewardship and conservation."

# PROUD PARTNER

MARY PEARL MEUTH

TEXAS Master Naturalist™

The Texas Master Naturalist (TMN) Program is a statewide network of highly trained volunteers dedicated to education, outreach, and the conservation of Texas' natural resources. Across 48 chapters, TMN volunteers contribute more than 550,000 service hours each year—a statewide impact valued at over $13 million annually—supporting resource managers, researchers, and conservation partners at every scale.

In South Texas, TMN volunteers from the South Texas Border Chapter and the Rio Grande Valley Chapter play a special role in advancing East Foundation's mission. Through the Foundation's Behind the Gates SM program, certified Texas Master Naturalists serve as educational leads and field-station volunteers, helping student visitors experience the ecological and cultural significance of working lands at the El Sauz and San Antonio Viejo. Their service also extends to supporting species documentation, assisting with field observations, and engaging the public in science-based conservation learning.

TMN volunteers also regularly participate in bioblitz wildlife surveys at El Sauz, contributing to species distribution data that enriches the Foundation's understanding of species diversity on the property. Since the partnership began, Texas Master Naturalists have provided 860 hours of service to East Foundation's programs and events.

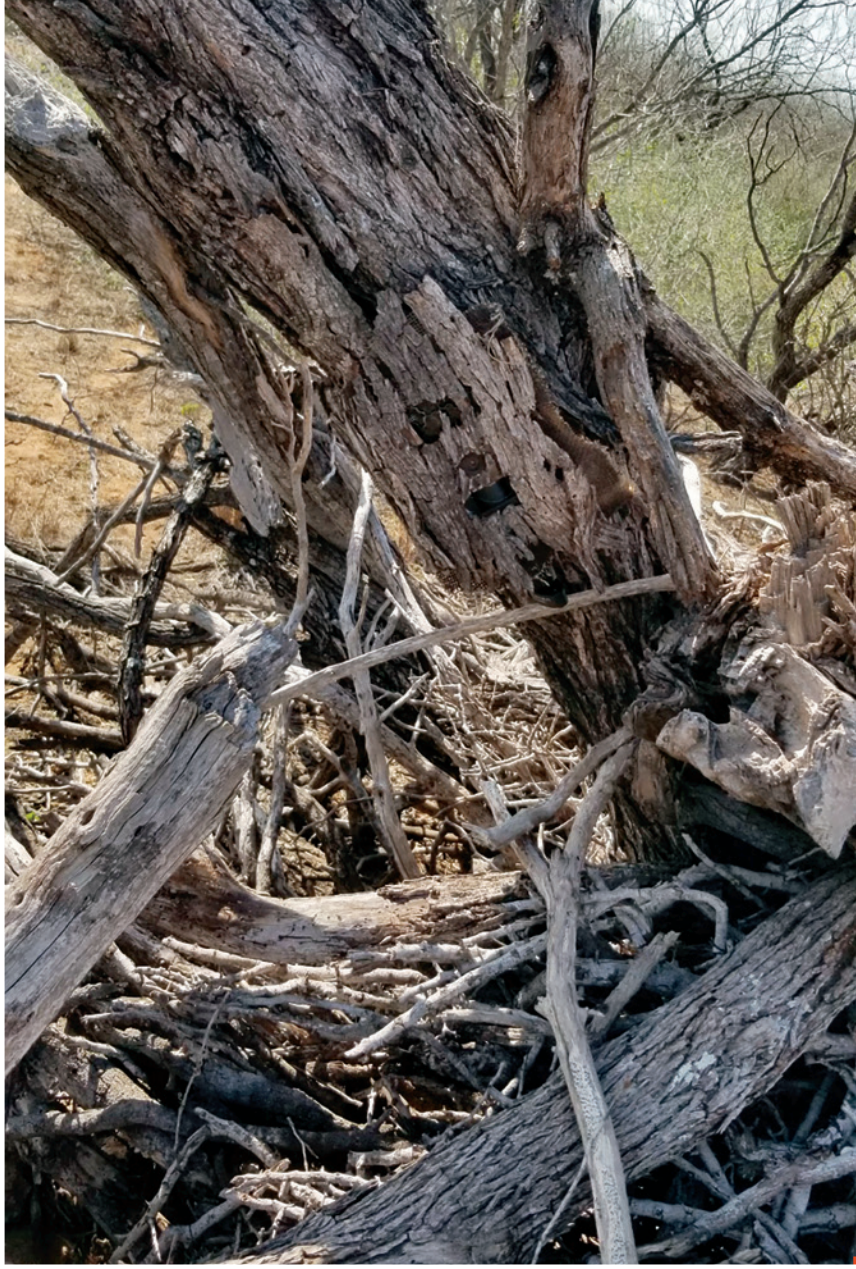
In 2023, the TMN Annual Meeting brought more than 500 volunteers to the Rio Grande Valley — and during the conference's signature El Sauz Eclipse Field Day, participants traveled by bus to the ranch to view the annular solar eclipse, learn from expert speakers, and take part in six immersive field-station rotations. Topics ranged from ocelot research and coastal brush ecology to aquatic habitat studies and grazing management, giving volunteers another "boots-on-the-ground" exposure to the diverse ecosystems and working lands stewardship practices at El Sauz. The event combined science, land stewardship, and public engagement — offering a memorable, hands-on experience that further deepened participants' appreciation for South Texas' unique ecology.

"Many volunteers reported the day as a highlight of their TMN experience, and the data and observations collected during the field stations continue to inform ongoing conservation efforts." Mary Pearl Meuth, TMN Program Coordinator

Together, East Foundation and the Texas Master Naturalist Program are strengthening science-based stewardship and building a deeper appreciation for the rich biodiversity of South Texas.

# FROM THE RANCH

RICHARD DOUGLAS



## INTEGRATING NEW TECHNOLOGIES WITH TRADITIONAL RURAL SECURITY PRACTICES

For many, the speed which modern technology advances is dizzying, especially for those of us who remember life before smartphones. From cellular trail cameras and improved night-vision capabilities to programmable UAVs (drones) and, more recently, artificial intelligence, the role of technology in security operations has expanded rapidly and significantly.

To keep up with the pace of technological advancements, the East Foundation Security Team continually evaluates emerging technologies which can be applied in practical ways to strengthen our ability to monitor access, detect and deter illegal activity, responder faster in an emergency. Combined, they serve as a critical force multiplier for our local, state, and federal law enforcement partners across South Texas. Given the vast and remote nature of the region—and the East Foundation's footprint within it—technology allows our comparatively small team to extend its reach by being "virtually" present in multiple locations at the same time.

Technology alone is not enough. The remoteness that defines much of South Texas makes strong, trusted relationships with first responders

essential. By leaning into these relational networks, we are significantly more prepared and capable of responding to incidents across our many areas of responsibility. Technology, paired with solid professional relationships, is far more effective and efficient than technology used in isolation.

While the time and expense required to integrate new tools into a layered security approach is worthwhile, these advancements must be supported by old-fashioned leg work. Getting out into the brush, gathering firsthand intelligence, and maintaining relationships within our communities remain critical. Without this groundwork, even the most advanced systems can quickly become burdensome and unwieldy.

Much of the non-ranching world views ranch security teams as gate guards, pseudo-game wardens, and roaming security patrols. In reality, the scope of responsibility is much broader. In remote environments, security personnel may be the first and only immediate responders to medical emergencies, often operating in difficult conditions where professional medical assistance may be an hour or more away. In these situations, response planning must account for severely delayed arrival times rather than the minutes typical in urban settings.

Advancements in communication networks, mobile mapping applications, and dispatch systems have greatly improved coordination and response efficiency, and these tools are invaluable. At the same time, we intentionally layer technology with real-world experience by inviting our first-responder partners onto our properties. Through events such as Behind the Gates Field Days, hosting department meetings at our facilities, and offering training opportunities in the remote areas where they operate, we help partners become familiar with East Foundation ranches terrain and infrastructure they may one day need to navigate in an emergency. This familiarity builds confidence, trust, and faster, more effective responses across not only our ranches, but South Texas as a whole.

In the end, our approach to security is about balance—embracing innovation while staying grounded in field experience, professional relationships, and collaboration. Technology enhances our capabilities, but it is people, partnerships, and preparation which make it truly effective.

# EDUCATION INSIGHTS

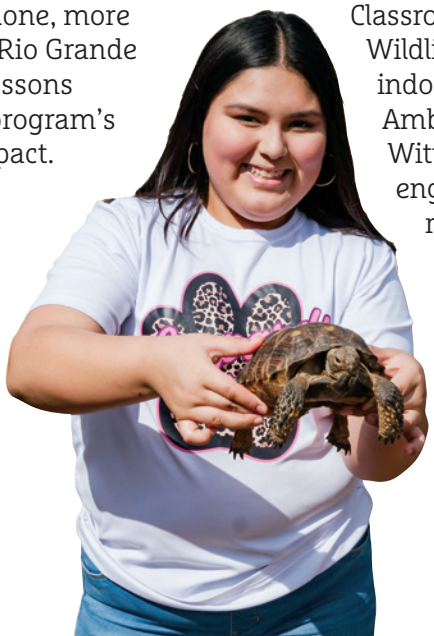
Behind THE GATES EAST FOUNDATION

## CULTIVATING TOMORROW'S LAND STEWARDS THROUGH EAST FOUNDATION'S EDUCATION INITIATIVE

TINA BUFORD

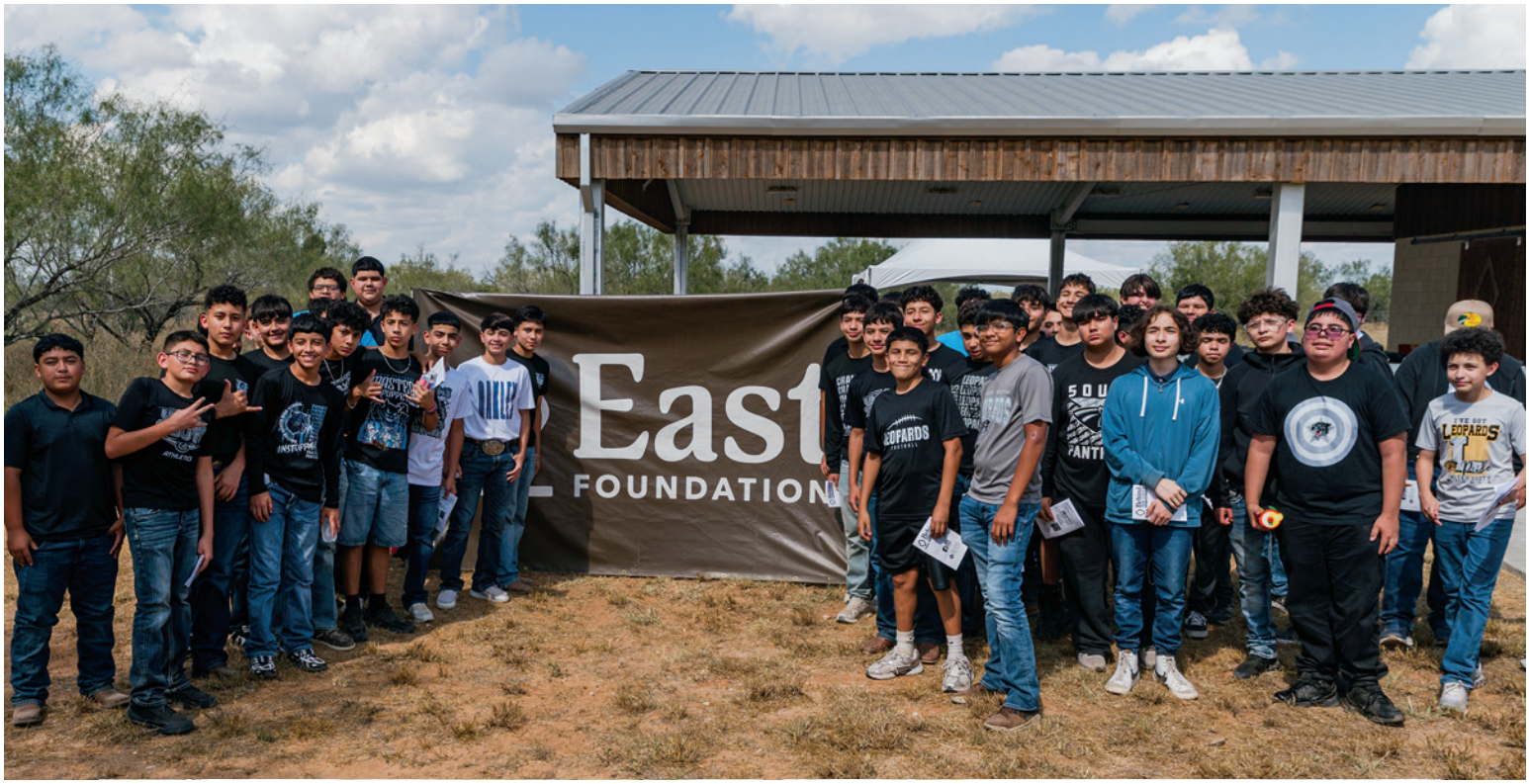
In the rangelands of South Texas, where cattle graze alongside wildlife, East Foundation is quietly revolutionizing education. Since 2014, its flagship Behind the Gates℠ program has invited over 31,000 students, primarily grades 4 through 12, through the gates of working ranches. This hands-on initiative transforms abstract science lessons into immersive experiences, blending ranching realities with conservation principles. In 2024 alone, more than 18,167 young learners in the Rio Grande Valley participated in classroom lessons and field days, underscoring the program's explosive growth and regional impact.

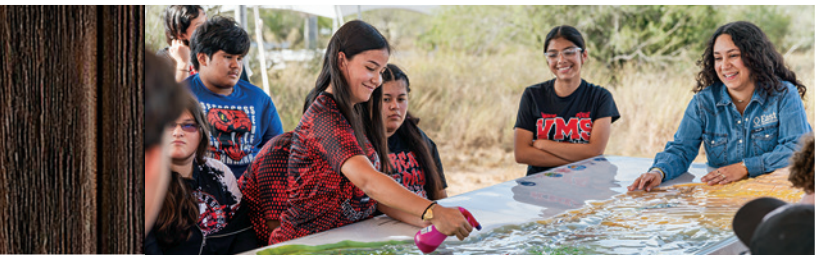
At its core, Behind the Gates℠ operates across three pillars: on-the-land field days, classroom curricula, and in partnership with like-minded organizations. Field days at the Foundation's El Sauz Ranch (home to the Elliff-El Sauz Education Center) and the San Antonio Viejo Ranch (Education pavilion dedicated to the late Harry Flavin) immerse students in rotational stations led by experts from partners including Texas Parks and Wildlife and the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute. Activities explore topics such as soil stewardship, water cycles, wildlife identification, and life cycles, all aligned with Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) standards.

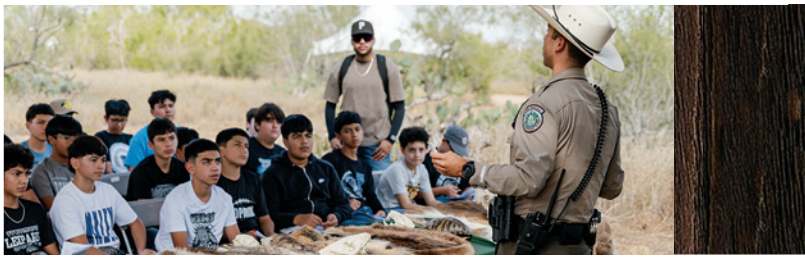


Classroom modules, developed with the Texas Wildlife Association, bring ranch-inspired lessons indoors. For high schoolers, the Land Stewardship Ambassadors program (in partnership with the Witte Museum) builds leadership, fostering civic engagement and career pathways in natural resource-related fields.

Success is measurable and profound. Pre- and post-test scores show significant knowledge gains, with students demonstrating deeper understanding of ecosystems and human impacts. Anecdotally, participants



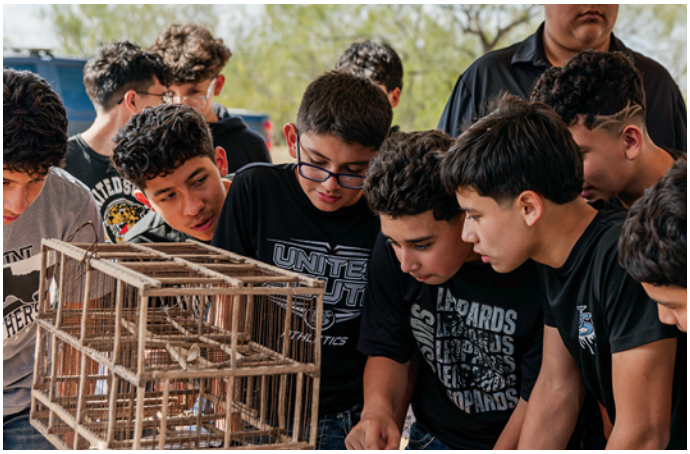





report heightened environmental awareness—many are inspired to pursue conservation careers. Partnerships have scaled the program exponentially, including a collaboration with IDEA Public Schools, proving Behind the Gates℠ as a model for experiential learning. Research backing its design highlights outdoor education benefits: healthier, happier, and more engaged youth, countering screen-time epidemics.

Yet, the program's branding elevates it beyond scattered efforts. A distinct Behind the Gates℠ identity—evoking the authenticity of ranch life—builds instant recognition among educators and communities. It ensures consistent messaging, quality control, and narrative cohesion, making it easier to forge alliances and market the program to South Texas school districts. In an era of fragmented education, branding creates loyalty and legacy, positioning East Foundation as a strong voice for informed land stewardship.

As Texans continue to become more disconnected from the land, the Behind the Gates℠ brand equips future decision-makers to safeguard Texas's working lands. By connecting the land behind our ranch gates to real world food security, East Foundation isn't merely educating; it's ensuring a resilient, conservation-minded tomorrow.



JASON SAWYER

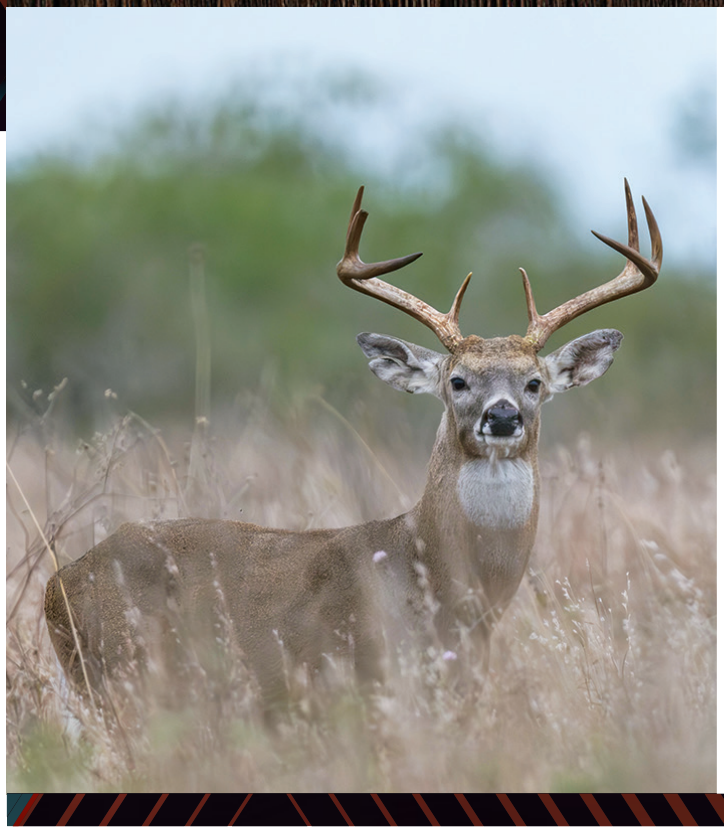
# GAME SPECIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The value of a ranch can be conceived of as the sum of the present values of all revenue streams that the land can support over time. Wildlife populations are important contributors to this value for South Texas ranches. Stewardship that sustains working ranchlands also sustains wildlife and helps maximize the long-term value of the ranch asset.

East Foundation's Science Program is designed to generate information that can guide management decisions to promote the stability and resilience of our resources, including wildlife populations. On working ranchlands where management decisions have real economic and ecological consequences, we study wildlife outcomes at scales and timeframes that matter for long-term viability. Because essentially all game species management decisions occur in the context of hunting, we include harvest pressure as a variable in our studies. We evaluate effects of harvest by comparing responses to unharvested populations on our ranches. This case-control model is difficult for many to execute, either because scale limitations prevent having sufficient separation between harvested and unharvested sites, or because harvest is an embedded component of the system.

Bobwhite quail are a valued resource in South Texas. While weather exerts the most pronounced effects on quail populations, we also examine how controlled harvest, grazing management strategies, and range condition influence the population's ability to recover from shocks. While we can't control the weather, better predictability about these combined effects under different weather conditions allows our managers to be more proactive and ensure recovery from inevitable 'bust' years, so that bobwhite populations in South Texas are robust for generations to come.

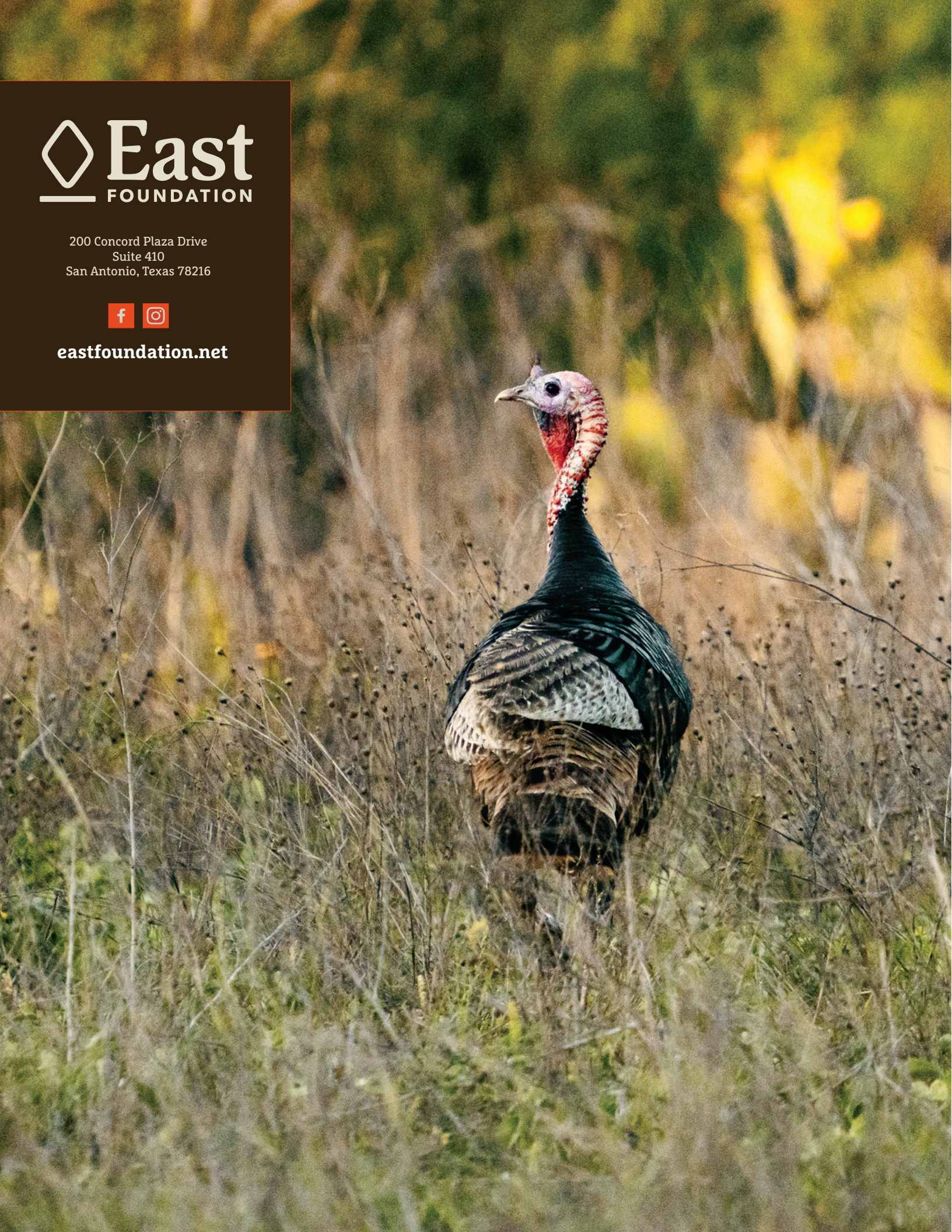
Whitetail deer are another iconic game animal in Texas. Deer populations are typically more stable than



those of bobwhite quail, but recruitment rates (the number of new deer entering the population) can be highly variable due to low fawn production or high fawn losses during weather extremes. While the light, selective harvest typically practiced in South Texas is sustainable, other shocks to the population from pests or disease entering a deer herd can be devastating, and low recruitment rates make it difficult for populations to recover. We are exploring how different management strategies like nutritional supplementation or habitat improvement practices may help buffer these shocks by avoiding recruitment failure to allow rapid recovery or offsetting higher mortality in adult deer. Our current effort is to estimate how nutritional supplementation during stress periods alters population growth rate, whether similar results can be achieved through habitat improvement practices like brush control, and if combining these two strategies increases their effectiveness. Using controlled experiments and direct comparisons, we want to determine the return on investment to these practices in terms of population outcomes and enable managers to make their best decisions about the deployment of these strategies to achieve deer population management goals. Understanding these relationships will also give us insight into optimal recovery strategies if – or when – a significant threat to a local deer population like Chronic Wasting Disease or New World Screwworms emerges, so that we can better sustain this resource into the future.

Non-native wildlife are often viewed as 'invaders,' but the nilgai antelope in South Texas is viewed in a different light. Nilgai have long been viewed as a unique sporting opportunity; their popularity as a game animal continues to increase and demand for nilgai hunts has risen steadily. Because they are non-native, and have extraordinary meat quality, they are also increasingly desired in the commercial meat trade. However, as their population – and popularity – continue to grow, concern exists about resource competition between nilgai, livestock, and native wildlife. We are actively studying nilgai population dynamics, movement patterns, and life history, so that we can better inform decisions about population management when considering multiple uses of a shared rangeland resource base.

Our game species management work uses science on real working ranchlands to reveal outcomes only visible on landscapes where ranching, wildlife, and rangeland management functions operate together in a long-term context. Getting answers isn't always about being 'right'; instead, it is about being able to better predict the outcomes of management actions, so that as land stewards we can make decisions and take actions that help to achieve goals that maximize the long-term value of the ranch and its resources.



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