



FROM THE CEO NEAL WILKINS

SCREWWORMS, THEN AND NOW

KNIPLING AND BUSHLAND'S LEGACY

A few weeks ago, I traveled to Kerrville to attend the opening of the new 52,000-square-foot Knipling-Bushland U.S. Livestock Insects Research Laboratory. Dr. Kim Lohmeyer directs this USDA facility, which serves as the headquarters for our nation's long-term research on cattle fever ticks and New World screwworms. The laboratory was originally established in 1946 and, for nearly 80 years, has hosted generations of scientists quietly engaged in the research and innovation needed to protect our livestock and wildlife resources from insect pests. Much of that work was conducted in World War II-era Quonset huts and aging facilities that remained in service long past their intended lifespan. The new laboratory is a well-deserved and much-needed upgrade.

Continued on Page 3

The facility is named after two Texas scientists whose work changed the course of livestock production throughout the Western Hemisphere. Edward F. Knipling and Raymond C. Bushland were USDA entomologists from Menard, Texas, who developed the Sterile Insect Technique (SIT), the primary technology used for large-scale control and eradication of New World screwworms. Their idea was elegant and revolutionary: if enough sterile male screwworm flies could be produced and released into the wild, female flies – which mate only once – would fail to reproduce, eventually collapsing the local screwworm population.

It took years for Knipling and Bushland to develop the methods needed to rear and sterilize massive numbers of screwworm flies. Their work has since been called one of the most original and successful biological control strategies of the twentieth century. Beginning in 1957, sterile flies were released throughout the southern United States. By 1966, New World screwworms had effectively been eradicated from the country.



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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.



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In the campaign of the 1950s and 1960s, it took nine years and the release of approximately 500 million sterile flies per week to push screwworms south of the U.S. border. Another 34 years were required to eliminate them from Mexico and Central America, ultimately driving them south of the Darién Gap in 2000. There they remained for more than two decades.

MOST AMERICANS FORGOT ABOUT SCREWWORMS

The scientists in Kerrville did not. One of the highlights of my visit was the opportunity to speak with Dr. Alex Arp and several of his colleagues. Along with Dr. Max Scott at North Carolina State University, Dr. Arp's team has spent years developing NovoFly, a genetically engineered strain of New World screwworm that eliminates females during production, allowing the mass rearing of male-only populations. When incorporated into sterile fly production systems, NovoFly effectively doubles the useful output of sterile male flies without requiring a proportional increase in production infrastructure. More than a decade in development, NovoFly represents a major advancement and a natural extension of the pioneering work begun by Knipling and Bushland generations ago. And that brings us to today.

WE'RE DEALING WITH A CHALLENGE, NOT A DISASTER

At the time of this writing, Texas ranchers – and the nation – are about three weeks into the first infestations of New World screwworms in the U.S. since they were eradicated almost 60 years ago. This first case, confirmed on June 3, 2026, was about 30 miles inside the U.S. border – this was followed by another 24 cases, and perhaps more by the time this newsletter goes out. At present, there are 10 infested zones in Texas with animal movement controls. One of the most recent – and furthest south – is an infested zone

that covers the majority of East Foundation's San Antonio Viejo ranch. We were not surprised by this, and we are prepared to respond with increased wildlife surveillance, animal movement controls, and preventive treatments for our livestock.

Social media has amplified this news considerably. National media coverage and a barrage of public statements have contributed to confusion, anxiety, and no shortage of finger-pointing. For many Americans, awareness of New World screwworm began only within the last week. The truth is far less dramatic.

Those who have followed this issue closely over the past three and a half years are not surprised by these detections. We did not simply watch as New World screwworm advanced through Central America and Mexico. We prepared. We formed coalitions, had difficult conversations, built partnerships, and pressed for meaningful action. Our universities and federal laboratories are filled with innovative scientists. Our state agencies have capable veterinarians and animal health professionals. Federal agencies are now focused on long-term solutions. Ranchers, livestock producers, landowners, and wildlife managers are informed, engaged, and actively participating in the response.

This does not mean there will not be hardships. Livestock, wildlife, pets, and people who depend on them will face risks and losses. It does mean that we have the capacity to adapt, mitigate those risks, and continue supporting the science, technology, and policies needed for ultimate eradication – we prepared so that we don't have to panic.

THE SPREAD

The current outbreak likely began in August 2022 when New World screwworm breached the long-standing containment barrier at the Darién Gap and began moving north through Central America. It took approximately 27 months for the infestation to travel roughly 1,100





miles through Central America before crossing into Chiapas, Mexico, in November 2024. By June 2025 – one year ago – screwworms had advanced another 300 miles into Oaxaca, crossing a secondary containment barrier established by Mexico in coordination with the USDA. During the past year, cases have continued moving northward through Mexico. The most recent confirmed detections occurred approximately 30 miles inside the United States between Eagle Pass and Del Rio, Texas. From the breach in Panama to the arrival in Texas, the northward movement occurred over approximately three and a half years. That was rapid.

THE RESPONSE

From the outset, it became clear that illegal animal movement throughout Central America and Mexico

was a major factor contributing to the rapid spread of screwworms. In May 2025, the USDA closed the border to livestock imports from Mexico and increased pressure on Mexican authorities to slow the spread. Despite these efforts, illegal livestock movements continued to move screwworms northward. It also became clear that dispersing sterile flies from Panama alone was insufficient. In November 2025, the USDA opened a second sterile-fly dispersal facility in Tampico, Mexico. This improved operational efficiency in northern Mexico but did not solve the fundamental problem. At the time, only about 100 million sterile flies per week were being produced, while full-scale eradication likely requires approximately 500 million flies per week.

In January 2026, the USDA assumed direct control of the dispersal strategy and shifted the campaign northward to protect the U.S. border. In February

2026, the USDA opened a new dispersal facility at Moore Air Base in Edinburg, Texas. This marked a strategic decision to concentrate sterile-fly resources specifically on slowing northward movement toward Texas. Some predictive models suggest these actions delayed the arrival of screwworms in the United States by nearly a year. That year mattered. It provided time to prepare.

During that period, the USDA accelerated construction of additional sterile-fly facilities in both Mexico and Texas. The dispersal facility at Moore Air Base is already operational. A retrofitted production facility in Metapa, Mexico, is expected to come online in the next few months and produce between 60 and 100 million sterile flies per week before year's end. The new production facility under construction at Moore Air Base is expected to begin producing approximately 100 million sterile flies per week by November 2027 and eventually expand to 300 million flies per week.

A CHALLENGE BECOMES A DISASTER WHEN IT EXCEEDS THE CAPACITY TO RESPOND.


The response has extended beyond sterile-fly production. Before 2025, there were essentially no FDA-authorized treatments specifically labeled for New World Screwworm in the United States. In August 2025, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services established an emergency-use pathway allowing the FDA to authorize products intended to prevent or treat New World screwworm infestations. Over the past year, that pathway has led to authorization of several important tools, including injectable Ivomec (ivermectin), Dectomax (doramectin), F10 Antiseptic Wound Spray, and Negasunt Powder for treatment of screwworm myiasis in livestock.

In October 2025, the USDA released the first New World screwworm Response Playbook. The document outlined preparedness and response procedures in the event screwworms were detected in the United States. Following review and input from ranchers, livestock producers, wildlife managers, state agencies, and public officials, the playbook was updated and reissued in April 2026.



The playbook is a battle plan, yet battle plans are never perfect. As Helmuth von Moltke observed more than a century ago, “No plan survives first contact with the enemy.” The purpose of a plan is not perfection, but rather preparation.

Throughout this response, state agencies, universities, federal partners, ranchers, and wildlife managers have remained in close communication. There are disagreements about tactics and priorities – as there always are in complicated situations – but the overall effort remains coordinated and focused on long-term eradication.

As for me, and as for now, it appears we can prevail without disaster. Is this a challenge? Yes. Should we have started earlier? Yes. Do we have all the resources we need? Not yet. Are those resources on the way? Yes. Can we manage this until they arrive? Yes. Do we have the will and capacity to respond? We better. 





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.



MATT LAGOW

EMPLOYEE PROFILE

Matt Lagow is a Texas native, born in Fort Worth and raised in Burleson, Texas. Matt is a Master Electrician, and before joining us at the Foundation, he owned an electrical contracting business in Colorado for 20 years. Prior to that, he was a commercial and

industrial electrician in the Dallas-Fort Worth area for 10 years.

As Facilities and Grounds Foreman, Matt manages, expands, and improves East Foundation facilities in Hebronville and on the ranches. In his first year at the Foundation, Matt has renovated one of our research bunkhouses to significantly increase housing capacity and is working on several other improvements to provide additional housing to meet our growing commitments at the San Antonio Viejo ranch.

In his free time, Matt enjoys fishing and hunting big game. Hunting and fishing are hobbies he has shared with his daughters for many years; they have backpacked in for several elk and mule deer hunts in Colorado. He also enjoys traveling with his wife and exploring new places.



MIRANDA HOPPER

ALUMNI PROFILE

Miranda Hopper, originally from Covington, Georgia, developed an early appreciation for animals and the outdoors, though her path to conservation took shape much later. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Fisheries and Wildlife Science

from the University of Georgia in 2021. During her undergraduate studies, she participated in a study abroad program in Chiang Mai, Thailand, where she worked with Asian elephants at the Elephant Nature Park. This experience sparked her interest in wildlife conservation and set her on a path toward research.


At the University of Georgia, Miranda worked with the UGA Deer Lab, helping with animal husbandry at the captive deer facility and multiple research projects, including a statewide deer population survey using game cameras. In summer 2020, she served as a fawn capture technician on the North Georgia Deer Project, which aimed to understand drivers of deer population decline. These experiences fostered her strong interest in game species, particularly white-tailed deer, and population ecology.



In June 2021, Miranda moved to East Foundation's San Antonio Viejo ranch to pursue a Master of Science in Range and Wildlife Science through the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute (CKWRI) at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. She led East Foundation's white-tailed deer survival study, coordinating annual captures of adult females and monitoring fawning events using GPS collars and vaginal implant transmitters. Over three years, she led the annual fall capture efforts and contributed to the capture of nearly 2,000 white-tailed deer.

Miranda completed her M.S. in August 2024 and is now pursuing a Ph.D. in Wildlife Science at CKWRI. Her research focuses on wildlife community dynamics in the Texas Hill Country, with an emphasis on spatiotemporal niche partitioning of native and non-native ungulates.

In her own words:

"My time with East Foundation shaped the way I think about research and its role in conservation. I'm incredibly grateful to have worked alongside people deeply committed to stewarding Texas rangelands through sound science. They showed me how closely research and stewardship go hand in hand, and how thoughtful management matters for the future of these landscapes." 





CKWRI AND EAST FOUNDATION: BETTER TOGETHER

LORIE A. WOODWARD



The Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute (CKWRI) and East Foundation are better together.

“We had a strong foundation, but this partnership has magnified our impact, credibility, and reach,” said Dr. Dave Hewitt, CKWRI’s Executive Director. “The same is true for East Foundation; scientific credibility and peer-reviewed validation strengthen their work. Together, we’re stronger.”

Dr. Neal Wilkins, President and CEO of East Foundation, concurred. “At the Foundation, we have to have access to world-class scientists, and Caesar Kleberg is at the top of the list. If they didn’t exist, we would’ve had to invent them.”

He continued, “This partnership is integral to our mission – and working together, combining our expertise and leveraging our assets makes us both stronger organizations.”

According to Wilkins, the partnership began during East Foundation’s formative days. Former CKWRI Executive Director Fred Bryant helped create the initial strategy for the Foundation and served as a mentor. The institutional and personal relationships continued uninterrupted when Hewitt took the reins at CKWRI.

“From the beginning, we’ve always remained completely aligned on what we’re trying to get done,” Wilkins said.

Early on, CKWRI scientists helped East Foundation set up some key long-term research projects focusing on bird, large mammal, and range monitoring. These long-term data sets have become valuable assets and signature projects for both institutions.

“When you’re talking about projects involving hundreds of deer captures each year and



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-Neal Wilkins

datasets spanning 15 years across varied habitats, that is a massive draw for top-notch graduate students and research scientists from across the country,” Hewitt said. “The partnership has been good from the beginning, but it has grown in depth and scale over the years.”

THE SYNERGY +

The synergistic relationship existing between CKWRI and East Foundation is a natural outgrowth of the institutions’ shared interests and complementary missions. CKWRI is a research and education organization, while East Foundation is a land management, research, and education foundation.

In many cases, the interaction between the two organizations is driven by needs identified by East Foundation’s team as they strive to actively and responsibly manage 217,000 acres of rangeland in different environments across South Texas.

East Foundation brings a question or project to CKWRI’s scientists and says, “How can you help us?” Because of East Foundation’s commitment to education, CKWRI has answered by enlisting the talents of top-notch graduate students and putting them to work in an expansive, private field laboratory. Oftentimes, East Foundation scientists help shape the research projects and serve on graduate committees as well as co-leading projects and co-authoring papers.

“A private land lab with a direct focus on research opens up opportunities that we wouldn’t otherwise have,” Hewitt said. “Other landowners have different objectives, and sometimes research fits and sometimes it doesn’t, but East Foundation is a working ranch with a strong research focus. Because they can commit to long-term, consistent, and reliable management, we can establish research baselines that are unheard of elsewhere in Texas.”

He continued, “Plus, our students gain real-world exposure to the complexities that landowners

face – balancing livestock, wildlife, infrastructure, and income streams – which gives them an understanding of how private lands function and makes our research more practical and relevant.”

Once insights are gleaned and answers are discovered, both organizations work to communicate the results to their respective circles, which include both academics and landowners, showcasing their shared commitment to applied research.

“The idea is that we become a force multiplier,” said Wilkins, noting that East Foundation is the nation’s first agricultural research organization. “We look out for each other’s interests, even in areas that aren’t strictly part of either organization’s core responsibilities.”

Conservation issues, both emerging and ongoing, are one area where the force is obviously multiplied. As part of the state university system, strict rules govern CKWRI’s activities in the public arena. As a private foundation, East Foundation has more freedom and flexibility to get things done through advocacy as well as through informal channels.

“In policy leadership around statewide wildlife conservation issues, we can react quickly with a science-based approach,” Wilkins said. “Sometimes that means advocacy, but often it’s working behind the scenes with state and federal agencies in ways university faculty can’t always do.”

As East Foundation leadership crafts its response to ongoing and emerging challenges, Wilkins said they rely on CKWRI’s “scientific horsepower” and bounce positions back and forth to ensure both groups are aligned. Sometimes CKWRI’s scientific rationale makes East Foundation rethink its assumptions, while other times the realities of landownership and economics experienced by East Foundation prompt the CKWRI staff to expand their perspective beyond theoretical.

“East Foundation leadership is deeply engaged in the broader conservation and working lands landscape,” said Hewitt, noting East Foundation has helped bring CKWRI scientists into conversations about large-scale issues like

the New World screwworm, cattle fever tick, and ocelot conservation policy. “Being a part of those discussions gives us insight into policy challenges and information gaps, which helps identify and shape the research questions we pursue.”

Asked why the partnership continues to succeed, Hewitt and Wilkins offered different answers. Not surprisingly, though, their reasons complemented each other and together painted a complete picture.

“Our success as partners comes down to like-minded leadership, aligned missions, cross-pollination between organizations, and shared commitment to training the next generation of wildlife professionals who understand private lands and their stewardship,” Hewitt said.

Wilkins added, “People. It started with personal trust, and that trust continues. People trust people. Organizations change, but strong relationships endure.”



A SHINING EXAMPLE OF COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION

CKWRI and East Foundation’s collaborative approach to ocelot reintroduction offers a shining example of the “better together” philosophy that drives the organizations’ ongoing partnership.

Because of its location in the heart of historic ocelot habitat, CKWRI has been the epicenter of ocelot research in the United States. When Dr. Dave Hewitt arrived in 1996, the Institute team had already conducted 15 years of research focusing on ocelot ecology. Another 15 years of foundational research occurred, garnering a greater understanding of the rare cat’s biology and ecology, but recovery efforts languished.

“East Foundation’s vision, particularly under Neal [Wilkins], broke, the logjam,” Hewitt said.

According to Wilkins, it was paramount that East Foundation was involved with CKWRI on ocelot research centering on natural history and ecology. As time passed, though, the research process hit a critical juncture.

“Without a concerted push for recovery, both organizations were in danger of studying ocelots until they were extinct,” Wilkins said. “With that in mind, I, on behalf of my team, proposed that either we all commit to recovery across private lands in South Texas, or we stop research all together.”

Instead of reluctance or skepticism, CKWRI’s scientists received the challenge with enthusiasm. They said, “Yes. Finally!”

Concurrently, the shy ocelot’s profile rose. The stunning cat was the star of two feature films produced by Texan Ben Masters, which not only showcased the changing research priorities, but helped coalesce public support for ocelot recovery. Heightened awareness led to a coalition involving Texas A&M University, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Once the possibility of reintroduction was a reality, the next hurdle was having enough ocelots to sustain a reintroduction effort. The remaining wild populations were not large enough or genetically diverse enough to provide an adequate number of animals for the effort.

The answer? An ocelot reproduction facility located on the Texas A&M-Kingsville University campus. CKWRI successfully raised the funding for the \$18 million to \$20 million facility through its long-time supporters. When the primary funder was hesitant to route money through state procurement, East Foundation stepped in.

“We jointly concluded if East Foundation leased the land and built the facility, we could do it faster and cheaper than the traditional university system,” Wilkins said.



“ Our success as partners comes down to like-minded leadership, aligned missions, cross-pollination between organizations, and shared commitment to training the next generation of wildlife professionals who understand private lands and their stewardship, ”


With a shared commitment to reintroduction, East Foundation leaders established a relationship with the USFWS and landowners surrounding the San Antonio Viejo ranch. The foundation’s largest ranch offered suitable inland habitat with no risk from coastal flooding and minimal risk from road fatalities, both of which threatened the remaining known wild populations. Eventually, this led to a Safe Harbor Agreement, opening the way for reintroduction of the endangered species on private lands.

The Foundation formed a subsidiary, hired the right people, and is managing the project. Ground was broken on October 9, 2024, and construction began in early 2025. The anticipated opening is early fall 2026.

“East Foundation has been critical in bringing everything together – capacity, people, and willingness,” Hewitt said.

Once the lease expires, the university will own the facility. To further enhance the project’s viability, East Foundation hired Dr. Ashley Reeves, one of the nation’s top experts in wild feline reproduction as its staff veterinarian after she finished her Ph.D. at the

University of Tennessee in conjunction with CKWRI while working on Foundation lands. She and Landon Schofield, a range and wildlife biologist for East Foundation, are co-stationed at the university.

“Given Ashley’s expertise in ocelot reproductive physiology, it made sense for her to work for us while collaborating closely with university faculty,” Wilkins said. “When you see them working together, you can’t tell who belongs to which institution – that’s a true team.” 



Increasingly, urban communities are turning to rural Texas to meet their water needs.

FROM THE RANCH

TODD SNELGROVE

GUARDING THE LIFELINE: WHY GROUNDWATER MONITORING MATTERS

Early settlers hand dug shallow wells to access water just below the surface. These were the lifeblood of early homesteads. Windmills sprung up, allowing ranchers to go deeper and tap into higher volumes of water. Small towns and communities sprang up around the large ranches. Electric and solar pumps tapping into deeper aquifers enabled growth and sustained agriculture and ranching communities throughout Texas. Reliable access to water has been the driver of human endeavor for generations.

In the South Texas Sand Sheet, this dependence on groundwater is absolute. The Gulf Coast Aquifer supplies virtually every drop used for livestock, wildlife, and rural domestic needs across our ranches and neighboring operations. With recharge rates measured in tenths of an inch annually and surface water absent except after rare

heavy rains, the margin for error is narrow. Sixty percent of years fall below-average rainfall, making groundwater the constant that holds both ecological health and economic resilience steady when drought deepens.

We recently completed a comprehensive groundwater study of our ranches. A few key take homes from the study – our needs as a working ranch remain nominal relative to regional availability, our supply is largely dependent upon brackish groundwater resources, and we have sufficient supply to meet operational requirements for many generations under current conditions – if nothing changes.

Increasingly, urban communities are turning to rural Texas to meet their water needs. Large municipalities are actively developing rural well fields and exploring brackish groundwater transfers to meet growth. This external pressure is exactly why we are implementing a systematic groundwater monitoring program across our ranch lands. We have begun taking regular water-level measurements and annual water-quality sampling (including total




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dissolved solids) at representative wells. Just as we rigorously monitor wildlife populations, habitat conditions, and research outcomes across our ranches – because we cannot manage what we do not measure – we are applying the same disciplined measurement principle to groundwater. This data will be tracked over time to detect early signs of aquifer stress or water-quality changes, support management decisions, and establish a documented baseline for future planning. We will expand the program in the years ahead with automated technologies and broader well coverage, building the data foundation needed to protect groundwater resources amid growing regional pressures.

Water development for general ranching needs is not the greatest threat to long-term water availability.

As our groundwater study highlighted, water development for general ranching needs is not the greatest threat to long-term water availability. Our needs are modest, and any operational projects we pursue based on ranch requirements will have negligible long-term impact on the aquifer. In a region where the aquifer is already under “managed decline,” additional withdrawals from large-scale groundwater development risk accelerating aquifer drawdown and increasing salinity. Monitoring establishes a clear baseline of aquifer conditions based on our current operations that enables early detection of changes driven by development elsewhere in the region. The biggest benefit is our ability to quantify those impacts, giving us the data to engage effectively with Groundwater Conservation Districts and contribute to informed regional water planning. Early detection through monitoring provides the window for mitigation and supplies the evidence needed to defend local interests in regional policy discussions.

Ultimately, structured groundwater monitoring protects more than well yields. It safeguards the productive capacity of working ranches that generate local employment, tax revenue, and habitat value. It reinforces the economic viability of small towns whose existence has always traced back to reliable water. And, it embodies the long-term stewardship ethic required to keep land, water, and people bound together for the next generation of South Texas ranching. 



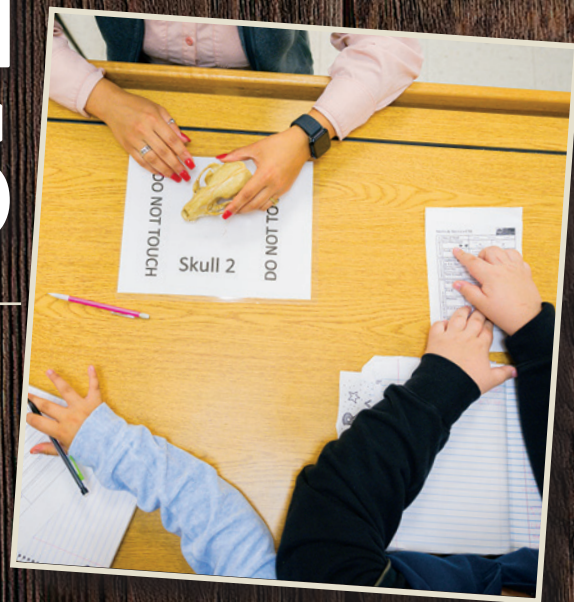


EDUCATION INSIGHTS



EDUCATION BEYOND THE CLASSROOM IN SOUTH TEXAS

Katarina Johnson




Education in Hebbronville and across South Texas has the greatest impact when students can connect what they are learning to the world around them. Over time, many students in the communities we serve have lost touch with the land that surrounds them and may not fully understand where their everyday resources come from.

One of the primary ways East Foundation impacts student education is through direct classroom engagement. By partnering with local schools, we provide lessons aligned with state standards while incorporating hands-on learning. These lessons cover topics such as wildlife, ecosystems, and land management, helping students better understand the natural resources that shape their communities. My role within the education team involves assisting with and facilitating these lessons, ensuring they remain engaging and accessible to students of all backgrounds. What stands out most to me is seeing the moment when a concept clicks, when students realize that what they are learning applies directly to their own environment and experiences.

In addition to classroom instruction, we extend learning opportunities beyond school walls. Field Day experiences allow students to interact with the land in ways that are not always possible in a traditional classroom setting, and in some cases, may not be accessible to them otherwise. For example, we take students on nature walks along well-worn paths on our ranch, pointing out plants and birds native to South Texas. It is incredible to see them develop a new appreciation for things that have always been part of their environment. These experiences reinforce what they learn in the classroom while making it more tangible and memorable.

The education team also helps students begin thinking about life beyond K-12 education. Through programs such as the Land Stewardship Ambassadors, students are introduced to leadership development, career pathways, and skills connected to natural resource management. Even for those who pursue careers outside this field, the experiences they gain can benefit them long-term. These opportunities encourage students to consider paths they may not have previously imagined and build confidence in their ability to pursue them.

One of the ways I have contributed to the community is by building relationships with local schools and encouraging participation in our programs. Recently, I've connected with five schools and worked closely with teachers to demonstrate the value of even a single lesson or Field Day. Through these efforts, I have seen how

meaningful partnerships can lead to larger possibilities. For example, one of the schools I have connected with reached out for support on an outdoor classroom and pollinator garden grant through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and it was successfully awarded. Experiences like this highlight the potential within our rural communities when we collaborate to create meaningful opportunities for students. Being part of that process is something I am especially proud of because it allows us to help students not only learn about their environment but also begin to see their place within it. 





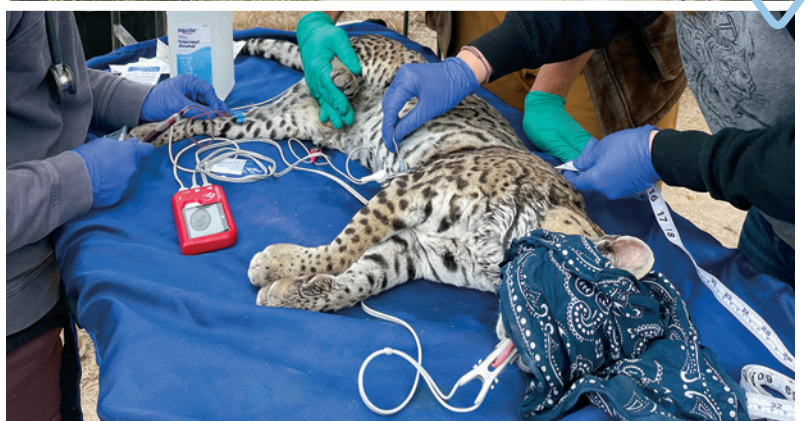
OCELOT CONSERVATION — FACILITY — UPDATE



Following years of research and partnership involving ocelots, 2026 will mark an important milestone for ocelot conservation in Texas: the completion of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute (CKWRI) Ocelot Conservation Facility. The purpose of the Facility? To breed a source stock of ocelots that can be released to the wild in Texas. With potentially fewer than 120 wild ocelots remaining in the state, the facility will play an important role in the efforts of East Foundation and our partners to recover endangered ocelots.

Facility construction began in early 2025 following thoughtful design by East Foundation, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, CKWRI, and other partners, plus funding from anonymous donors. The facility sits on an approximately six-acre portion of CKWRI's Tio and Janell Kleberg Wildlife Research Park at

Texas A&M University-Kingsville. It will contain 16 ocelot breeding enclosures plus four outdoor "wilding" enclosures. The facility will also have a research building with quarantine enclosures,





as well as staff offices, laboratories, and veterinary spaces to support ocelot care and research.

After the facility is completed later this year, ocelots will be transferred in from U.S. zoos that have created a Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) program to support the breeding and recovery effort. Ocelots may also be obtained from wild locations in Texas or other countries in their range. To go along with live cats, wild ocelots' genetic material banked by East Foundation over the last several years in Texas will be used to artificially breed ocelots. In total, the CKWRI Ocelot Conservation Facility will enable us to house multiple ocelot pairs in one location and use various breeding techniques to successfully produce kittens.

After the birth of kittens at the facility, ocelot mothers will raise their offspring in large, semi-natural wilding enclosures that will promote natural behaviors such as exploring densely vegetated habitat and hunting live prey – all with limited human contact. Once they reach about one year old and show suitable natural behavior, facility-born ocelots with the desired genetics will be released to the proposed ocelot reintroduction area at East Foundation's San Antonio Viejo ranch. Ocelots

released there will start a new ocelot population in a part of the state that has been without ocelots for decades. Additionally, facility-born ocelots could be released into the existing ocelot populations in coastal South Texas, including at East Foundation's El Sauz ranch or other appropriate locations in Kenedy, Willacy, and Cameron counties. This will provide a genetic and demographic boost to those populations.

Consistent with the need to minimize human contact with ocelots raised to be wild, the facility will not be open for public visitation. However, we will have a camera system to monitor ocelots, producing a wealth of amazing images and videos. We look forward to sharing this content along with future program updates. For now, more information on the ocelot breeding and reintroduction program and the Ocelot Conservation Facility can be found at RecoverTexasOcelots.org and ckwri.tamuk.edu/wildlife-center-facilities/ckwri-ocelot-conservation-facility. ◊



SCIENCE AT WORK





The CKWRI Ocelot Conservation Facility will be recognized as the most significant conservation effort to date as we strive to sustain the legacy of the United States ocelot. The CKWRI Ocelot Conservation Facility will provide solutions to the many needs surrounding ocelot conservation and recovery throughout South Texas. All spaces have been carefully designed with the animals' well-being and safety as the highest priority.

To learn more about this project or to make a contribution online, please visit: www.ckwri.tamuk.edu.



200 Concord Plaza Drive
Suite 410
San Antonio, Texas 78216



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