



FROM THE CEO

NEAL WILKINS

ABUNDANCE AND SCARCITY



In nineteenth-century Texas, land was abundant, and people were scarce. As a solution, Texas exchanged land for the ingredients of growth and development. To invite settlement, build railroads, spur manufacturing, fund education, and even build the State Capitol, Texas transferred its land held in the public domain into thousands of private hands. These private landowners largely put this land to good use, and their successors have done likewise for generations.

Fast-forward to the present, and we are facing the inverse problem. Texas has an abundant supply of the very things once sought—population, capital, and infrastructure—but an increasingly scarce supply of large, intact working lands. Now the question is reversed: no longer do we ask how much land we should use to create growth, but rather, how much land are we willing to consume to accommodate it?

At almost 140 million acres, Texas' farms, ranches, and forestlands still account for about 80% of the

state's land area. But the annual loss of these lands to conversion and development is accelerating. The most recent Texas Land Trends analysis from Texas A&M's Natural Resources Institute shows a loss of more than 1.8 million acres of working lands over the five-year period from 2017 to 2022.



As the primary land use across more than 80 million acres, ranching remains a dominant land use in Texas. Privately owned ranches presently cover about 48% of Texas' total land area. These lands are distributed among some 120,000 operations, each with its own land history, family heritage, and ownership



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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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characteristics. The public benefits drawn from this land base unquestionably support the economy, prosperity, and quality of life of those who live in Texas and beyond. In fact, the food, water, wildlife, recreation, and ecosystem services these lands provide cannot readily be replaced by any other resource.

BIG DEBATE

Texas is in the midst of a big debate over transmission lines. This conflict has been brewing for several years as the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) has taken steps to upgrade the state's electric grid. From 2010 to 2014, utility developers built about 2,400 miles of high-voltage transmission corridors across Texas. Another 970 miles were built over the following decade. Those were 345-kV lines with 150-foot rights-of-way, built mainly across private lands. The routing process was almost always contested by landowners who did not want their property devalued by the construction of these transmission lines.

Landowners complained that the utility developers' routing process was flawed and that the Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) should adopt a more reliable process. While only a small percentage of the rights-of-way had to be legally acquired through eminent domain, it was the implied threat of condemnation that ultimately persuaded many landowners to accept the impacts of those transmission lines. These lines directly affected about 4,700 landowners. Even landowners who ultimately avoided a transmission line often had to pay substantial fees for lawyers and consultants.

But we are not done yet. To meet anticipated demand, ERCOT and the PUC have plans for another surge of construction. This time, many of the lines will operate at higher voltages, with larger towers and wider rights-of-way. ERCOT's 765-kV strategic expansion contemplates

thousands of miles of new high-voltage transmission, with approximately 3,441 miles identified in the broader 765-kV plan. Together with the rest of ERCOT's transmission expansion, the planned 2026–2031 buildout could require approximately 90,000 acres, or 141 square miles, of new right-of-way—an area larger than the City of Lubbock.

To be fair, many of these transmission lines are needed to assure the capacity and reliability of Texas' electric grid in the face of continued growth and development. But much of the conflict with landowners centers on how the routes are chosen. At present, the routing process provides very little incentive for a transmission company to invest the additional effort necessary to thoroughly evaluate alternatives that minimize impacts to landowners, agricultural operations, wildlife habitat, and natural resources before filing an application. Instead, much of that responsibility shifts to the people whose land is affected. Landowners are expected to review thousands of pages of technical documents, organize with neighbors, hire attorneys, retain engineers and environmental experts, acquire GIS data, evaluate dozens of routing combinations, and ultimately develop better alternatives—often within just a few months.

Many decisions about siting transmission lines are heavily influenced by construction costs. Altering routes to avoid damage to wildlife habitat, maintain intact ranchlands, or retain the many other benefits these lands provide can be costly. But maybe those costs are worth bearing. The current decision-making process gives too little weight to the public benefits at stake. In other words, the public benefits provided by private lands do not appear on the balance sheet.

If we genuinely believe that the value of these private lands extends beyond their monetary market value, then we are forced to ask the question: Are we communicating the benefits and public value of land in a way that cannot be ignored? 





OUR PEOPLE

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 of the Foundation's recent hires and program alumni.



ORLANDO PEREZ

EMPLOYEE PROFILE

Orlando "Orly" Perez was born in Rio Grande City and raised in San Isidro, Texas.

As the facilities and grounds technician for East Foundation, Orly assists Matt Lagow, the facilities and grounds foreman, by

addressing electrical and plumbing issues in facilities and maintenance, and in the presentation and preservation of the grounds at the ranches.

Orly has worked closely with Matt on several renovation projects, with more planned through 2027. Before joining us at East Foundation, Orly was working towards a double major in Criminal Justice and Environmental Studies at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. He worked at All Star Nutrition in Pharr, Texas, for four years and then at Farm and Ranch in San Isidro.

In his free time, he enjoys learning new ways to improve his technical trade skills, going to the gym, fishing, and playing video games.



MICAYLA PEARSON

ALUMNI PROFILE

Micayla Pearson grew up in a family that prioritized time outdoors. She spent her childhood dove hunting in South Texas and fishing along the Gulf Coast, keeping an eye out for unique finds.

Micayla wanted to

share her experiences with others, so she pursued a Bachelor of Science degree in Range and Wildlife Management from Texas A&M University – Kingsville. Throughout her undergraduate career, Micayla worked for East Foundation in the summers as a range ecology technician and eventually acted as the crew lead for the summer range ecology crew from 2018 through the summer of 2020. She was also a graduate student technician with CKWRI for range monitoring, looking at the grazing effects of forbs and species richness in 2018 and 2019.

Starting in 2019, Micayla assisted with data collection and quail trapping for the Sustainable Harvest of Northern Bobwhites project with

Abe Woodard at CKWRI before graduating from Texas A&M University – Kingsville in 2021. Upon graduation, she returned to East Foundation, where she continued assisting Abe with research. In January of 2022, she returned to Texas A&M University – Kingsville, where she earned her Master of Science degree in Range and Wildlife Science. Micayla's master's research examined seed mix development and planting techniques for use in active solar energy developments in South Texas.



Currently, Micayla is a natural resource specialist with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and serves as a wildlife biologist for McMullen County. She volunteers with the South Texas Bobwhite Brigade and serves on the executive committee for the South Texas chapter of the Quail Coalition. Micayla attributes her success to the time she spent learning to be a biologist at East

Foundation, working with our science team, including Andrea Montalvo, Abe Woodard, and Landon Schofield. [🔗](#)



PROUD PARTNER



Our Texas Our Future



For more than 120 years, H-E-B has proudly served Texas communities, providing quality products, fresh food, and outstanding customer service. In 2023, H-E-B announced its Our Texas, Our Future commitment, a promise to help preserve Texas' natural resources.

H-E-B's investment in East Foundation's Behind the Gates Education Program reflects a shared belief that the future of Texas depends on connecting the next generation to the land that sustains us. Programs like this help students better understand the relationship between agriculture, conservation, and the natural resources that provide our food, water, and quality of life.

H-E-B is proud to support improvements to Behind the Gates learning facilities and the development of new science-based curriculum rooted in East Foundation's research and land stewardship work. These investments will help strengthen hands-on learning experiences, expand access to over 20,000 students across South Texas, and equip future decision makers with a deeper appreciation for the working lands that sustain Texas communities.

Together since 2024, H-E-B and East Foundation are helping cultivate tomorrow's land stewards by ensuring more young Texans have opportunities to learn from the land itself and understand their role in conserving it for generations to come.



Education INSIGHTS

— ♦ A DAY ♦ —
IN THE CLASSROOM
WITH EAST FOUNDATION'S EDUCATORS

Elisa Velador



Mornings are always chaotic in schools across South Texas. Students rush to class, parents try to get through the drop-off lane on their way to work, front office staff check in visitors, and teachers welcome students as they come in. East Foundation educators are back on the road, visiting campuses for the new school year, and happy to be part of the hustle and bustle of the morning. After setting up for the day and once the dust settles in the hallways, it's time to educate, inspire, and make a positive impact on young minds in the classroom.

As the students file into the classroom, their teacher reminds them to be respectful, attentive, and ask good questions.

These are sixth graders, the perfect age to begin exploring interests, strengths, and possible future careers, and it's a great opportunity for East Foundation to offer some insight into careers in

natural resources. Some students look excited, some look confused, and some pretend not to care but are secretly curious about the skins and skulls on the table and about their hands-on lesson.

We begin by introducing ourselves, East Foundation, and our role within the organization. At this point, students begin to feel comfortable asking questions about the Foundation, the people who work there, and, of course, they ask if the skins and skulls on the table are real. After a brief pre-test to gather data about their prior knowledge, we discuss natural resource conservation, the importance of working lands, and people's role in their stewardship. The students are eager to begin their hands-on activity.

The lesson is called Skins & Skulls; it covers Texas mammals, their adaptations, and how land stewardship can support their populations, especially on working lands. It's one of six hands-on, TEKS-aligned lessons we offer teachers. Other offerings include Where is Our Water?, Birds of a





Most of them have never touched the fur of a wild animal, much less handled its skull.



Feather, Stewarding Soil, Investigating Life Cycles, and Outdoor Scavenger Hunt, all from our long-time partner, the Texas Wildlife Association.

After guided practice, students work together in groups to investigate their assigned skull and determine which mammal it belongs to. Most of them have never touched the fur of a wild animal, much less handled its skull. They study the skull size, eye placement, nose, teeth, and auditory bullae. They excitedly discuss how these structural adaptations help these animals survive in their natural environment and what they mean for each animal.

Once students identify which animal their skull belongs to, they research facts about it, and they return their skull so they can complete their post-test. Their scores will allow our education team to gauge student comprehension when compared to the pre-test scores. Before students leave for their next class, we recap what they learned, and they're allowed to gently touch the different furs available, such as deer, coyote, bobcat, fox, raccoon, skunk, and opossum. For some, this is the most exciting part of the whole experience. Students comment that they never imagined they'd be touching a real skunk that day, or that they're surprised by how soft the furs are. By learning about the wildlife that lives on our working lands, these students are more likely to care about them and the land that they call home.



East Foundation's Behind the Gates education program for grades 4 through 12 aims to provide students with unique experiences in the classroom and out on the land to help them understand and appreciate the value of our land and ultimately inspire them to act and become informed adults who will be advocates for its stewardship no matter what field they choose to work in or where life takes them. We are excited to announce that we are developing new lessons that highlight the ranching, science, and ecological phenomena that occur behind the gates of our ranches, so we can better connect students to their local working lands. 





BOBWHITE HARVEST MANAGEMENT: ACCOUNTING FOR TOTAL MORTALITY

Understanding the many causes of mortality in a game species is an important component of understanding population dynamics to better manage that species for long-term viability.

As we enter the 10th year of our study into the sustainability of quail harvest in South Texas, the one variable that continues to stand out is “crippling loss”. Harvest quotas are intended to limit the total number of bobwhites lost during a hunting season, but the birds retrieved and reported in the bag are only part of that loss. Some birds are wounded, escape recovery, and die later—a form of mortality known as crippling loss.

The long-held 20% annual harvest recommendation for South Texas assumes that 16% of the population will be retrieved, and another 4% will be lost to crippling. After 10 years of studying sustainable quail harvest,

however, we have consistently documented crippling loss above that assumed level, even before accounting for injuries that hunters never detect.

When a covey flushes and shots ring out, some birds are bagged and reported in the harvest. But what happens to the others that flew off seemingly unharmed – do they survive? What about the bird you marked down with a broken wing, or the bird that was “feathered” by the gunshots?

To shed light on the survival of bobwhites following a hunting party encounter, we trapped and radio-tagged 195 bobwhites across 25 coveys on Santa Rosa and San Antonio Viejo over the course of three hunting seasons from 2022 to 2024. We fitted each bird with a VHF radio transmitter collar and tracked them daily for 14 days. Some coveys were exposed to a single hunting encounter, while others were captured, tagged, and released without exposure to hunters.

We also recorded and categorized crippled birds observed during the hunt – winged (birds with visible

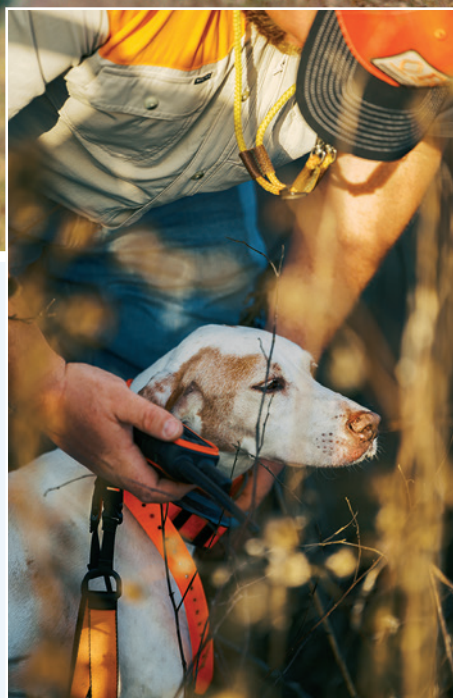




impairment or a broken wing), downed (birds that fell but were not recovered), legged (birds with a visibly dangling leg), and feathered (birds that shed feathers but flew off).

We found that hunted coveys had lower survival than those never exposed to a hunting encounter: 87% compared with 96% over a 14-day monitoring period. Visibly crippled (i.e., injured) birds had a 24% survival rate, while all birds classified as winged at the time of the encounter did not survive the monitoring period. In comparison, across all hunted birds monitored, non-crippled birds had a 95% survival rate (i.e., birds not identified as crippled post-hunting encounter). Shot count also drove outcomes, where every shot fired above the average (8.7) led to an additional 7% drop in survival.

Our study provides an updated view of the cost of a hunting encounter, focusing on crippling loss, through controlled hunting. Not every hunting operation records crippling loss when prescribing the bobwhite harvest quota for the season. Texas bag limits count



the quail in your hand. They don't count the bird that flew off after the shot, carried pellets into the brush, and died two days later. That bird doesn't appear in any harvest report. It just disappears into the landscape.

We carefully documented every shot, flush, and harvest in our study area within just a single hunting encounter and found that if a bobwhite was visibly observed as crippled in the field, their survival rate was low. For species that have high natural mortality, not accounting for crippling loss can lead to overharvest, which could lead to declines in population and the loss of our hunting heritage for future generations.

The practical lesson is straightforward: sustainable harvest management must account for all hunting-related mortality, not only the birds retrieved. Our findings indicate that crippling loss may exceed the amount built into the standard 20% annual harvest recommendation for South Texas. For a species already subject to high natural mortality, overlooking those losses can cause managers to remove more birds than intended. Protecting bobwhite populations—and the hunting tradition they support—requires counting the full cost of a season, not just the birds in the bag. ◇



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