

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sept. 26, 2022

Media contact: Lydia Saldaña
817.851.5729
lsaldana@tpwf.org



TPWF Program Helps Buffer Protected Lands from Development

New program supports its first conservation easement, forever protecting land in North Texas

Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation (TPWF) is supporting the protection of Texas' rural lands and wildlife habitat by helping private landowners voluntarily protect their land through conservation easements. TPWF's new Buffer Lands Incentive Program awarded its first grant in September 2022, and now the 11,800-acre Birdwell and Clark Ranch in Clay County is forever protected by a conservation easement.

The new program's goal is to "buffer" existing protected areas, including lands owned or managed by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, the federal government, or private lands already protected with a conservation easement. The Birdwell and Clark Ranch is centrally located in North Texas between Lake Arrowhead State Park, Fort Richardson State Park, LBJ National Grasslands, and the Nocona Unit of Hagerman National Wildlife Refuge.

"This North Texas ranch is in an ideal location relative to other protected state and federal land," said Zach Spector, TPWF Associate Director of Conservation Programs. "It is a hub within a wheel of protected land, which is a boon for migratory birds that move along the Central Flyway. The ranch also includes seven miles of the East Fork of the Little Wichita River and 65 miles of seasonal creeks and drainages, which offers vital habitat for a myriad of fish, wildlife, and bird species."

While many landowners are interested in conserving their property, due diligence costs—including surveys, title work and stewardship endowments—can be financially onerous, particularly for donated easements. Thanks to generous support from the Knobloch Family Foundation and The Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation, TPWF is able to provide a grant to land trusts to reimburse landowners, up to \$50,000 per project, to help defray some of these costs. The easement on the Birdwell and Clark Ranch is held by the Texas Agricultural Land Trust (TALT).

“This successful land transaction exemplifies how Texas conservation organizations work together to achieve meaningful outcomes,” said TALT CEO Chad Ellis. “We’re grateful to our partners at Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation for helping us conserve our rural land heritage where Texas wildlife thrives.”

Emry Birdwell and Deborah Clark have been ranching in Clay County since 2004 and are proponents of holistic ranch management. The ranch is a stocker operation, and about 5,000 head of cattle is moved through the ranch in an intensively managed grazing program. The focus is on improving rangeland conditions, holding water, increasing carbon sequestration, and improving soil health.

Native tallgrass prairie has emerged throughout the property, and the monoculture of little bluestem has diversified into various grasses, forbs and legumes. Since 2004, bare ground on the ranch has decreased from approximately 25 percent to 5 percent. The healthy habitat now supports not only their cattle herd, but also an amazing array of wildlife.

“We so appreciate TALT’s guidance, and the grant from Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation helped us close the deal,” said Deborah Clark. “We are very grateful that this land we love will be forever protected from development.”

Permanently protecting healthy habitat like the Birdwell and Clark Ranch increases the conservation value of other protected land nearby. As development pressure continues to increase across Texas, parks, wildlife management areas and wildlife refuges will become islands of conservation if the mostly rural land around them are not also protected. The major cause of decline for many Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including many grassland birds, is the loss of suitable habitat.

TPWF’s Buffer Lands Incentive Program is achieving important conservation outcomes by supporting voluntary conservation easements like this one. For more information go to

tpwf.org/blip/

Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation raises private funds to advance Texas’ proud outdoor traditions and conserve our state’s wildlife, habitat, recreational areas, and natural resources. Since 1991, Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation has invested more than \$220 million in efforts to ensure that all Texans, today and in the future, can enjoy the wild things and wild places of Texas.

###