



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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JOHN KNOX RANCH SECURES PERMANENT PROTECTION

A new conservation easement with Hill Country Conservancy ensures John Knox Ranch is preserved forever

AUSTIN, TEXAS & FISCHER, TEXAS – February 18, 2025 – Hill Country Conservancy (HCC) and John Knox Ranch (JKR) today announced the closing of a conservation easement on 255 acres of the 300-acre John Knox Ranch. The HCC-held easement will protect the property's important water and wildlife resources, and John Knox Ranch will continue operating as a nonprofit summer camp and retreat center.

The ranch was purchased in 1962 by Mission Presbytery (Presbyterian Church USA), the governing body of John Knox Ranch. The first summer camp was held in the summer of 1963, and today the camp hosts over 1,000 children ages 4-18 each summer, providing a place for them to learn new skills, grow confidence, and gain an appreciation for the natural world.

John Knox Ranch contains almost 2,000 feet of the Blanco River and nearly a mile of Carpers Creek. The headwaters of Carpers Creek, Blue Hole Springs, are located on the ranch and support rare species including the Blanco River Salamander. Above the river and the creek are more than 200 acres of old growth Ashe juniper-dominated forest, providing connectivity to thousands of acres of endangered Golden-cheeked Warbler habitat in the area. Beyond harboring this endangered species, these forests collect, filter, and infiltrate rainwater into the Edwards Aquifer, a source of drinking water for 1.7 million people in Central Texas.

"Hays County is grateful to be part of the preservation of John Knox Ranch through this conservation easement, said Hays County Commissioner Morgan Hammer. "The acquisition allows for the protection of a cherished piece of land that will continue to benefit our community for generations to come. It ensures that future residents and visitors may enjoy open spaces, recreational activities, and the rich natural and historical resources of this unique property. This partnership reflects our commitment to magnify the beauty and character of Hays County."

“Hill Country Conservancy was blessed with an especially rare opportunity to help preserve John Knox Ranch,” said Frank Davis, Hill Country Conservancy’s Chief Conservation Officer. “This land is incredibly sensitive and unique, as evidenced by the incredible water resources and diverse and rare species found throughout the property. More than that, many thousands of kids (many of them now grownups) have cherished experiences at John Knox Ranch – and a connection to nature that they will never forget. It is wonderful to know that this place will continue to support the water and wildlife of the Texas Hill Country and instill wonder in the hearts of people for many generations to come.”

The Ranch straddles the border between Hays and Comal counties, just a few miles southwest of Wimberley. This area is crucial for conservation efforts, with numerous conservation groups focused on protecting water resources, wildlife habitat, public recreation opportunities, and scenic views. This conservation easement adds to a network of over 2,000 acres of completed and pending conservation projects along the Blanco River from the Devil’s Backbone to Wimberley.

“Our 300 acres of beautiful Texas Hill Country, and our spring-fed Blue Hole in particular, are unique natural resources and spiritual places that must be protected,” said Henry Owen, Executive Director of John Knox Ranch. “By establishing a conservation easement on a portion of the JKR property, we further live into the mission of John Knox Ranch ‘to Foster Experiences of Christian Community in the Beauty of God’s Creation by protecting the land of John Knox Ranch forever and protecting the camp and retreat ministry program through the creation of an endowment. We are thrilled to partner with Hill Country Conservancy on this effort—HCC has a stellar reputation as a land trust and a vision for preserving our beloved Texas Hill Country.”

The conservation easement on John Knox Ranch would not have been possible without the support of the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Hays County Parks and Open Space Bond, Texas Parks & Wildlife’s Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program, the Trull Foundation, the Malcolm C. Damuth Foundation, the Jacob & Terese Hershey Foundation, Comal County Conservation Alliance, and generous individual donors.

ABOUT HILL COUNTRY CONSERVANCY:

Hill Country Conservancy is a nonprofit land trust committed to preserving open spaces in the Texas Hill Country. Preserving vital natural resources through conservation, community collaboration and engagement, HCC works to sustain our region now and forever. For more information, visit HillCountryConservancy.org.

ABOUT JOHN KNOX RANCH:

John Knox Ranch is a ministry of Mission Presbytery, part of the Presbyterian Church USA, with a mission to foster experiences of Christian community in the beauty of God’s creation. John Knox Ranch hosts a yearly summer camp for ages 4-18 and offers year-round retreat rentals for groups. For more information, visit JohnKnoxRanch.org.

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