



Advancing Capacity for Land & Water Conservation in Texas

A Capacity Needs Assessment to Accelerate the Pace, Scale, Equity and Impact of Conservation in Texas for the Coming Decade

May 2025

 Land Trust Alliance
Together, conserving the places you love

Acknowledgements

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Project Leadership:



Land Trust Alliance is a national land conservation organization working to save the places people need and love by empowering and mobilizing land trusts in communities across America to conserve land for the benefit of all. The Alliance represents approximately 1,000 member land trusts and affiliates nationwide. www.landtrustalliance.org

With Support From:



Texas Land Trust Council is the state association that supports and strengthens Texas land trusts to serve as a powerful coalition for land and water conservation. The Texas Land Trust Council (TLTC) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that builds and supports a strong, active coalition of more than 30 organizations working to conserve the lands and waters of Texas. www.texaslandtrustcouncil.org

Partners in Strategy Development

This report is based upon collaborative input gathered through a robust research process led by the Land Trust Alliance and the Texas Land Trust Council that engaged the following organizations across Texas.

Participating organizations that provided input

- American Farmland Trust
- Aransas First
- Audubon Texas
- Bayou Land Conservancy
- Cibolo Conservancy
- Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries
- Coastal Prairie Conservancy
- Colorado River Land Trust
- Conservation Fund
- Cradle of Texas Conservancy
- Devils River Conservancy
- Ducks Unlimited
- Frontera Land Alliance
- Galveston Bay Foundation
- Great Springs Project
- Green Spaces Alliance
- Guadalupe-Blanco River Trust
- Hill Country Alliance
- Hill Country Conservancy
- Houston Audubon
- Native Prairies Association of Texas
- Texas Agricultural Land Trust
- Texas Cave Management Association
- Texas Land Conservancy
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Watershed Association
- Trust for Public Land
- Wilbarger Creek Conservation Alliance

Advancing Capacity for Land & Water Conservation in Texas

The future of Texas depends upon the lands and waters that support the quality of life that we all value. Conserving land is key to addressing the challenges faced by the state: rampant development pressure, habitat loss and the intensifying impacts of our changing climate, to name a few. As almost all lands in Texas — nearly 96% — are privately owned, land trusts are partnering with landowners to conserve and steward the lands and waters that will define Texas for future generations.

This report is a collaboration led by the Land Trust Alliance, with support from the Texas Land Trust Council. Our aim is to synthesize the input we received from land trusts, funders and conservation partners to identify the needs for support and increased capacity, gaps in funding and focal areas for increased collaboration to advance the pace, scale, equity and impact of land conservation.

The results are clear: Now is the time for action to significantly increase the pace of conservation. We have arrived at a moment when the urgent challenges of accelerating population growth, rapid development, biodiversity loss and social movements are meeting a land trust sector that has expanded its reach and ambition. We believe the time is right for a new, significant investment in land conservation and the organizations that drive this important work.

ULTIMATE GOAL:

In the next 10 years, land trusts will partner with landowners and their communities to conserve and steward another 1 million acres of private lands to protect land and water, help communities thrive and create a healthier Texas.

VISION

Texans are empowered to conserve their lands and waters, fostering healthy, vibrant communities now and for future generations.

PURPOSE

To articulate the strategies and investments required for building the capacity and collaborative impact of land trusts, conservation partners and philanthropists to advance the pace, scale, equity and impact of conservation in Texas.

GOAL

To catalyze a plan for capacity building to collectively grow our conservation legacy and expand the impact of conservation to serve all of Texas and all Texans.

Accelerating the pace and scale of land conservation will require transformational change across all of the enabling conditions — engaging more landowners, increasing staff and expanding funding — as well as the immediate scale-up of system support for collaboration, shared services and conservation finance tools to compensate for the exponential pressures from rapid development, rising land prices and expanding renewable energy. This document synthesizes the specific investments required to change that course and advance land conservation.

Executive Summary & Findings

Texas land trusts play a critical role in helping to address the converging challenges of rapid development, drought, water scarcity and landscape change.

Input from the land trust community, partners and funders was collected through one-on-one conversations; regional meetings; the Texas Land Trust Council's Leadership Assembly; and listening sessions, both online and in-person, at the Texas Land Conservation Conference. Listening sessions with land trusts and conservation organizations across the state covered emerging topics within the land trust community (two sessions), communications and fundraising (one session) and dialogs in specific geographies (one session each focused on the Hill Country and the Houston Metro regions). Initial findings from these conversations were shared at the Texas Land Conservation Conference Leadership Luncheon, where land trust leaders helped prioritize needs, opportunities and potential solutions.

Capacity Building: How it works

Implementing a capacity building program is a long-term investment that builds strategic thinking, good governance, strong leaders and talented staff. Programs are most successful when they are guided by a trusted partner, offer multi-year iterative support and build collaborative capacity.

Through this project, we found that all Texas land trusts face barriers to working at greater scale, but most are seizing opportunities to grow, exploring new programs, and searching for creative ways to broaden their mission and deepen their impact. They would benefit from support in building stronger organizational foundations, collaborating across organizations and regions, and working collectively toward greater levels of investment in land conservation.

Framework for Capacity

The Land Trust Alliance invests in the growth and durability of land trusts and their partners through a holistic, interconnected framework that puts resources behind the people who drive permanent conservation as a down payment on successful community-led land protection for future generations in Texas.



STRONG FOUNDATIONS

Partner with land trusts to understand the unique challenges of individual organizations as well as shared needs across the state. Work together to diagnose these challenges and set goals to grow through guided, continuous improvement.



SCALE FOR SUCCESS

Boost capacity by increasing staff and systems to support land trusts, layering in expanded fundraising and team management which leads to increased outreach, expanded services and geographic reach and more acres conserved.



COLLABORATE & INNOVATE

Forge partnerships across regions and pilot new models for land protection through bolder, riskier strategies, such as strategic conservation plans, collaborative acquisitions, outreach plans, community partnerships, advocacy and addressing emerging issues in conservation at scale.

Land trusts face a unique set of challenges in Texas.

Unprecedented growth is causing working lands and open space to **disappear at a historic rate**. This loss, compounded by a changing climate, threatens Texans' way of life and the viability of core Texas economic sectors, including agriculture and military readiness. Land trusts' work is thus more urgent than ever.

There is no shortage of landowners eager to conserve their land, but many landowners — including stewards of some of the state's most important conservation lands — can't afford to donate conservation easements. In the face of rapidly rising land prices and steep competition from developers, land trusts need to offer more robust economic incentives to landowners. For this, they **need access to more capital**.

Texas is one of 11 states — and the only state among the 10 most populous — **without a dedicated funding source** for private land conservation.¹ This seriously limits the potential for Texas land trusts to scale their work and puts enormous fundraising burdens on them. In an absence of public investments, land trusts rely heavily on landowner generosity and support from philanthropists. While there is a core of institutional funders committed to Texas land conservation, they desire to find compelling projects and seek a more strategic approach.

Solid majorities of Texan voters support land conservation and have demonstrated a willingness to pay for it, but Texas land trusts, often limited to working with those landowners willing and able to donate properties, have struggled to make a **highly visible case** for private land conservation's **broader benefits**.

With limited funding and intense competition for land, Texas land trusts operate in an **environment of scarcity** that makes long-term, strategic and visionary approaches to conservation difficult. This, combined with recent leadership transitions at nearly a third of Texas land trusts, has limited land trusts' collective potential at precisely the moment their work is most needed.

At the same time, Texas land trusts possess significant strengths.

Despite these challenges, **Texas land trusts have conserved over 2 million acres** across the state. For a community numbering several dozen organizations, most with fewer than six staff members and facing the challenges noted above, this is a major accomplishment. Texas land trusts have an **entrepreneurial spirit**. They have **boards and staff** who are **committed and enthusiastic** about their organization's respective missions, histories and cultures. As a community, they have big ambitions and the desire to grow. These organizations, when they are invested in, have the ability to scale. They just need the next level of investment to meet the increasing challenges that they face.

To meet the moment, an integrated capacity building program is needed.

A comprehensive capacity-building program will help Texas land trusts break through to a new level of impact. To do so, it must build on strategies and investments that focus on both **organizations and systems**. Accordingly, we propose adapting the Land Trust Alliance's proven framework for change to Texas land trusts' specific challenges and needs. This framework focuses on helping land trusts build **strong foundations** and **scale for success**, while also supporting the enabling conditions that foster **collaboration and innovation** across the sector.

¹ Trust for Public Land. 2022. Texas Conservation Funding Feasibility Study.

Priorities for Capacity Support

Strong Foundations <i>People & Core Capacity</i>	Scale for Success <i>High Impact Land Trusts</i>	Collaborate & Innovate <i>Systems & Networks</i>
Cultivate leaders	Expand staff with sustained multi-year funding	Support shared services for legal consultation & government relations
Strengthen fundraising skills & capacity	Expand community engagement & partnerships	Advance collaboration , campaigns & community-centered conservation
Develop board leadership	Advance financial management	Build strategic conservation funding & finance tools

Based on our research and analysis, we recommend a capacity building program that prioritizes the following investments:

1. Strong Foundations: People & Core Capacity

First and foremost, Texas land trusts need the right people with the right skills. There are opportunities to boost the expertise of current staff, board members and volunteers in specific areas, including **leadership, transactions** and **community-centered conservation**. In addition, Texas land trusts rely on private funds, and nearly every organization would benefit from additional people and improved systems for **fundraising and engaging donors**. Land trusts need training, funding and resources for leadership success, accreditation preparation and Standards & Practices implementation.

2. Scale for Success: Expand Funding & Impact

With a strong foundation in place, land trusts are ready to work at greater scale and grow their impact. **Capacity staffing** grants immediately enable land trusts to add essential roles, while stable, multi-year funding for competitive salaries and professional development **improve staff performance and retention**. This additional funding leads to increased outreach, expanded services and geographic reach, and more acres conserved.



CARPERS CREEK / HILL COUNTRY CONSERVANCY PHOTO: RICH KOSTECKE

3. Collaboration & Innovation: Partnerships & Community-centered Conservation

Much of what Texas land trusts need they can learn from one another — and they can achieve more together. There are opportunities across Texas for deeper collaboration between land trusts and partner organizations; in some cases, this might even include **shared services, strategic partnerships and mergers**. There are also opportunities for collaboration with new partners and in new contexts, from **urban centers to rural working lands**, expanding who benefits from conservation. **Training, peer sharing and grant programs** incentivize innovative thinking, seed action and increase sharing of best practices across land trusts. These partnerships are vital to helping land trusts adapt and form new relationships, increase their relevance and boosting their connections, effectiveness and long-term conservation success.

4. Systems of Support: Coalitions & Networks

Texas land trusts can't achieve the conservation outcomes Texans need and want by themselves alone. It takes a system — a whole ecosystem — which includes a strong partnership with funders, state associations, elected officials and their communities. Working through networks facilitated by the Alliance, Texas Land Trust Council and regional groups, like Hill Country Alliance, land trusts pilot ideas and develop new solutions. By tapping a diversity of unique perspectives, expertise and relationships, conservation can **engage more people**, to support nature at a higher level.

Capacity building is a long-term investment with benefits that will accrue over time.

Based on over 40 years’ experience supporting land trusts, the Alliance has learned that capacity building is most effective when it combines: (1) an **integrated program** guided by regular **organizational support** and development plans to focus strategic capacity investments; (2) **multi-year capacity funding** to equip land trusts with the investment they need to immediately add staff with sufficient runway for long-term success; (3) focused efforts to **grow the amount of funding** and resources dedicated to conservation; (4) incentives for **collaboration and innovation**; and (5) **measures of accountability** to track progress on key targets in order to continue to receive funding. The project of building (and maintaining) land trust capacity is never done. At the same time, even relatively modest investments in capacity, if appropriately targeted, can have outsized returns.

Next Steps

These recommendations call for holistic investment encompassing four interconnected responses, which encourages collaborative solutions to bring forward the biggest strengths of land trusts, conservation partners, funders and communities to advance greater land protection. Several recommendations will require additional conversations to develop and refine the strategies identified within this report into a fully operational implementation plan. We have illuminated a common desire to take collective action and change the course of private land conservation for the future of Texas. However, there is work to be done to strengthen the collaborative capacity, build the relationships and trust that is required, and align our collective actions to be successful. We are confident that these outcomes can be achieved within a generation — if we continue building the network of people and organizations doing the work, and if we resource and fund the effort adequately.

The project’s next phase of work comprises:

- Establishing an advisory group of key leaders and partners to lead aspects of the project forward.
- Developing a strategic capacity-building program and science-based conservation priorities for focusing implementation, with clear goals and associated costs articulated.
- Partnering with the philanthropic community and land trusts to secure sufficient funding.

Call to Action

The goal is ambitious: In the next 10 years, land trusts will partner with landowners and their communities to conserve and steward another 1 million acres of private lands to protect land and water, help communities thrive and create a healthier Texas. In doing so, we will dramatically increase the amount of private conservation lands, protecting land and water resources and helping healthy communities thrive. Imagining a sustainable land trust community across Texas is equally ambitious and essential. By addressing the internal challenges through organizational development and building a strong conservation sector, land trusts and the conservation community are better positioned to tackle the pressing external threats and challenges facing Texas, such as water shortages and escalating development pressure. Working together, land trusts and communities can address equity, engage their communities, and save land and water resources, paving the way for a brighter future in Texas. Collectively, we will ensure a resilient and inclusive conservation movement that safeguards our precious landscapes and enriches the lives of communities across Texas.

Together, let us build a legacy of land conservation for generations to come.



COASTAL PRAIRIE CONSERVANCY

“We were able to dream big and think about ways that we could increase capacity and expand audiences. It’s incredible as a staff to be given the opportunity to be innovative and to think outside the box.”

Mary Anne Piacentini, president and CEO

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BAYOU LAND CONSERVANCY

“It was important to our board to do that training with fellow land trust leaders in the area — it made it much more meaningful. It was helpful to have the Alliance on the same learning journey with us — it gave us a lot of validation that we’re doing the right things and moving in the right direction.”

Jill Boullion, executive director of the Bayou Land Conservancy, considers the Alliance a critical partner on the Conservancy’s journey to center their community within their work. In February 2022, the Alliance provided funding for the four accredited land trusts in the Houston region to engage in collective training.

A ROADMAP FOR COLLABORATION

Project & Research Objectives

ACCELERATING CONSERVATION IN THE COMING DECADE

As the origin of this project, in 2022, the Land Trust Alliance Western Division completed a strategic planning process that included listening sessions in Texas. Through this discovery process, across Texas, the conversations articulated a shared desire for a more systematic assessment of the needs and opportunities faced by land conservation. Land trusts, partners and funders shared a sense of the mounting challenges and asked the Alliance to help Texas land trusts advance the pace and scale of land conservation. The Texas Land Trust Council updated their strategic plan in 2023, providing renewed direction to support and strengthen Texas land trusts to conserve land and water for current and future generations. In response to the strong feedback received through both planning processes, the Land Trust Alliance and the Texas Land Trust Council launched this collaboration in 2023 to work with land trusts to define our collective capacity to advance conservation, identify needs for support, gaps and focal areas for increasing collaboration.

THE QUESTION BEFORE US IS:

What can land conservation and land trusts become, and how will we find the resources to achieve our potential?

The Conserving Texas Land & Water capacity project collected input through a robust process starting with one-on-one conversations, regional meetings and the November 2023 Texas Land Trust Leadership Assembly. During the winter of 2024, 12 land trusts completed organizational assessments and identified priorities for advancement. Simultaneously, the Alliance hosted a series of five virtual listening sessions with land trusts and conservation organizations across Texas, with sessions focusing on emerging topics within the land trust community (two sessions), communications and fundraising (one session) and dialogs in specific geographies (one session each focused on the Hill Country and the Houston Metro regions). Initial findings from these conversations were shared at the Texas Land Conservation Conference Leadership Luncheon, where land trust leaders continued the conversation and helped prioritize needs, opportunities and potential solutions.

This report synthesizes the results of input captured through organizational assessments, expert analyses, collaborative conversations and dialog with land trust leaders to identify priority strategies for advancing the pace, scale, equity and impact of conservation in Texas. The land trusts’ needs assessments provide comprehensive, actionable strategies to meet the modern capacity needs of the Texas land trust community at organizational, regional and statewide scales. The report integrates multiple recommendations responding to the trends, opportunities and drivers shaping the landscape of Texas land conservation. In addition, through land trust community input, the report provides a community-informed framework that identifies four strategic investments needed to set and attain the goals of the statewide land trust community. The Alliance then applies lessons learned in similar efforts across the country and at the larger scale of the national land trust movement and provides a potential model for Texas.

Table 1: Conserving Texas Land & Water capacity planning process

Preparations Prior to 2023	August-November 2023	December 2023- January 2024	February-May 2024	June-December 2024
Land Trust Alliance Western Division Strategic Plan (2022)	Initiate partnership Sounding Board #1: Kickoff at TLTC Leadership Assembly	Sounding Board #2: Explore priority topics Conduct interviews Launch land trust assessments	Focus groups with land trusts & partners (5 sessions) Sounding Board #3: Review findings at TLCC Complete land trust assessments (12)	Sounding Board #4: Review by TLTC, land trusts and key partners Additional research Develop draft recommendations Recommendations final report
Texas Land Trust Council Strategic Plan Update (2023)				
Texas Land Conservation Conference Round Table: Capacity Building (2023)				
Project Initiation	Research, Listen & Learn			Set Priorities & Recommendations

The arc of the analysis presented in this report is organized in the following sections:

- **Executive Summary & Findings** provides a synthesis of the input, findings and key messages.
- **Project & Research Objectives** outlines the purpose, goals and process of this project.
- **Definitions for Scaling Capacity** presents key terms and a framework for scaling impact.
- **The Challenge Facing Conservation in Texas** builds an understanding of emerging conservation challenges for land trusts and their communities.
- **Conservation Progress in Texas** establishes the baseline for conservation over 60 years and discusses several patterns of the outcomes, highlighting key patterns.
- **Texas Advancement Initiative** presents an evaluation of a 10-year history of capacity building in Texas, showing that land trusts that invested in their capacity elevated their outcomes.
- **Analysis at the Individual Scale** shares results from individual land trust assessments to identify priority areas for increasing capacity. Diving into the details, this section provides detailed requests for services and needs at the different stages of a nonprofit’s life cycle.
- **Statewide & Regional Analysis** looks at regional and statewide scales to develop collaborative approaches and strategies to increase collective outcomes.
- **Community Informed Framework** synthesizes all of the above analyses into four central investment areas grounded in local, regional and statewide needs for advancement.
- **Capacity Building: How It Works** applies the Alliance’s approach to capacity building with a comparison to other programs and best practices.
- **Capacity Recommendations** provides a final recap and vision for a future program.

CAPACITY APPROACH

Definitions for Scaling Capacity

THE STRATEGY & APPROACH

The project set out to start a new conversation aimed at transformative and systems-level approaches for accelerating land conservation in Texas. What does it mean to accelerate conservation? Critics often challenge that increasingly, the traditional metrics of conservation as ‘bucks and acres’ is not a sufficient lens for measuring the true potential and outcomes of private land conservation. This process sought to move beyond simply increasing the speed of transactions and the size of projects to instead focusing on transformative actions and systems-level outcomes to ensure that land conservation results in lasting benefits for people, communities and nature. This section provides several key concepts and definitions to inform that dialog. **Table 2** provides a framework for scaling capacity moving beyond incremental improvements to explore and imagine strategies that address root causes and offer new approaches to scaling conservation.

Core Concepts in Capacity Building: A Systems Approach

Capacity is broadly defined as a wide range of capabilities, knowledge and resources that ensures continuity and stability across time that enables nonprofits to be effective. Capacity is the result of investments in the internal foundations of a land trust, creating a stronger engine for the organization that drives its programs and impact. The following report is based upon several grounding principles and terms that inform the approach.

Strong foundations result in organizational effectiveness, which results in resiliency and sustainability. Organizational effectiveness is driven by leadership, mission and vision, strategic planning, funding development and financial management. Land trusts must have strong internal systems to withstand the pressures required to scale and grow their impact.

With a strong foundation in place, land trusts are ready to scale their teams, grow their funding and build lasting relationships with landowners and their communities. Multi-year grants for adding staff positions are essential to provide the runway needed to scale.

Centering community and partnerships in land conservation is essential to creating people-focused outcomes and more opportunities for conservation impact. When land trusts build relationships with local communities and other partners, they co-create better projects that deliver tangible land conservation and community benefits. By engaging people in all aspects of conservation work, the practice emphasizes collaboration, listening, learning and sharing power and resources to deliver multiple benefits.

Every Texan deserves to benefit from land conservation and have access to nature. Land trusts can help ensure that every person—regardless of income, age, race, culture or ability—has equal access to open space, clean water and local food.

System-wide approaches are fundamental to reaching the scale needed for impact. The best results follow a shared vision executed through collective action—bigger than any individual organization, association or funder—to drive bolder strategies for broader impact.

Building capacity is an ongoing practice with rewards over time. The effort should be seen not as a static one-time act, but an ongoing dedication to continuous renewal. The results of this report should be viewed as a ‘living document’ to be updated and adapted as new information and circumstances arise, reflecting the dynamic nature of Texas and society.

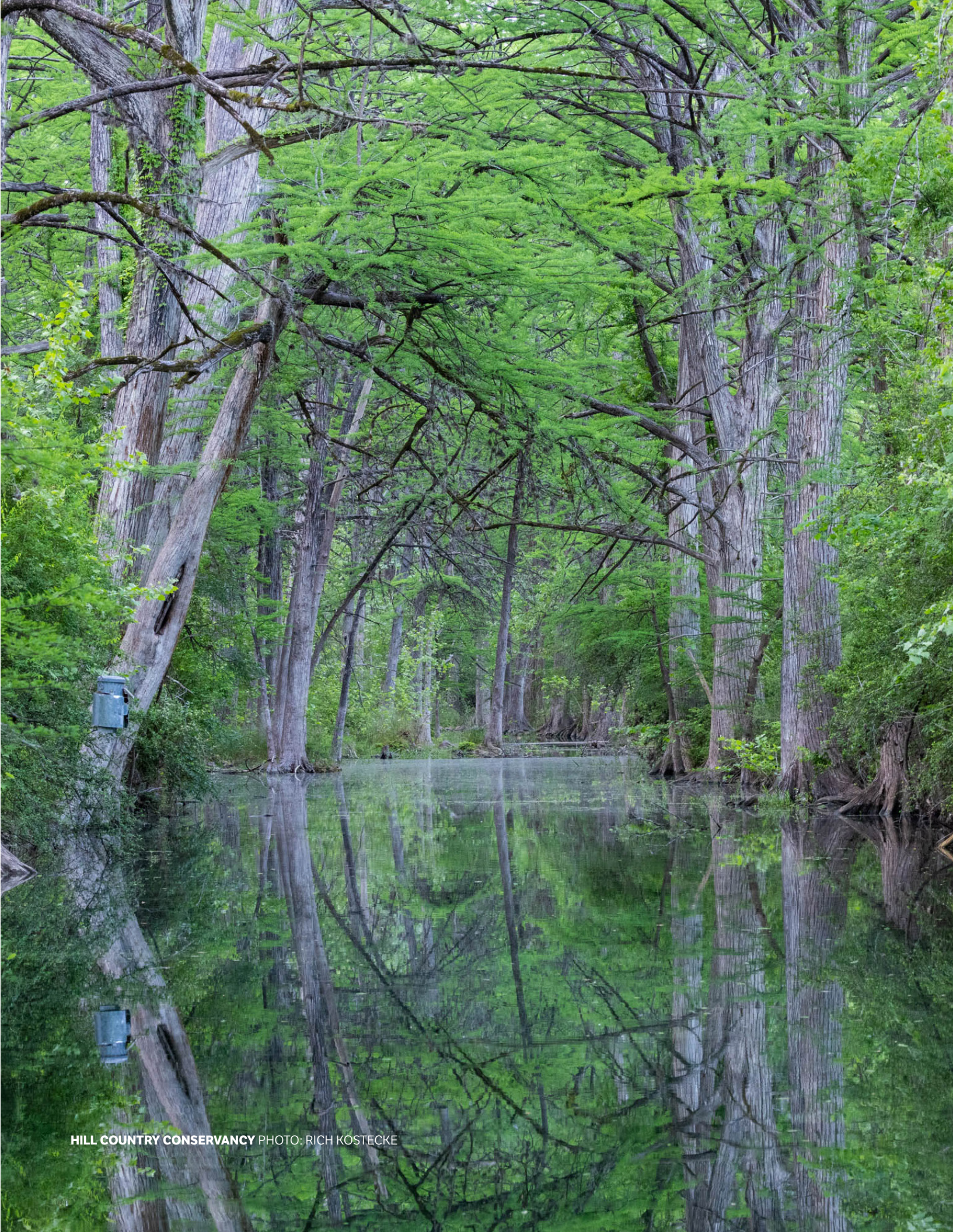
Applying Frameworks for Scaling to Land Conservation

Several studies evaluating capacity building offer frameworks for exploring different ways to ‘scale up’ programs. **Table 2** applies the most common approaches for land conservation as improving **effectiveness**, increasing **efficiency**, **replicating** successful models, **expanding** programs and seeding **collaboration**. The following table applies these concepts to the goal of accelerating the pace, scale, equity and impact of conservation.

Table 2: Connecting goals, scaling frameworks and strategies for scaling up land conservation²

Goal	Scaling up frameworks	Strategy to accelerate conservation
Pace <i>the rate projects are completed</i>	• Program Efficiency: Reduce inefficiencies in systems and speed up processes. • Program Replication: Expand or duplicate successful programs in other areas or contexts.	• Increase pipeline of interested landowners. • Increase rate of project closings. • Increase access to land capital for projects. • Develop strike funds and revolving loan programs for quick access to land capital.
Scale <i>the size of operations</i> <i>the size of projects</i>	• Operations Expansion: Scale up the operational capacity to serve a larger number of beneficiaries or higher volumes of services. • Geographic Expansion: Expand programs or services to new locations or regions.	• Increase fundraising staff to raise land capital and scale fundraising operations. • Increase conservation staff to increase transaction deal capacity. • Increase marketing and community engagement to attract more landowners.
Equity <i>who is served</i> <i>who benefits</i>	• Benefactor Expansion: Broadening the target audience or demographic groups that benefit from the program. • Removal of Barriers to Program Benefits: Increasing equity and access to land so that all people benefit from conservation.	• Expand transaction cost assistance programs. • Assist with title work for heirs’ property and inherited properties without a clear title. • Offer land access programs for new farmers. • Form community conservation networks and offer training and toolkits for public access.
Impact <i>multiple benefits</i> <i>community-centered</i>	• Collaboration: Building partnerships with other nonprofits, businesses or public entities to amplify impact and reach. • Multiple Strategic Benefits: Prioritize projects that achieve multiple goals, serve communities and deliver conservation outcomes by design.	• Partner on multiple-goal projects such as combining affordable housing and new parks. • Support public-private partnerships for source water protection or wildfire risk reduction.

² Adapted from Nonprofit Learning Lab. 2024. Program Management and Scaling: A Guide to Manage and Scale Programs to Reach Nonprofit Goals.



HILL COUNTRY CONSERVANCY PHOTO: RICH KOSTECKE

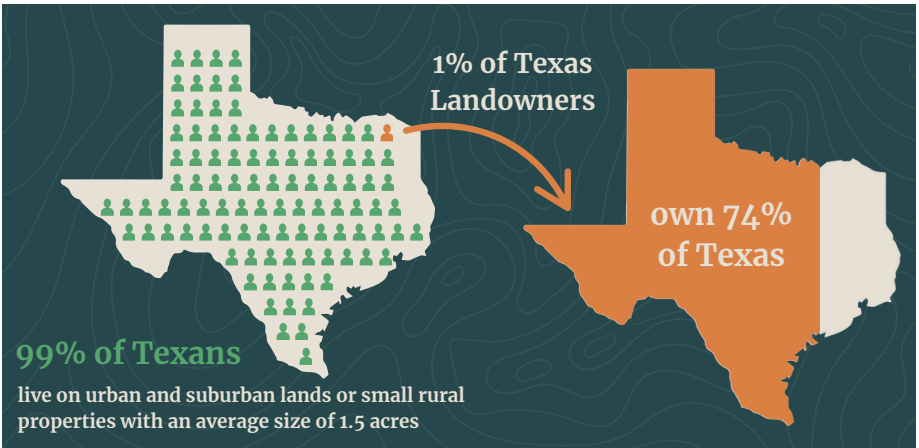
The Challenge Facing Conservation in Texas

UNDERSTANDING THE CHALLENGE & NEED FOR CONSERVATION



Texas is known for its wide-open spaces, diverse landscapes and the richest biodiversity in North America. It's home to 5,000 species of plants, including 2,000 different wildflowers and 550 species of birds that call the mountains, deserts, prairies, marshes and barrier islands their home.³ From the diversity of the piney woods and rolling hills of East Texas to the rugged mountains and high deserts of the west, Texas landscapes are as diverse as they are big.

Texas is also home to 30+ million people — and it is growing fast. It is projected to reach 54 million people by 2050, putting incredible pressure on the state's land, water, wildlife and infrastructure. According to the U.S. Census, 30% of population growth in the entire United States between July 2022 and July 2023 was in the Lone Star State. Five of the top 10 fastest-growing counties in the U.S. are in Texas.



Source: Texas Land Trends: Status Update and Trends of Texas Working Lands 1997-2022 by the Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute.⁴ Over 30 million Texans are concentrated in urban areas, while the remaining rural landscapes are owned by just 231,000 landowners. The vast majority of Texans lack a direct connection to the natural heritage of Texas. Supporting private landowners in stewardship of working lands is crucial to conserving healthy ecosystems and fostering resilient communities. Strategic conservation and planning will be essential to connecting urban populations to the benefits of open space, clean water and healthy environments.

Rapid Change in a Private Lands State

Texas land trusts face rapid development pressures, growing demands for energy infrastructure, rising land prices, landowner succession challenges and increasingly devastating climate events — together representing significant threats to the biodiversity and healthy ecosystems that Texans rely upon. They are striving simultaneously to address inequities that restrict community-wide access to the benefits of land.

- Nearly 96% of Texas is in private land ownership. That means that only 4% of Texas is protected from development through federal, state or local mechanisms such as being designated a state/national park or a wildlife conservation area.
- In addition, less than 3% of Texas is available for public recreation, ranking it in the bottom five of states with access to public land and/or access to nature.
- Rapid growth is an incredible threat to Texas landscapes and habitat, which accentuates the shortage of places for Texans to experience the benefits of healthy water, land and biodiversity. Growth is also driving land prices — and for every year prices increase, land becomes harder to conserve.
- Extreme weather events and climate impacts are hitting Texas hard. Texas is ranked first in the U.S. in the variety and frequency of natural disasters. Flooding, wildfires, tornados, hurricanes, hail storms, sinkholes, erosion and drought all occur in the state (<https://www.fema.gov/flood-maps/products-tools/national-risk-index>).
- With so many new people moving in, more Texans need places to live, work and play, driving demand for residential and recreational land.
- Texas farm and ranchland is ranked as the most vulnerable in the country in a report by American Farmland Trust, with a projected 2.2 million acres projected to be developed by 2040.
- Rural land prices have increased dramatically over the last two decades, driving many private landowners to sell to developers. Data from Texas Real Estate Research Center at Texas A&M University shows that Texas rural land prices have increased by 9-20% in 2023 from the previous year.
- 87% of Texas residents live in four urban centers — Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio and Austin — representing just 4% of the state's land base. 96% of rural landowners are non-Hispanic white, and over 60% are over 65. This contrasts with the rest of the state's population, which is 59% people of color.⁵
- Texas has very limited public funding available for land conservation and acquisition relative to other Western states, which limits the potential of land trusts to scale their operations. Texas is one of 11 states that does not have a dedicated funding source for private land conservation. Of the 10 most populous states, Texas is the only state without dedicated funding.⁶ This lack of support puts an extra burden on Texas land trusts. More than in other states, Texas land trusts struggle to find individual support and sustainable funding and need to develop stronger fundraising and development teams.

³ Texas General Land Office and Texas Nature Conservancy. 1987. The Natural Heritage of Texas. <https://tamug-ir.tdl.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/286f4e41-0081-4cd9-a462-cfe0ab0ac023/content>. Accessed 7/30/2024.

⁴ Smith, L.A., R.R. Lopez, A.A. Lund, and R.E. Anderson. 2025. Status Update and Trends of Texas Working Lands. Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, College Station, TX, USA.

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau. 2024. Texas Quick Facts Population Estimates as of July 1, 2023. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/dashboard/TX/PST045222>. Accessed 9/4/2024.

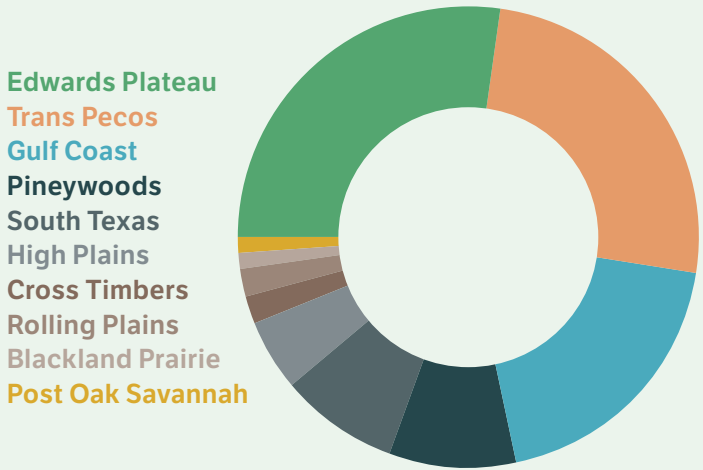
⁶ Trust for Public Land. 2022. Texas Conservation Funding Feasibility Study.

Conservation Progress in Texas

TEXAS CONSERVATION LANDS INVENTORY: LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO INFORM THE FUTURE

The Texas Land Trust Council tracks the progress of private land conservation through the Conservation Lands Inventory⁷ to understand and communicate the success and economic benefits of conservation efforts throughout Texas. The inventory provides data and visual information on all of the lands protected and conservation easements held by land trusts. As of the end of 2024, Texas land trusts have helped conserve over 2 million acres, including over 1 million protected through conservation easements.

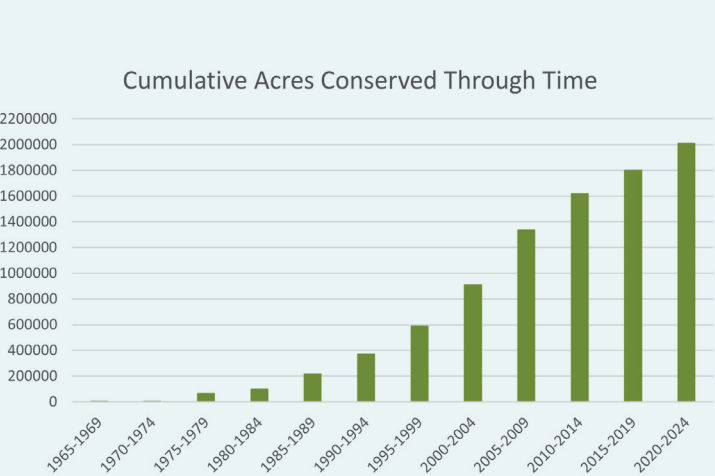
Area Conserved by Eco-Region



The ecosystems with the most protected land are the Edwards Plateau, Gulf Coast and Trans Pecos regions. Other ecosystems have far less protection.

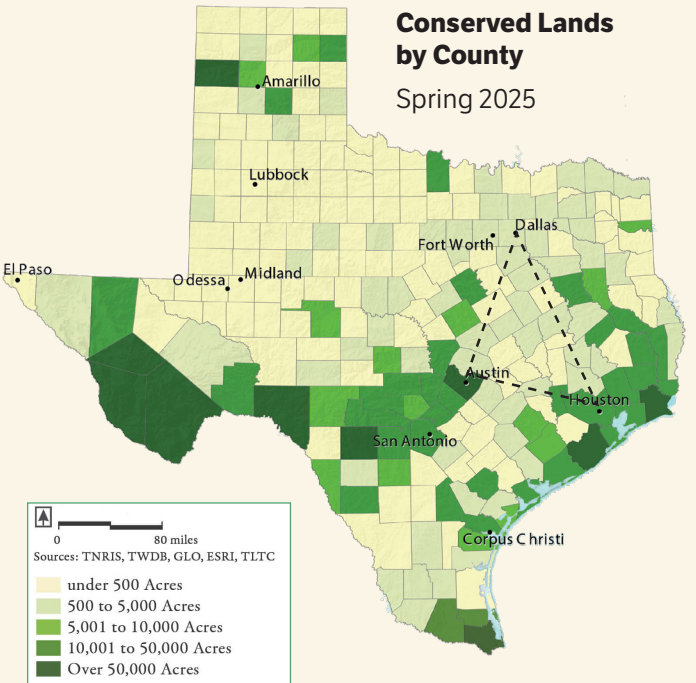
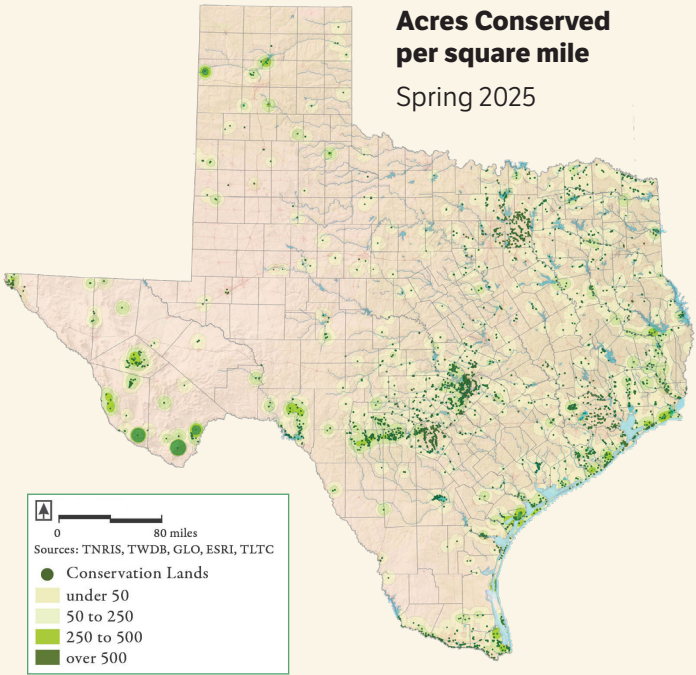
Updating strategic conservation plans could help focus opportunities for specific funding and conservation tools that align with geographic priorities and needs, such as supporting working landowners in Rolling Plains, flood mitigation in mid-coast and protecting grassland birds in grazing areas.

Five-Year Breakdown of Acres Conserved by Land Trusts



Source: Texas Land Trust Council

The most common reason cited for the declining number of projects is the lack of available funds to pay for projects. Several land trusts report the number of landowners willing or able to donate easements has leveled off. The consensus seems to be that the decline is due to the rapidly rising price of land and more intense competition from developers, including commercial and residential development and even renewable energy projects or data centers. Limiting projects to only donated easements may mean that land trusts will not be able to help working landowners save their farms and ranches, as often the land’s value is the most valuable asset the landowner’s family has.



**Texas Land Trust Council
Conservation Lands Inventory**

Total Area Conserved: 2,018,689 acres
Conservation Easements: 1,201,082 acres
Fee Simple: 814,988 acres
Other Conservation Properties: 2,619 acres

Concentrated efforts have made significant gains in protecting the Edwards Aquifer and Big Bend areas. Place-based funding has also increased conservation in specific hotspots. The Gulf Coast, Houston, Austin and Dallas/Fort Worth metro areas are representative of areas with high development pressure and population growth where new tools, incentives and funding are needed.

Beyond these areas of concentrated success, much of Texas lacks landowner engagement and a cohesive strategy to conserve land at the necessary scale, especially in West Texas and the Rio Grande watershed.

Many of the conserved acres are in the Trans-Pecos/Big Bend area, with fewer acres near population centers such as Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin and San Antonio, known as the ‘Texas Triangle.’ More parks and open space are needed for public access.

The relative success of conservation efforts in the Texas Hill Country is strongly connected to place and a shared theme of water conservation around the Edwards Aquifer. Focusing conservation efforts on local communities and unique features of Texas’ urban and rural landscapes have had a catalytic effect in some regions.

⁷ Texas Land Trust Council. 2023. Conservation Lands Inventory. <https://texaslandtrustcouncil.org/what-we-do/conservation-lands-inventory/>. Accessed 4/24/2025.

Maps prepared by Siglo Group for Texas Land Trust Council



TEXAS AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST

“The Texas Agricultural Land Trust is grateful to the Land Trust Alliance for shepherding us through so many important milestones in our 10 years. Accreditation, Terrafirma and constant support and training for our staff and board lend us profound credibility with our partners. The Alliance truly is the anchor for private land conservation in the nation.”

Blair Fitzsimons, former TALT executive director, current Alliance board member and donor

TEXAS AGRICULTURAL LAND TRUST / SYCAMORE SPRINGS RANCH PHOTO BY DAVID LANGFORD.

10-YEAR STORY OF SUCCESS

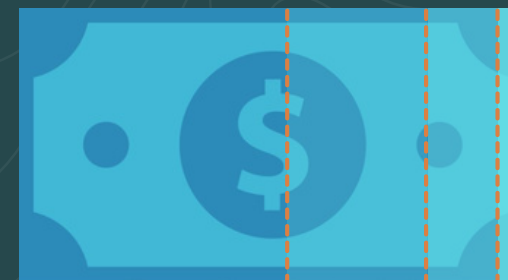
Texas Advancement Initiative

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CAPACITY BUILDING IN TEXAS

The Alliance partnered with the Texas Land Trust Council and funders to build land trust capacity and to increase the on-the-ground conservation impact through the Texas Advancement Initiative (2014-2024). The Houston Endowment invested in the Texas Advancement Initiative initially, with additional support from the Still Water Foundation, the Jacob and Terese Hershey Foundation, the Meadows Foundation, the Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation and the Shield-Ayres Foundation. Over the past 10 years, the Alliance and partners invested \$946,000 in tailored training, direct assistance, coaching and mentoring for 21 participating land trusts. Alliance staff and consultants worked with organizations to assess their effectiveness and design, implement improvement plans, support accreditation preparation and provide leaders with training and resources to guide their teams forward. While the initiative brought services to land trusts of all shapes and sizes, it targeted organizations poised to advance organizational effectiveness and thus result in more land conservation in Texas.

Texas Advancement Initiative (2014–2024)

\$945,961 Investment



56% - Catalyst Granting

25% - Excellence Program Support

12% - Training and Travel Assistance

7% - Accreditation Preparation Grants

Note: “Catalyst Granting” encompasses a variety of grant programs offered by the Alliance to support land trust efficiency and capacity.

372,330 Acres Conserved

An area approximately the size of Houston, Texas.

\$9.3M Increase in Operating Budgets

Increases in operating budgets averaged \$424,000 across organizations.

Land Trusts Hired 60+ Staff

Growing land trusts averaged 4 new staff.

Growing Orgs Conserve 3x More Land

Land trusts that hired new staff increased acreage by 70% compared to 20% for organizations without new staff.

12

Accredited
Land Trusts

9.5
yrs

Average Tenure of
Executive Directors

9

EDs with Alliance
Leadership Training

Between 2010 and 2024, Texas land trusts experienced broad growth in staff, operating budgets and total conserved acreage. Across the state, more than 60 new staff members joined Texas land trusts, nearly doubling the state’s staff footprint. During the same period, land trusts conserved over 372,000 acres, an area approximately the size of Houston, and reported an average increase of more than 50% in total conserved acreage. The program assisted 12 land trusts in gaining and maintaining accreditation, meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence. Operating budgets soared \$9.3 million, representing a 10:1 return on the Texas Advancement Initiative’s investment in Texas. These figures and those outlined below represent the catalytic nature of the Alliance’s capacity approach and the ability of Texas land trusts to conserve land at scale when given the necessary resources.

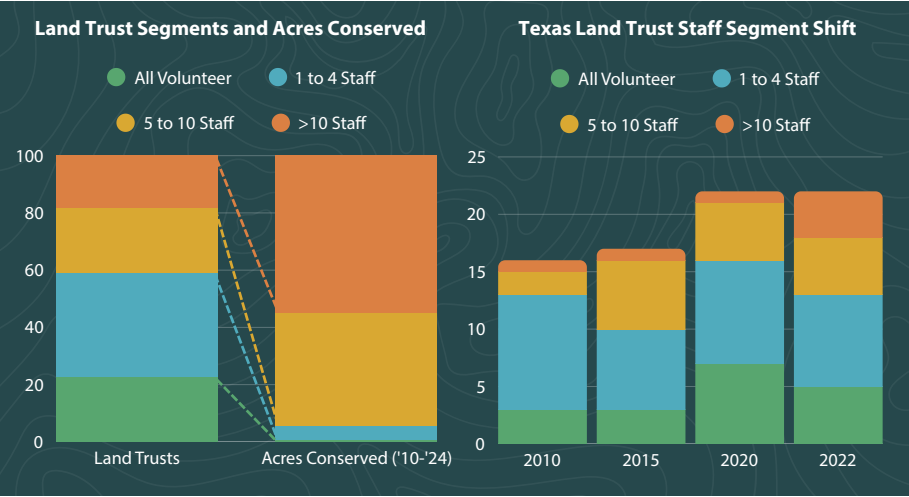


Source: Land Trust Alliance, 2020. National Land Trust Census is the nation's longest-running survey of private land conservation. Every five years, the Land Trust Alliance queries Texas land trusts for key metrics about their work, including staffing, acres protected and community engagement. The next survey will be conducted in 2026. Visit <https://landtrustalliance.org/land-trusts/gaining-ground/texas> for more statistics on Texas land trust impacts.

Data Collection and Methods

This report replicated metrics and methods developed by Peter Szabo of Bloomingdale Management Advisors for the Land Trust Excellence Program Impact Evaluation (2018).⁸ The Alliance monitors the impact of our capacity-building programs, including the Texas Advancement Initiative and Oregon Advancing Conservation Excellence Program. The data presented in this report originates from historical records of the Land Trust Alliance’s National Land Trust Census from 2010, 2015 and 2020. Data from 2020-2024 was reported by land trusts or collected from publicly-available federal tax filings.

Growing Teams: Changes in Staff Segments Over Time

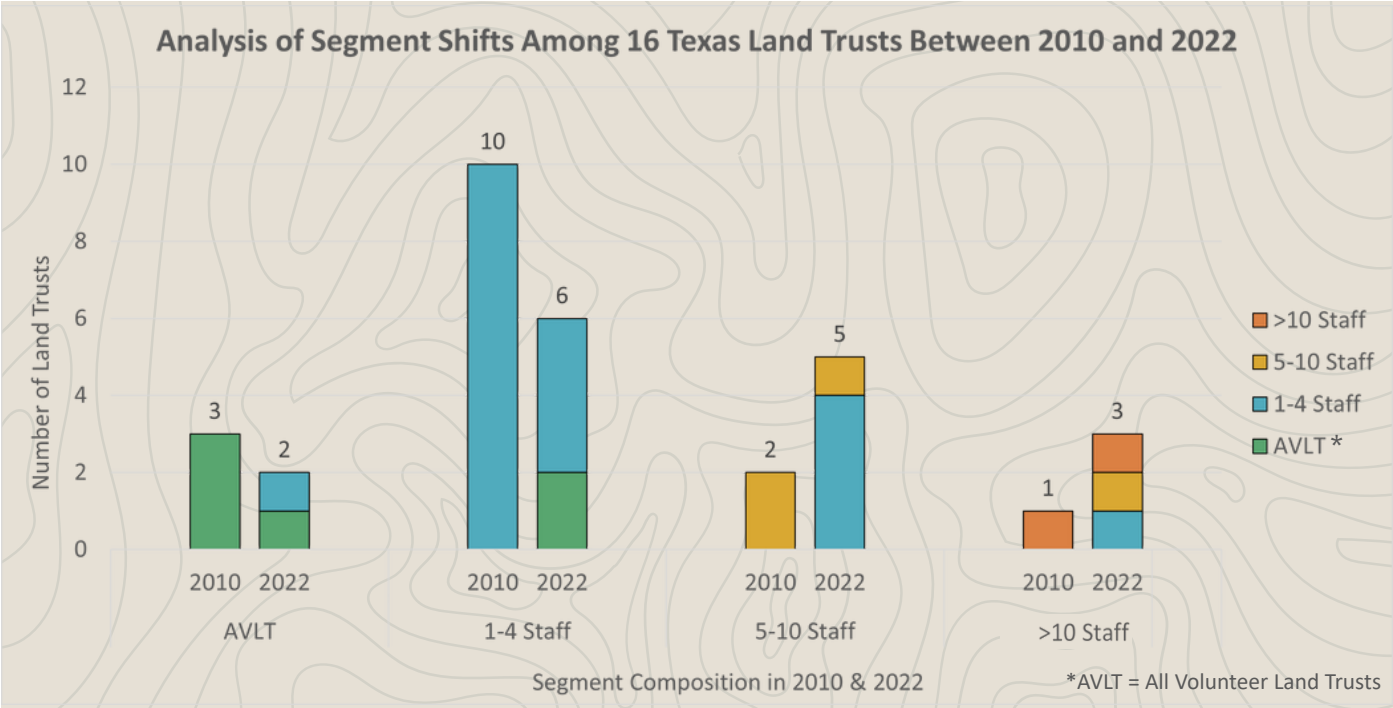


Land trusts’ staff capacity can be categorized into four groups or segments: All Volunteer, 1 to 4 Staff, 5 to 10 Staff and Greater than 10 Staff. By comparing these segments to their respective acreage totals and observing shifts in the segments over time, the conservation landscape of Texas comes into clearer view. The resulting analysis shows the largest two staff segments (5 to 10 Staff and >10 Staff) represent only 40% of land trusts but 94.5% of lands conserved between 2010 and 2024. The growth of the 5 to 10 Staff and >10 Staff segments seen below

indicates a positive trend of Texas land trusts increasing staff and scaling their capacity to conserve private lands. Organizations within these growing segments conserve dramatically more land than organizations in the lower two segments—a convincing case for the relationship between increased staff capacity and the ability to conserve significantly more land.

As land trusts increase staff and shift into different staff segments over time, it is helpful to understand where the most significant shifts are occurring. The chart below details which segments grew and from where that growth originated. For the 16 land trusts with staff data between 2010 and 2022, several upward shifts contributed to the growth seen in the 5 to 10 Staff and >10 Staff segments. In one case, an organization’s growth shifted by two segments, rising from 1 to 4 Staff to the >10 Staff segment in just 12 years, a tremendous achievement for Texas conservation and a model for the type of capacity increases needed across the state. Increasing land trust capacity in these segments is a solid investment in Texas conservation and a model for the type of capacity increases needed statewide.

⁸ Bloomingdale Management Advisors. 2018. Land Trust Excellence Program Impact Evaluation. Internal evaluation report for the Land Trust Alliance. Author: Peter Szabo.



Comparing Conservation Outcomes & Capacity Programs

The most effective Texas land trusts share several key attributes such as accreditation status, engagement in leadership and advocacy training, involvement of board members and others that may indicate the internal strength and resilience of the organization. The table below compares average acreage growth rates of organizations with and without specific attributes. Average acreage growth rate = ((2024 Total Acres – 2010 Total Acres) / 2010 Total Acres) * 100.

Table 3: Land trust participation in capacity building and average increase in land protected

Participation in Capacity-Building Programs	Yes	No
Executive Director Attended Alliance Leadership Training	80%	39%
Land Trust Increased Staff	70%	20%
Board Engaged with Alliance Services	95%	46%
Achieved Accreditation	95%	14%
Staff Participated in Advocacy Days and Advocacy Training	112%	22%
Statewide Average Acreage Growth Rate		57%

Capacity building in Texas and other states has demonstrated that investing in the land trust community leverages impact on the ground. Participating land trusts conserved three times more land than other land trusts and grew their operating budgets by \$9.3 million, leveraging the capacity program as a 10-to-1 investment advancing conservation. During this time, land trusts conserved 372,330 acres, grew their teams and operating budgets and matured as organizations.

Grants through this program significantly grew the capacity of Texas land trusts, and strategic collaboration with the Texas Land Trust Council further united and strengthened the Texas land trust community. They are ready for the ‘next level’ of growth and impact.



Analysis at the Individual Scale

ELEMENTS OF DURABLE & HIGH IMPACT LAND TRUSTS

The Alliance contracted with Capacity Refresh and Public Interest Management Group (PIMG) to conduct organizational assessments from January to May 2024 for land trust organizations in the Southwest Region, including Texas. Participants completed a survey, reviewed the results with the consultants and created a development plan for their organization. Regionwide, 28 Southwest organizations — including 12 from Texas — participated in the assessment process, and the assessment survey was completed by 338 individual board and staff members. The 12 participating Texas organizations identified several common needs for investment. There is a clear and immediate need to dramatically increase human capital — increasing staff capacity and skills — to drive conservation impact and put land capital to use on the ground. Land trusts have prioritized board training and development, financial planning and management, talent development, fundraising and retention systems for cultivating staff.

Key Findings

Texas land trust board and staff expressed a lot of enthusiasm for their individual land trust's vision and mission, as each organization has a unique history, culture and conservation driver. Several land trusts are engaging in collaborations and are focused on growing their impact and operations.

Many Texas land trusts are seizing opportunities for growth, exploring new programs and ways to expand their mission and service areas. Others face significant challenges: More than a third have gone through a recent leadership transition with new executive directors racing to come up to speed. Several are adjusting to recent expansion through mergers. Many face fundraising challenges and need to launch new programs and community service models to engage more people and attract more support.

- **Strategy and Impact:** Several land trusts have updated their strategic plans, but there is a need for strategic planning investment at other organizations. Equity training is a top need, although not all organizations view it as a top priority. While some boards are hesitant to navigate these important and difficult issues, many funders, individual staff and community members see focusing on equity as imperative, which is creating external and internal pressure for land trusts to shift their thinking and practices. Programming and training offered at the state and regional levels has helped to advance equity and initiate change in these areas, but additional investments are needed to continue the learning journey and engage more people in it.
- **Financial Systems:** Land trusts are confident in their current fiscal management and oversight, and many seek to advance new tools as they grow their organizations. Financial system best practices for program budgeting, reporting and scenario planning would enhance the ability of land trusts to handle more complex conservation finance projects. Given the desire to increase project capital and address financial sustainability in Texas, additional training would be beneficial.
- **Fundraising:** One of the highest areas for improving land trust sustainability includes hiring and devoting more staff, volunteers and board capacity to fundraising. Only 29% agreed that they had enough capacity devoted to fundraising. Having enough funding for programs, operations and overhead and devoting enough staff capacity for fundraising were all raised as concerns in Texas.



PEDERNALES RIVER / HILL COUNTRY CONSERVANCY PHOTO: RICH KOSTECKE

- **Leadership and Management:** In the last 10 years, many Texas land trusts have leveled up their operations by expanding their teams. This staff growth also led to new needs for the organizations in terms of management and leadership systems. Management systems, such as annual work plans tied to their strategic plans and succession plans for key roles, are less common at Texas land trusts than organizations in other states. Nearly half of the organizations requested support for improving their basic staff supervisory systems such as performance evaluations, employee handbooks and workplans.
- **Board Leadership and Roles:** Less than a third of Texas land trusts reported having board succession planning and term limits, which are important best practices that allow organizations to grow and evolve with time. Training in fundraising and financial oversight would greatly strengthen organizational sustainability.
- **Equity:** Inclusive behaviors, such as updated human resource practices and shared decision making, were also less observed in Texas land trusts. Inclusive behaviors include continuous improvement practices like soliciting feedback on executive director and supervisor performance, establishing inclusive language expectations in meetings, sharing decision making, clarifying roles, discussing culture and organizational norms around work and communication styles, and creating standardized questions for job applicants. Land trusts identified board training for community-centered conservation as a key area for growth, to help boards to better understand the communities that they serve.

Following the organizational assessments led by Capacity Refresh and PIMG, 12 land trusts created a development plan tailored to their needs and based upon their results. Texas land trusts prioritized board training and development, fundraising, financial planning and management, talent development, and retention systems for cultivating staff. **Table 4** includes the most common support requested for organizational development.

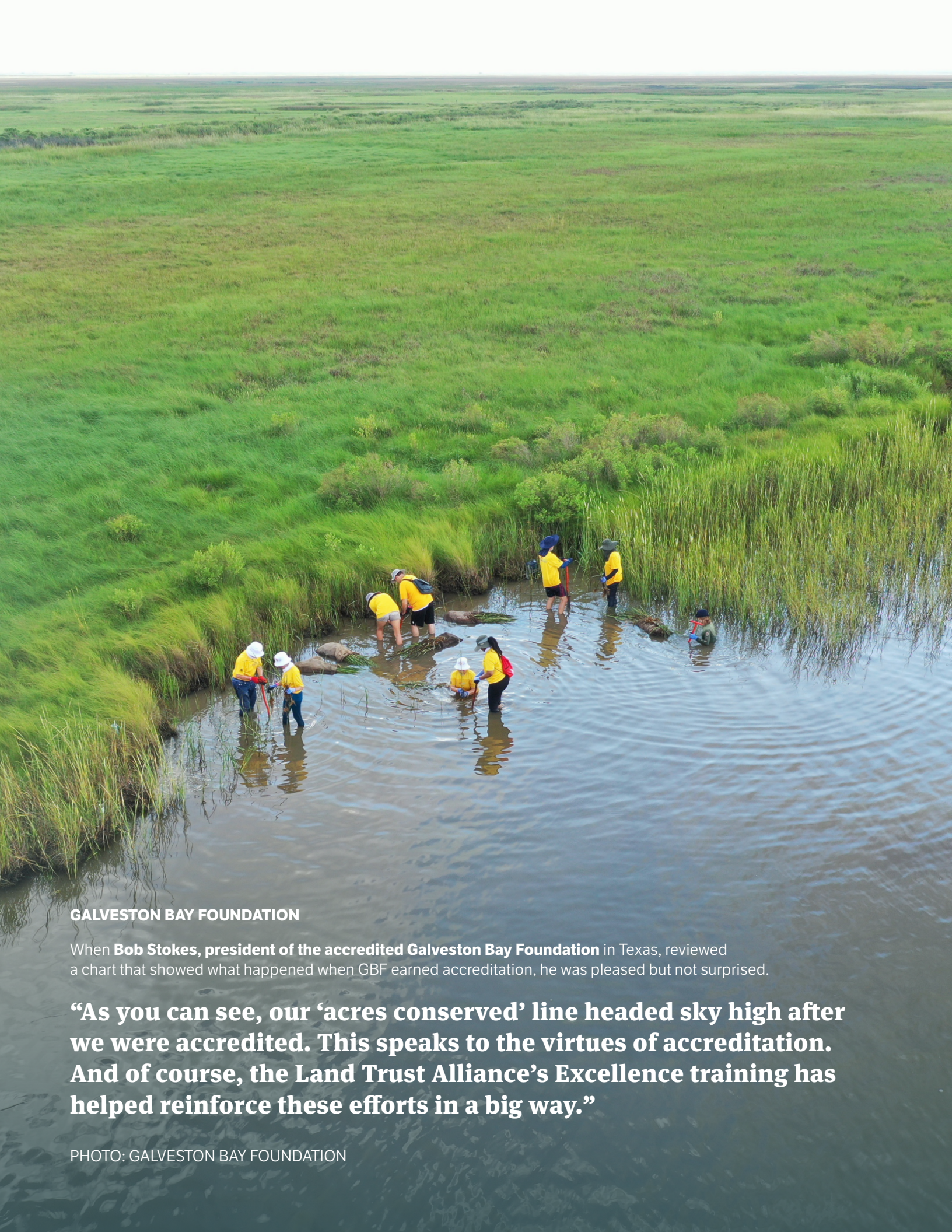
Table 4: Top capacity investments requested in development plans by service type

Capacity Grants	Training	Consulting & Coaching	Peer Learning & Networking
• Fundraising staff expansion • Operations staff expansion • Finance staff expansion	• Board development • Community-centered conservation • Fundraising & program planning	• Fundraising consulting • Inclusive leadership consulting • Strategic planning • Strategic conservation • Legal services	• Sample plans & policies • Executive director cohort • Joint grant & fundraising opportunities

Organizational capacity needs are contextual and vary by situation and life cycle of each nonprofit. As shown in **Table 5**, Texas land trusts vary widely in terms of size, age, experience, revenue and the local community — all of these factors influence what is needed to boost capacity. Younger and smaller land trusts benefit from building capacity of core functions, fundraising and foundational skills. Midscale organizations are focused on scaling management systems, expanding capacity and partnerships, and adding specialized skills to their teams. More mature and older organizations are expanding their impact, replicating successful strategies and adding more complex initiatives.

Table 5: Alliance members’ critical moments and capacity needs by life cycle stage

Life Cycle Stage	Selected critical moments	Capacity building needs
All Volunteer Forming 5 land trusts	• Working board directly engaged in land conservation • Volunteer-driven, limited capacity • Board succession planning	• Strategic planning • Professional expertise • Land Trust Standards & Practices
Small & Young Startup 7 land trusts	• Hiring first staff with flat structure • Board transition from working board to policy board with paid staff • First land deal by professional staff • Navigating leadership transitions	• Land Trust Standards & Practices • Leadership cultivation • Accreditation preparation • Skills training & technical assistance • Mentoring new executive director
Medium-sized Growing 5 land trusts	• Managing staff and establishing HR systems • Expanding staff with specific expertise • First strategic plan • Diversifying fundraising and reliable income • Stewarding a growing portfolio of easements	• Maintaining accreditation • Capital for capacity & land deals • Strategic planning • Mentoring staff • Formalizing operations & management
Large Texas-based Maturing 5 land trusts	• Toolbox expansion • Next-level fundraising • Next-level community engagement • Sector leadership • Piloting new, innovative practices	• New conservation finance tools • Tackling new, emerging issues • Leadership opportunities • Increased capacity for communications & advocacy
National Sustaining 5+ land trusts	• Apply national resources to Texas campaigns • Engaging local and regional partners • Leverage national funding for local impact	• Partners for large landscape projects • Local relationships for leveraging communications and advocacy



GALVESTON BAY FOUNDATION

When **Bob Stokes, president of the accredited Galveston Bay Foundation** in Texas, reviewed a chart that showed what happened when GBF earned accreditation, he was pleased but not surprised.

“As you can see, our ‘acres conserved’ line headed sky high after we were accredited. This speaks to the virtues of accreditation. And of course, the Land Trust Alliance’s Excellence training has helped reinforce these efforts in a big way.”

PHOTO: GALVESTON BAY FOUNDATION

Statewide & Regional Analysis

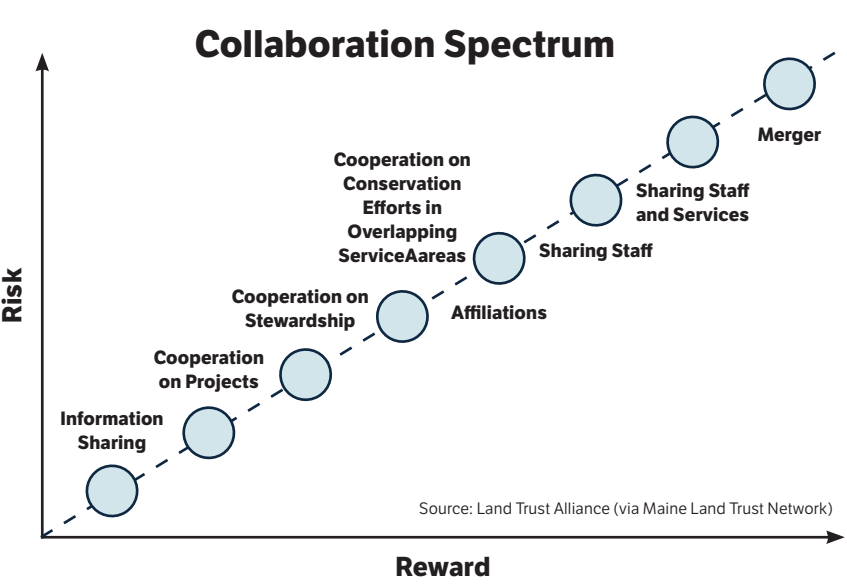
SCALING COLLABORATION, INNOVATION & SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Texas is a big state, and yet across its 172 million acres, there are only 35 land trusts — and about 150 staff and 300 board members — leaving large sections of Texas not served or underserved by a land trust partner. Several statewide land trusts are scaling to fill voids and meet the opportunities, but they need more human capital, deal capital, and new skills and tools to meet the demand in an evolving, increasingly complex industry. The best scale to meet many of these needs are at the level of the collective at regional and statewide level where strategic partnerships and other collaborative models can achieve bigger outcomes and leverage more resources than the individual land trust can when acting alone.

To understand what is needed to sustain and strengthen conservation portfolios, both in underserved areas and places where there is overlapping land trust coverage, we conducted interviews to identify systems-level solutions with experts and organizations that are considering changing their approach. Expanded capacity programming is needed to support a range of needs, from organizations considering reorganization, strategic collaboration and, in some cases, consolidation or mergers.

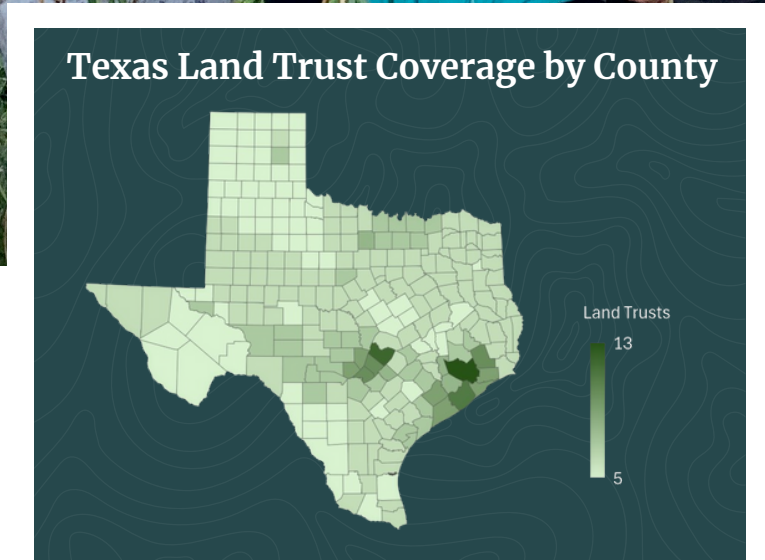
Strategic partnerships, shared services, collaborations and mergers could help strengthen the Texas land trust sector if: (1) land trusts sought support and collaborations earlier, before facing unsurmountable challenges on their own; (2) smaller organizations knew more about models and options for collaboration and/or reorganization, expanding the options beyond traditional land trust structure; and (3) incentives and funding existed to motivate organizations to collaborate.

Larger organizations are interested in supporting collaborative, landscape-scale projects, providing transaction expertise and supporting mergers and/or strategic collaborations. Larger organizations need support and capacity to build relationships and position their organizations as trusted partners in order for smaller organizations to be interested in these models.



Source: Land Trust Alliance “Collaboration Spectrum from Introduction to Mergers.”

Several patterns have emerged regarding geographic need for collaboration, consolidation and/or mergers. First, the Hill Country and Houston areas have the most overlapping coverage and a density of organizations; these areas warrant exploring options for efficiency and collaboration. Efforts to strengthen collaboration should focus on strengthening systems leadership, collaborative fundraising, and bold, ambitious initiatives. Second, land trusts that are isolated and/or in rural areas with limited funding struggle financially. Support and training for development teams, collaborative fundraising and strategic business planning is needed.



Land trusts are concentrated in the Texas Hill Country (Austin) and Houston areas, with fewer serving East, North and West Texas, mid-coast and the Rio Grande Valley. State-wide land trusts include The Nature Conservancy, Texas Land Conservancy, Texas Agricultural Land Trust, The Conservation Fund, and Trust for Public Land.

Underserved Areas: Underserved areas include the mid-coast zones, Rio Grande Valley and north and west Texas. In each of these areas, anchor institutions or collaboratives could serve as the nexus for building additional capacity. Statewide land trusts can also assist to fill in gaps if they receive support for adding staff capacity and time for strengthening partnerships.

Texas Hill Country: Hill Country has more overlap in land trust capacity, networks and level of collaboration than any other area in Texas. Efforts are needed to help strengthen collaboration and should focus on strengthening systems leadership, collaborative fundraising and scaling shared resources, such as bond measure campaign staff. Hill Country Alliance is proving to be a strong magnifier as a backbone organization, leading initiatives that build capacity, partnerships and networks. Increasing available funding to Hill Country Alliance to expand its capacity to advance collective action would have an exponential impact in this vital region. Smaller land trusts are struggling to survive as they are finding fundraising and sustaining support a constant challenge. Local bond initiatives are incredibly effective at increasing conservation funding to overcome the lack of state-sponsored resources. There could be great potential for shared services, strategic partnerships, consolidation and/or mergers in this area to strengthen organizations and magnify their impacts. Key themes in the Hill Country include access to more funding, especially rapidly deployable options; opportunities for partnerships with water-focused organizations and districts; continuing or expanding local/county education and bond initiatives; and strong organizational foundations (the foundations of capacity).

Houston Region: A history of collaboration, sustained capacity growth and long-standing leadership has poised Houston's land trusts for a 'next level' project and the development of new funding sources. In the face of unbridled growth, skyrocketing land prices and limited political influence, opportunities include engaging the diversified and urban population; joining equitable land protection campaigns; promoting climate-smart, nature-based solutions; and connecting Headwaters-to-Baywaters ecozones to climate-smart solutions for people and nature.



HEALTHY HARVEST CELEBRATION / GARCIA STREET URBAN FARM PHOTO GRACE CARLIN

Urban Areas: Land trusts are expanding their services in urban areas through nature preserves, trail corridors, community gardens, restoration and other projects that offer community engagement and direct access to nature. In some cases, land trusts own land offering access, recreation and nature centers. These projects represent fertile ground for expanding the number of people who benefit from land conservation as well as building a network of financial supporters for the movement. Land trusts are also exploring ways to help with Centennial Parks Conservation Fund projects and partnering with local and county conservation programs. In many cases, land trusts need to develop new skills and business models for supporting these types of projects. The new Centennial Parks Conservation Fund offers new capital funding for state parks acquisition. While this fund provides significant capital to purchase property, the role that land trusts and community partners might play to facilitate those projects needs further development, including how to fund their efforts to support these types of projects. Funding, budgeting and programming for these new types of projects are areas that need funding to seed and operate.

Rural Areas and Working Lands: Working lands and rural landowners are essential partners to achieving landscape-scale conservation, protecting water sources and producing local food. Building and strengthening relationships with private landowners to support stewardship and management of working lands is crucial to conserving healthy ecosystems and fostering resilient communities. While every property and landowner is different, they face shared challenges. Farm and ranchland loss is driven by marginal profitability, generational transfer of ownership and record high land prices. At the same time, many beginning and historically marginalized producers struggle to access or afford land. Stewarding land requires unique perspectives, tools and programs that speak to their motivations and values, provide incentives, and reduce barriers to conservation. Important programs and tools are transaction cost assistance programs for low-income families and under-represented producers, additive conservation and restoration services, and economic programs to support keeping families on the land.

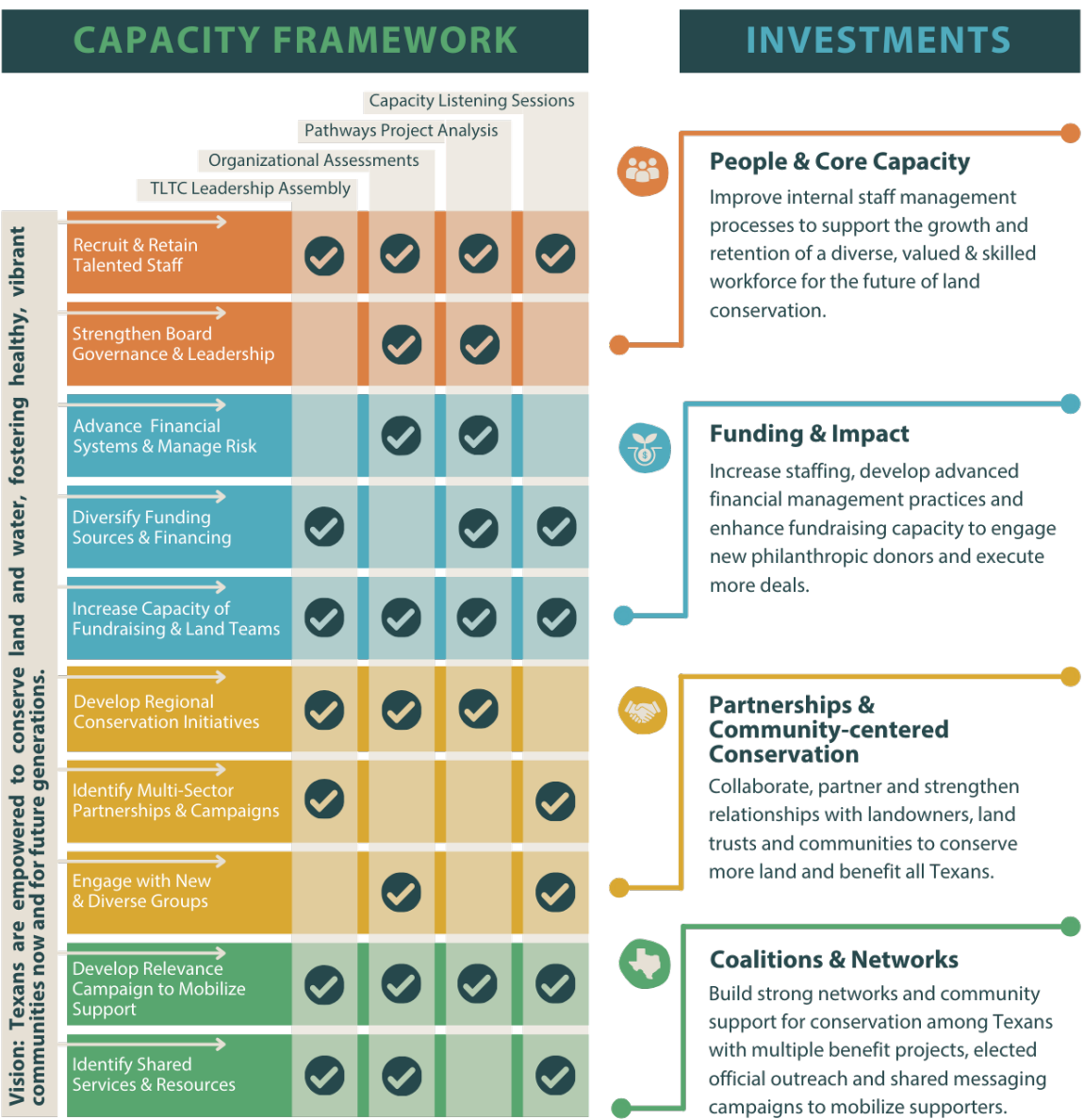
In many places, there are opportunities to support Hispanic and Black producers in Texas. In six counties primarily in southern Texas, 80% or more of farms are operated by Hispanic producers: Starr, Zapata, Brooks, Hidalgo, Webb and Duval. Also, Texas has more Black producers — almost twice as many — as any other state in the U.S.⁹ While these farmers and ranchers are still a minority in the state, they represent an important growing segment of landowners with different needs for support and resources.

⁹ USDA. 2024. Highlights of the U.S. Census. Publications Hispanic Producers and Black Producers. www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2024/Census22_HL_HispanicProducers.pdf and www.nass.usda.gov/Publications/Highlights/2024/Census22_HL_BlackProducers.pdf. Accessed 8/1/2024.

Community Informed Framework

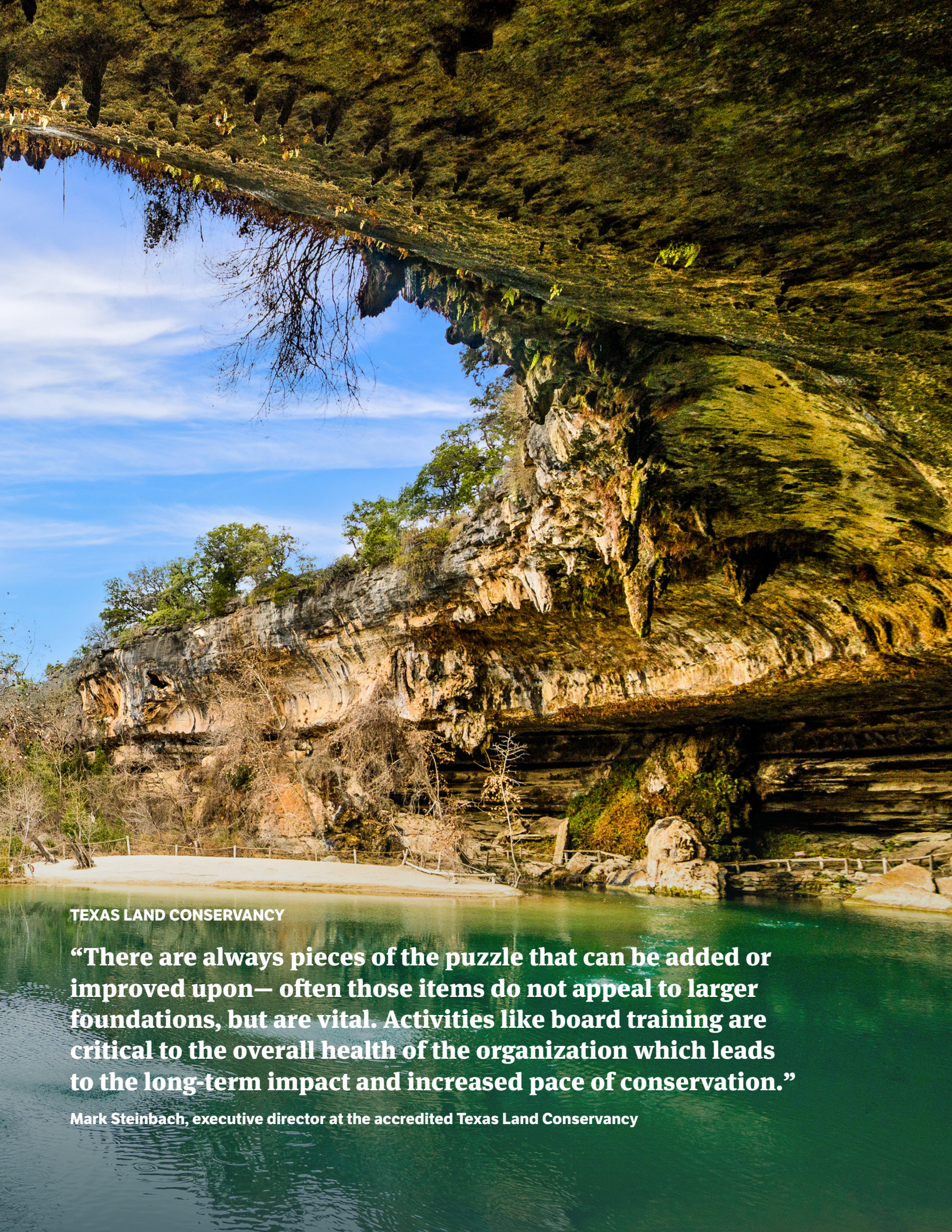
ALIGNING CAPACITY NEEDS WITH STRATEGIES FOR INVESTMENT

To better understand the capacity needs of Texas land trusts, the Alliance hosted a series of five virtual listening sessions with land trusts and conservation organizations across the state facilitated by Bold Bison Communications & Consulting, in addition to analyzing insights gained from individual organization assessments, a statewide mergers and acquisitions analysis, and feedback at the annual Texas Land Trust Council Leadership Assembly. Initial findings from these conversations were shared at the Texas Land Conservation Conference Leadership Luncheon, where participants continued the conversation and helped prioritize needs and opportunities. In response to these reported needs, the Alliance has articulated a capacity-building framework that supports the ultimate goal of land trusts partnering with landowners and their communities to conserve and steward another 1 million acres of private lands in the next 10 years.



The investment activities listed in the table below represent various approaches to targeted capacity investment in response to the needs reported in the Capacity Framework on the previous page. The Alliance advanced several activities in the Strong Foundations category throughout the Texas Advancement Initiative and will work with land trusts, Texas Land Trust Council, funders and community partners to prioritize additional investments to maximize conservation outcomes across the state.

EXAMPLE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES			
	Strong Foundations <i>People & Core Capacity</i>	Scale for Success <i>High Impact Land Trusts</i>	Collaborate & Innovate <i>Systems & Networks</i>
People & Core Capacity	- Leadership training for executive, emerging leaders & managerial levels - Board leadership, roles & responsibility training - Accreditation preparation, plus Standards & Practices training	- Multi-year staff funding to add positions - Land acquisition & transaction support for new/growing teams - Update strategic conservation plans & prioritization for leverage	- Shared legal consultation & landowner identification - Shared government & public relations consultant(s) - Shared technology: wealth software & GIS systems
Funding & Impact	- Financial management, business model & financial risk training - Fundraising for donor & major gift cultivation - Conservation Finance Bootcamp training	- Fundraising consultants for major gifts & grant writing - Support from the Alliance's National Conservation Acquisition Team for federal program guidance - Conservation Support Center for complex deals	- Attract new philanthropy & corporate investment - Shared campaigns for planned giving - Expand & initiate new landscape-scale collaboratives (e.g., Regional Conservation Partnership Program)
Partnerships & Community-centered Conservation	- Inclusion, cultural sensitivity & belonging training - Identify opportunities for community-centered conservation & increasing public access to land - Learn history of conservation in local area & community culture	- Offer grants to develop & expand relationships with community partners - Increase additive conservation & landowner support programs	- Seed regional cross-sector collaboratives - Community-centered Conservation peer group - Expand finance tools, e.g., strike funds & transaction cost assistance, to remove barriers
Coalitions & Networks	- Strengthen communications & community relations - Increase skills for relationship building with elected leaders & government staff	- Expand relationships & partnerships with community groups & local initiatives - Cultivate local official support at local, county & state levels	- Support regional conservation collaboratives (e.g., Hill Country Conservation Accelerator Program) - Expand Texas Communicators Network & offer other professional development peer learning - Join public coalitions & advocacy campaigns for state & local funding



TEXAS LAND CONSERVANCY

“There are always pieces of the puzzle that can be added or improved upon— often those items do not appeal to larger foundations, but are vital. Activities like board training are critical to the overall health of the organization which leads to the long-term impact and increased pace of conservation.”

Mark Steinbach, executive director at the accredited Texas Land Conservancy

CAPACITY APPROACH

Capacity Building: How It Works

THE LAND TRUST ALLIANCE STRATEGY & APPROACH

The Land Trust Alliance embraces a holistic, iterative approach to capacity building by offering a cohesive program combining direct support, funding, training and technical assistance. Combined, these services provide necessary infrastructure for land trusts to increase specific capabilities, deliver stronger programs, take risks, build connections, innovate and iterate.¹⁰ As the basic foundation, we assess the needs of individual land trusts and the broader conservation community; apply our national experience with a variety of options to create a tailored program for building land trust capacity; offer our Land Trust Standards and Practices as a blueprint for healthy land trusts; and strengthen the network of support by partnering with state associations.

To initiate the process, we offer organizational assessments to inform a tailored capacity-building strategy for each individual land trust. We begin by ensuring each organization has a strong foundation of strategic thinking and good governance, as well as recruiting and retaining talented staff and cultivating strong leaders. As collaborative partners, we work to deepen relationships with land trust communities and their conservation partners, coach leadership and boards, diagnose challenges, offer technical assistance and share potential solutions and best practices.

We then layer in larger projects that push organizations to think more boldly about their own approach to land conservation. This includes working to develop equitable community-centered programs, partnering with underserved communities, advocating for conservation funding, and exploring strategies to mitigate climate impacts through land preservation and restoration.

Finally, we assist organizations in becoming self-sustaining by developing innovative funding strategies including collaboration, coalition building and community engagement. These could target new and permanent sources of conservation funding, such as a state fund, or a thriving state association to “house” collaborative programs, advocacy initiatives or outreach campaigns.

Framework for Capacity Building

Investing in the growth and durability of land conservation organizations and their partners puts resources behind the people who drive permanent conservation and serves as a down payment on success in future community-led land protection for future generations in Texas.



STRONG FOUNDATIONS

People & Core Capacity

Partner with land trusts to understand the unique challenges of individual organizations as well as shared needs across the state. Work together to diagnose these challenges and set goals to grow through guided, continuous improvement.



SCALE FOR SUCCESS

High Impact Land Trusts

Augment capacity by increasing staff and systems to support land trusts, layering in expanded fundraising and team management, which leads to increased outreach, expanded services and geographic reach, and more acres conserved.



COLLABORATE & INNOVATE

Systems & Networks

Forge partnerships across regions and pilot new models for land protection through bolder, riskier strategies, such as collaborative acquisitions, outreach plans, advocacy and addressing emerging issues in conservation.

¹⁰ Grantmakers for Effective Organizations. 2016. Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity: core concepts in capacity building. www.geofunders.org. Accessed 9/14/2024.

Best Practices for an Integrated Capacity-Building Program

Over the years, the Alliance has learned that capacity is best built through an integrated combination of support and services including grants, training, technical assistance, coaching and mentoring, peer learning, and networking. Our national Conservation Excellence Program and Advancing Conservation Excellence model programs in Oregon and Massachusetts have provided opportunities for iteratively building and refining the approach discussed in this report and **highlighted below**. One of the most important defining elements are the multi-year programs offering capacity grants to immediately increase staff positions, which afford land trusts the runway to immediately boost their outcomes and ultimately become self-supporting. Guided by their assessment and the development plan, land trusts can acquire training to fill skill gaps and progressively advance their knowledge and systems. Consultants provide curated and customized services as a land trust progresses and hones more skills. Peer learning and networking provide reinforcement, brainstorming and sharing of different approaches. In combination, these investments result in better absorption, deeper implementation and organizational durability.

For example, an independent evaluation of the Conservation Excellence Program conducted in 2017 found that land trusts receiving training, grants and coaching over four years were stronger, more capably led and better connected to their communities. They showed gains in financial supporters (doubled), major donors (up 44%), volunteers (up 50%), strategic conservation plans (up 50%), operating budgets (up 25%) and staff (up 25%). Acres conserved grew nearly 20%, with more gains anticipated.

Oregon Advancing Conservation Excellence (ACE) Program

Over a 10-year period, the Alliance partnered with the Coalition of Oregon Land Trusts to leverage a \$10 million investment in land trust capacity. The project focused on organizational development, expanding teams, expanding fundraising skills and increasing community-centered conservation projects. The ACE program resulted in a 146% increase in lands protected, 384% increase in acres of conserved lands available to the public, and 525% increase in stewardship and legal funds to protect conservation lands in perpetuity.



Key attributes identified through the Land Trust Alliance’s experiences in Texas, Oregon and our National Conservation Excellence Program are compared in **Table 6**. The Texas Advancement Initiative over the last 10 years increased the Strong Foundations of several land trusts, despite being a more modest program. To take capacity building to the next level in Texas, the next program should retain Scaling for Impact strategies to extend and expand the Texas Advancement core capacity trainings. The next program should also include elements to immediately boost staff capacity with multi-year grants, focusing on funding and incentives for land trusts to deepen their strategic collaborations and community partnerships.

The best capacity program for Texas would include sustained investment over 5-10 years to provide: (1) guidance from regular organizational assessments and updates to focus capacity investments; (2) commitment of multi-year capacity funding to equip land trusts with the resources they need to add staff and allow time for iterative, adaptive adjustments to lead to long-term success; (3) focused efforts to grow the amount of funding and resources dedicated to conservation; and (4) emphasis on incentives for collaboration, innovation and new approaches.

Table 6: Comparing Texas Advancement Initiative with other national capacity models

Key Characteristics	Capacity Building Programs		
Program Elements Offered	Texas Advancement Initiative	National Conservation Excellence Program	Oregon Advancing Conservation Excellence Program
Scale	Statewide 21 land trusts	Nationwide 70 land trusts	Statewide 25 land trusts
Funding leveraged	\$975,000	\$3,300,000	\$10,000,000
Guided growth with organizational development plans	✓	✓	✓
Annual grant program (\$5-15k)	✓	✓	✓
Multi-year capacity grants including staff positions (\$30-75k)		✓	✓
Focus on growing fundraising skills			✓
Emphasis on increasing community engagement & partnerships			✓
Incentivize collaboration & support networks			✓

NATIVE PRAIRIES ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS

As a participant in the Southwest Executive Director Intensive program, **Amber Arseneaux, executive director of the Native Prairies Association of Texas**, found immense value in the cohort camaraderie, exchanging insights with fellow leaders, and the invaluable guidance from Megan Seibel.

“This experience has been particularly beneficial as we assess organizational effectiveness and enhance our financial sustainability in preparation for our upcoming strategic planning process. It has truly fortified the start of my journey as the executive director of Native Prairies Association of Texas.”

FUTURE VISION

Capacity Recommendations

To position Texas land trusts to meet the challenges they face and advance conservation at the pace and scale necessary, capacity building is needed. As external pressures for urban development and land use increase, land trusts need investment to be competitive. Land trusts have grown their staff and increased their level of professionalism. Many are ready for the next level of organizational development. Boards need also to grow and mature along with their organizations. In addition, as a community, land trusts are ready to enhance their collaboration skills and capacity to be more effective as a conservation movement. This growth and development will require organizational funds to support expansion and infrastructure, and more sophisticated financial management and fundraising to assure sustainability.

Breakthrough results require strategies and investments that focus on **both organizations and systems**. It is not a choice of “either/or” thinking. In order to scale operations and make change at a systems level, it requires healthy and adaptive organizations that can respond to opportunities and challenges in new ways — and it may also require new forms of organizations, collaborations and infrastructure to support that change.

Investment Priorities for Capacity Building

Learning from the Alliance’s national experience, capacity building is most effective when it combines: (1) guidance from regular organizational assessments and updates to focus strategic capacity investments; (2) multi-year capacity funding committed to equipping land trusts with the investments they need to add staff and other capacity for long-term success; (3) focused efforts to grow the amount of funding and resources dedicated to conservation; (4) incentives for collaboration and innovation; and (5) measures of accountability to track progress on key targets in order to continue to receive funding.

Strong Foundations: People & Core Capacity

- **More human capital is needed immediately to expand pace and scale.** Texas land trusts need immediate support to further expand their staff to meet the interest in conservation, raise funds and expand outreach to landowners and communities if they are to achieve ambitious conservation goals. Multi-year staffing grants would immediately boost capacity.
- **Support for executive directors and rising leadership of land trusts is critical** for growing organizations and their impact. Leadership training for new executive directors and emerging leaders is essential to growing and sustaining the movement.
- **Fundraising capacity was a top concern** of land trusts and deserves focused support. Because of the lack of general support funding, Texas land trusts need to be more self-reliant than organizations in other states. Capacity programs should make a greater commitment and emphasis on fundraising and development team staff, as their roles are essential.
- **Effective boards are critical to land trust success. Investing in board training** to maximize their potential, expand fundraising and focus strategic leadership will expand results.

Scale for Success: Expand Funding & Impact

- Supporting well-positioned land trusts in all areas of the state with **capacity grants to expand their staffing** is critical, especially for fundraising, land protection and stewardship. Capacity staffing grants would immediately position land trusts to add essential roles needed to increase their impact. Stable multi-year funding for competitive salaries and professional development will improve staff performance and retention.
- Texas land trusts are **scaling their efforts and growing their organizations**. In order to scale, they are seeking training to improve their internal staff management and build more inclusive and effective teams. Programming should be targeted by a land trust’s size and experience, with special offerings for small land trusts to strengthen their foundations and for medium-large land trusts to scale their programs and grow their impact.
- To complete bigger, more complex land transactions, land trusts need capacity and training to advance a more strategic (less reactive) **pipeline of deals, raise capital, and mature their financial systems and financial risk management**, so that boards and staff are capable of managing larger (federal) grants and leveraging more complicated conservation transactions.

Collaboration & Innovation: Partnerships & Community-centered Conservation

- **Increasing relevance through partnerships and collaboration is essential.** Many land trusts were founded under fairly narrow missions focused on conserving private lands for ecological purposes. As an unintended outcome, this narrow focus has isolated land trusts from other nonprofits and issues that could add significant momentum to their cause and open up new partnerships and opportunities for impact and funding.
- **Training, peer sharing and grant programs will help incentivize innovative thinking, seed action and increase sharing of best practices across land trusts.** These steps are vital to helping them adapt and form new relationships, increase their relevance, and boost their connections, effectiveness and long-term conservation success.

Systems of Support: Coalitions & Networks

- **Collaborative capacity and infrastructure are critical to delivering conservation outcomes** in Texas. Texas Land Trust Council deserves support as an important backbone role in facilitating collaboration, providing cross-network connectivity, leading statewide advocacy campaigns and building strong relationships with new cross-sector partners.
- **Facilitating new shared services, such as access to legal expertise** or technical assistance, would increase efficiency and meet a top need identified by land trusts.
- Strategic **partnerships, consolidation and/or mergers offer opportunities to strengthen organizations and magnify their impacts**. Grants to initiate new partnerships will help build relationships and trust, enabling conditions needed in order to succeed. Grants to incentivize the partnerships and support proper facilitation would increase support.
- **Larger organizations are interested in supporting collaborative, landscape-scale projects**, providing transaction expertise and supporting mergers and/or strategic collaborations. Catalyst grants for supporting smaller land trusts would enable them to serve leadership roles as well as build relationships and trust that may lead to future mergers.
- **Regional and topical “hubs” should be explored to connect land trusts with shared resources and provide support at more efficient scales.** The Hill Country Capacity Accelerator Project is a promising example of how a regional hub can increase collaboration and coordinate outcomes. Efforts to strengthen collaboration should focus on strengthening systems leadership, collaborative fundraising, and bold, ambitious initiatives.

Next Steps

These recommendations with the highest level of priority are intended to encourage collaborative solutions that bring forward the best strengths of our partners, land trusts, funders and community to advance more land protection. Several recommendations will require additional conversations to develop and refine a fully operational implementation plan. We have illuminated a common desire to take collective action and change the course of private land conservation to serve Texas.

The project’s next phase of work comprises:

- Establishing an advisory group of key partners to lead collaborative projects forward.
- Developing a strategic capacity-building program and science-based conservation priorities for focusing implementation with clear goals and associated costs articulated.
- Partnering with the philanthropic community and land trusts to secure sufficient funding.

Moving Towards Collective Action

The goal is ambitious: In the next 10 years, land trusts will partner with landowners and their communities to conserve and steward another 1 million acres of private lands to protect land and water, help communities thrive and create a healthier Texas. This collaborative process makes the message loud and clear from land trusts, partners and funders: Conservation of land and water is imperative for the future of Texas. Much more is needed for Texas land trusts to deliver on this need; they in turn need investments in their capacity and in the land trust community as a whole.



VOLUNTEERS IN THE BAY PHOTO: GALVESTON BAY FOUNDATION

Land trusts are uniquely poised to work with landowners and communities to secure the future of Texas landscapes and cherished places through land conservation. As a result of their hard work strengthening their organizations, they are well positioned to meaningfully address systemic challenges to conservation in Texas and more fully serve their communities by working more holistically. Conserving land and water are central to fostering climate resilience, making communities healthier and more livable, and advancing equity more broadly

The Land Trust Alliance is pursuing an integrated, 10-year initiative to sustain and grow Texas land trusts, so they can partner with landowners and their communities to conserve and steward another 1 million acres of private lands.

Join us to launch this vision into reality by investing in the people and partnerships that will conserve Texas for generations to come.



PHOTO: HEATHER GILL ON UNSPLASH

Appendix A

PATHWAYS PROJECT ANALYSIS

Report by Public Interest Management Group | May 2024

Introduction

The Land Trust Alliance established the Pathways Project in 2023 to explore the potential for mergers and consolidation to create a stronger and more sustainable ecosystem of Texas land trusts, with nationwide implications. Methods for achieving these objectives include exploring alternatives such as other nonprofit structures, including formal strategic alliances, shared services, consolidation and merger. The Pathways Project combined interviews, organizational assessments and group discussions. This report summarizes findings and recommendations reported by Public Interest Management Group in May 2024.

Findings

Need for Mergers

- People familiar or experienced with mergers generally believe the Texas land trust system would be well-served by more consolidation. Leaders of smaller land trusts tend to view this issue differently, often rating their own organizations as healthy and sustainable and often underestimating risks.
- Land trusts in Texas (and beyond) generally struggle to gain awareness and build or broaden their bases of supporters.
- Texas has modest public funding available for land acquisition relative to other Western states, which limits their potential scale of operation.
- Despite these factors, Texas has several strong, growth-oriented land trusts that are willing to consider and pursue mergers.

Obstacles to Merger

- Board members of smaller land trusts often have limited to no awareness of merger as a realistic strategy to sustain their work.
- Many long-time board leaders and some staff members appear to have resistance to merger. A common default assumption is that a small land trust will be erased in any merger with a larger organization.
- Merger is often seen as a strategy of last resort (short of dissolution) if a land trust is failing to thrive. Land trusts appear less likely to view merger in a positive light, for example, as an opportunity to safeguard and advance their mission.
- Some land trust leaders have no specific objection to the idea of merger but lack knowledge of potential partners and understanding of a process for pursuing merger.
- No consensus exists in the land trust community that mergers are generally needed.

Opportunities

- Several opportunities for mutually beneficial mergers may exist now in Texas.
- Longer-term opportunities may be driven by mid-sized land trusts seeking growth.

Capacity Needs and Interventions

- Building awareness of merger as a strategy for land trusts has not, to date, made an impact in Texas.
- The willingness of major funders to condition support based on pursuit of merger or other types of consolidation could boost consideration by land trust leaders.
- Actively addressing early-stage obstacles to merger may be effective over time, though there are few examples to examine in the nonprofit sector; this is a systemic gap.
- Alternatives such as broad strategic alliances addressing major capacity needs may gain more traction than merger with leaders of some small land trusts.
- Land trusts interested in merger have limited capacity to execute and implement them.

Recommendations

A. Actively work to reduce the stigma and myths associated with merger.

The concept of merger has associated stigma and mythology with land trust leaders, primarily board members. This stigma exists on three levels:

- Sensitivity to language, including use of the word “merger.”
- The idea that merger is a strategy of last resort.
- The misconception that merger requires loss of local engagement, input and identity.

The Land Trust Alliance can develop ongoing programming through communication, training and conference content aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of the benefits of merger and increase positive associations with the concept.

B. Establish a merger and consolidation support function within the Land Trust Alliance.

Building on recommendation A, the Land Trust Alliance can promote and support merger and consolidation within the network as strategies for conservation permanency by establishing a formal program (or office) for this purpose. Its scope of work may include:

- Serving as a clearinghouse for merger exploration and interest.
- Overseeing delivery of education programming for members.
- Delivering training to Alliance field staff.
- Maintaining an online merger resource and tools base.
- Maintaining a professional resource directory.
- Cataloguing mergers and formal alliances in the network and developing case studies.
- Coordinating troubleshooting for mergers in process.

C. Establish a formal pooled grant fund for mergers and alliances.

The Land Trust Alliance can also support merger and consolidation more systematically by developing a pooled grant fund for this purpose, with national and/or regional components. Various funders would contribute to the pool, which would be managed by the Alliance. Grantmaking could, in principle, support:

- Merger exploration.
- Facilitation of negotiations.
- Due diligence.
- Project management.
- Implementation support.
- Technical services to resolve problematic easements and contracts.
- Stewardship and legal defense gaps for underfunded easements.

D. Encourage addition of merger-positive elements to the accreditation process.

The Alliance can influence future accreditation criteria and process content to proactively address underlying obstacles to merger and promote its consideration by land trust leaders.

E. Develop a demonstration project for a regional strategic alliance umbrella entity.

One of the primary benefits of merger is improved economies of scale. One alternative concept for achieving this is a strategic alliance umbrella entity, which can conduct specific functions at scale for multiple organizations. These functions may include technical components of land acquisition deals, holding conservation easements, establishing uniform stewardship guidelines, conducting back-office functions such as accounting, and/or managing grant funding on behalf of member land trusts. The Alliance can consider conducting a demonstration project of such an umbrella in a region such as Texas.

F. Explicitly adopt a “low-hanging fruit” approach to supporting mergers.

Much of the discussion around merger as a perceived need in Texas has concerned small land trusts that have shown little or no interest in the subject. Experience in the sector suggests this characteristic is generally true nationwide. As an alternative, given the scarcity of resources, the Land Trust Alliance could focus primarily on supporting (a) those land trusts that have self-selected as current merger candidates with willing partners, and (b) medium to large land trusts that have proactively identified a willingness and desire to find merger partner candidates in their regions.

Appendix B

LEADERSHIP ASSEMBLY PRIORITIES

Through the strategic planning process, the following strategies were prioritized for investment at the Leadership Assembly. The number of votes for each strategy is recorded as a number at the end of each statement.

- 1. Expand Funding to Conserve and Care for Land through New Public and Private Sources.** Increase sources of capital to close more projects.
 - a) Expand new sources of capital and capacity funds from philanthropy, state and federal programs, and conservation finance to complete critical projects in the next five years. (17)
 - b) Increase capacity for local/county bond initiatives and campaigns with shared government relations staff/ centers with campaign experience. (8)
- 2. Expand Partnerships & Collaboration.** Build relationships and strategies that connect with adjacent and/or aligned projects and issues such as water, land use, equity and access to nature.
 - a) Build collaboration and coalition skills to contribute to larger regional, landscape-scale and systems-level projects. (5)
 - b) Develop new intersectional partnerships to center community values and secure substantially more funding in Texas (e.g., new state funding partners like TDOT, health organizations, affordable housing, water utilities, etc.). (10)
- 3. Increase the Pipeline of Landowners, Land Trusts & Communities Willing and Able to Conserve Land.** Build relationships and expertise to increase the number of conservation projects and stewardship.
 - a) Develop transaction cost funding to support underserved landowners and other projects with limited resources. (3)
 - b) Add additive conservation and program staff for supporting landowners with layered benefits and/or conservation incentives (e.g., carbon, restoration, etc.). (3)
 - c) Increase skills and capacity to engage in issues and support landowners within the renewable energy, climate and development spaces. (3)
 - d) Increase transaction expertise and support for complex conservation transactions. (0)
- 4. Increase Core Capacity to Deliver Impact.** Grow the Texas land trust community and capacity to serve the full range and diversity of communities in Texas — from working agricultural lands to urban centers.
 - a) Increase fundraising, communications and marketing staff and develop skills for advanced fundraising (e.g., planned giving, endowments, major gifts, federal grant writing). (3)
 - b) Grow and retain the next generation of conservation leaders. (4)
- 5. Build Community Engagement & Communications.** Develop and coordinate a large-scale communications initiative that builds awareness, community support and funding for land trusts — both locally and across Texas.
 - a) Develop shared narratives and communications that increase land trust relevance, movement building, and support for conservation. (1)

PHOTO: BARBARA DEMMY-SCHIEDLER



