

## COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION

2021 Annual Report







# *Letter From The Director*

t's been just over a year since I joined The Nature Conservancy as Texas State Director. During this time, I traveled across the state, exploring Texas' natural beauty and meeting with people and partners in the field to experience our work firsthand. The invaluable knowledge I gained from these trips has provided a solid foundation, as we rebuild and reshape the Texas Chapter. Although much has changed this past year-for TNC and the world-our dedication to conserving the places and spaces that make the Lone Star State so special has only intensified. With this renewed focus and a group of passionate staff, TNC has made amazing strides in safeguarding Texas' land, water, wildlife, and way of life—and I could not be prouder to be a part of this hardworking team.

With more than 60 years of experience and nearly one million acres protected, TNC has a strong, successful history as one of the first conservation organizations working in Texas-but TNC is just one piece of the conservation puzzle. More and more land trusts, environmental groups, and nonprofits have stepped up over the years and come together to achieve a unified goal: a safe, resilient, and more equitable future for all Texans. We now have more boots on the ground and more voices at the table than ever before to advance conservation. In a growing state, where the pressures on nature are urgent, it's critical to develop alliances to broaden our reach. These deep roots and relationships are helping us get conservation done-and it's especially important to strengthen this collaborative spirit if we want to move the needle on the big issues facing Texans today.

The stories detailed on the following pages represent some of our greatest accomplishments over the past year, none of which could have been carried out to completion without our partners, friends, and supporters. Our work is as inspiring and more important than ever, and I'm excited to see where the next year takes us. In the meantime, let's keep collaborating in new and innovative ways to give Texans the sustainable future they deserve.

Sincerely,

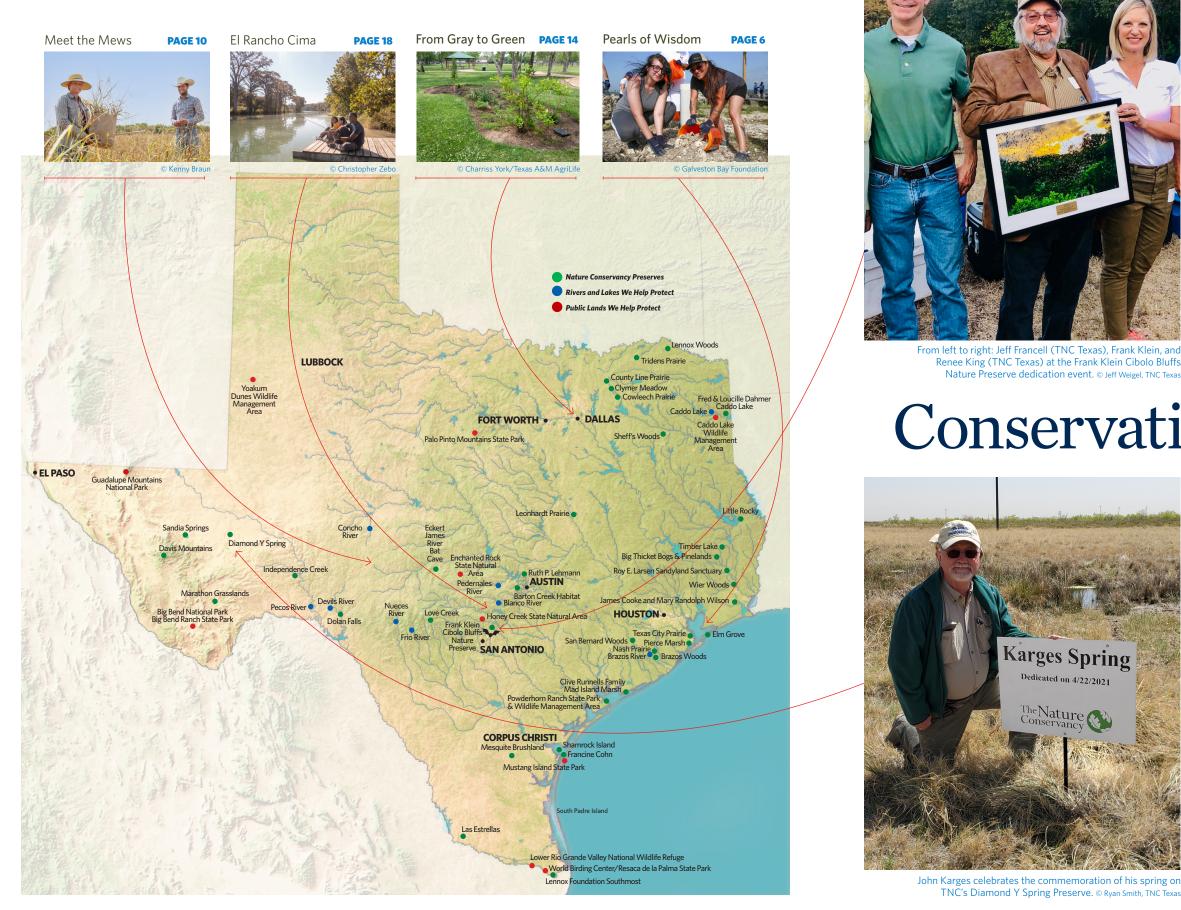
Suzame Blott



Cover Collage: Top row, left to right: © Rocky Kneten, © Kenny Braun, © R.J. Hinkle Second row: © R.J. Hinkle Third row, left: © Kenny Braun Third row, top: © Galveston Bay Foundation, bottom: © Kenny Braun

TNC Texas staff gather together at El Rancho Cima. © Christopher Zebo

## Protecting Texas Together



## Introducing the Frank Klein Cibolo Bluffs Nature Preserve

Thanks to the generosity of Frank Klein, TNC's fundraising campaign to protect land that safeguards Bracken Bat Cave ended in success and on a high note. Frank's commitment to conservation was celebrated at Bracken on September 18, 2021, which dedicated the **Frank Klein Cibolo Bluffs Nature Preserve** in his honor. The preserve now protects critical acreage near the cave, not only in one of the fastest developing regions in the nation, but also directly above the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone.

# **Conservation Milestones**

Celebrating A Career in Conservation

On Earth Day this year, The Nature Conservancy honored longtime friend and colleague John Karges for his conservation achievements through the dedication of a spring at Diamond Y Spring Preserve. From biologist to zoologist to natural historian, John has supported the Texas Chapter for more than three decades in several roles. The newly dubbed **Karges Spring** has been identified as the primary water source sustaining summer habitat for a number of endangered species, making it a fitting tribute to the legacy of his work in West Texas. We cannot thank John enough for sharing his passion and commitment to conservation with TNC. Pearls of Wisdom from the Humble Gulf Oyster While they may look small and unassuming, oysters are the engineers of our bays and estuaries. Together, they grow reefs, attaching to each other and taking strength from the collective structure. With each passing year, oyster reefs grow bigger and more capable of withstanding challenges and supporting each other. The reefs even benefit others, such as serving as a nursery for fish and protecting coastal communities from storms.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY IN TEXA

ust like these oyster reefs, we can achieve so much more when we pull together toward common goals. This year, The Nature Conservancy, Galveston Bay Foundation, and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department celebrated the successful completion of an oyster reef restoration project in the upper Galveston Bay area. Over 20,000 tons of limestone boulders and rocks were dropped in the water to create a 40-acre oyster reef. While that in and of itself is exciting—because oyster reefs are among the most threatened marine habitats on earth—the real win is an even bigger story.

Of the 40-acre project site, 25 acres will be open for commercial harvesting while 15 acres are designated for oyster restoration. This hybrid approach ensures a continuous production of natural oyster larvae from the protected area that contributes to a sustainable commercial reef. This virtuous cycle means the reef can provide a multitude of benefits, including supporting economic stability for the local seafood industry. The Gulf Coast region serves as the cornerstone of our country's \$220 million oyster industry and produces nearly half of all oysters consumed in the U.S. each year. The bulk of that production comes from Louisiana and Texas, with a \$43 million average annual impact on our state's economy.

We have an opportunity to get it right in the Gulf to reverse a century of harm and to restore oysters in our state and Gulf-wide. But ensuring a healthy future for the Gulf of Mexico hinges on partnering and coordinating across borders and outside of silos. Our efforts in Texas would not have been possible without relationships built on time and trust. TNC's first successful oyster restoration effort in Texas occurred in 2014, when we collaborated with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Texas General Land Office, Texas A&M University, and private foundations to restore Half Moon Reef in Matagorda Bay. Next, we built on this success at Copano Bay, constructing 60 acres of reef with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, and Texas General Land Office. Increased collaborations like these support the replication of proven methods, so that instead of reef-by-reef restoration efforts, we can work toward restoring larger bay and estuary systems.





Top: New oyster life forms on recycled oyster shells. © Galveston Bay Foundation

Bottom: Students help restore an oyster reef using recycled oyster shells from local restaurants. © Galveston Bay Foundation

> Next Page: A Port Houston volunteer helps restore a coastal oyster reef. © Galveston Bay Foundation



"The innovative model we've leveraged with this reef restoration is a strategy that's replicable all over the world because it's a solution everyone can see themselves in. Instead of reef-by-reef restoration work moving forward, we can think more broadly about restoring whole bays and estuaries, all while working with fisheries to meet their needs."

Lauren Williams, TNC Texas Resilient Coast Program Director

When we purposefully develop solutions that balance the needs of everyone who relies on a resource, conservation can have a compounding effect over time, creating a continuous cycle of health and growth. If we take the humble lesson of subtidal oysters to heart and work together just as they do, both people and nature can benefit in the form of improved water quality, better protection from storms, and a more resilient fishing and tourism economy. With creativity, collaboration, and a fair bit of courage, we'll preserve the chance to enjoy the incomparable taste of a fresh Texas oyster, today and far into the future.

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

 One adult oyster can filter as much as 50 gallons of water a day; a healthy one-acre reef filters approximately 24 million gallons of water daily. The new oyster habitat will provide food and shelter for over **300** different species of fish, shrimp and crabs, and other invertebrates.

Previous Page: Volunteer Arnold Leija moves piles of recycled oyster shells at a curing site in Texas City, Texas. © Galveston Bay Foundation





TNC has restored **55 acres** of harvestable reef and nearly **100 acres** of sanctuary reef—a total of almost **155 acres** in Texas.

## DIVING DEP INTO TEXAS' WATER MARKETS: **A Conversation** with Kathy and Paul Mews

exas is home to 15 major rivers that meander through the state as our lifeblood. Yet, as more people continue to call Texas home, the demand for fresh water is outpacing current supplies, leaving little to no water in our rivers for wildlife. How do we find a balance between this give and take? The answer comes in the form of water markets and water transactions—adaptable strategies that create incentives for conservation and help redistribute conserved water to ensure that there's enough for all of us.

This innovative work is touching down in places like Menard County, where the San Saba River is king. Here, TNC has been collecting data for the past five years to better understand the connection between the river and underlying aquifers. With this information, water managers will be able to make more effective decisions, protecting the river in times when water is needed most. Projects, like this, have even captured the attention of several corporate sponsors, who are working with TNC to support water transactions in Texas rivers. But developing environmental water transactions takes partnership, time, and trust with those who hold the rights to this critical resource. Local landowners Kathy and Paul Mews have established such an agreement with TNC, so that in periods when river flow is below average, they refrain from diverting water from the San Saba to keep things flowing.

Kathy and Paul, along with their daughter Daphne and son Roy, sat down with us at their cattle ranch in Menard, where they run their beef business. As the lazy San Saba ebbed through the edge of their property, they shared their experience working with TNC.



The San Saba River flows at sunset near Bois d'Arc Road in Menard, Texas. © Kenny Braun



Paul and Kathy Mews stand in a paddock at their ranch in Menard County. © Kenny Braun

**Q:** What's your connection to Menard County and the San Saba River? Why is this place so special to you?

Paul: We own or manage 5,000 acres here in Menard County for our ranching operation, and right across the road is a large ranch that has been in my wife's family for hundreds of years.

Kathy: Yes, I grew up in Menard, and my family has been here a long time, so I have a lot of knowledge of the area that's been passed down from generation to generation over time. All of my family history and memories—they're all right here.

Paul: The San Saba River is the only surface water in the county—it's the main artery of life in Menard. It runs through our property, and we irrigate out of the river a little. Most of the good soil in the county is close to the river in this mile-wide floodplain; much of the rest of the county is rock hills.

**Q:** How did you first get connected with TNC and where do you see this partnership going?

**Paul:** Our local water district manager introduced us to The Nature Conservancy about four years ago. Some folks from TNC asked if they could monitor the water level of our well for their hydrology work. Eventually, they approached us about monitoring the rangeland and leasing water rights for instream flow. I think the instream flow option for water rights is going to be helpful and attractive to a lot of people in the county, rather than seeing these rights sold downstream. This will incentivize people to keep their water rights and put them to use. As the land here is used less for agriculture and more for recreation, people sit on these water rights until they decide to cash them out-and that's not good for our watershed. Moving forward, we plan to experiment with different land management practices, and TNC has offered to help us monitor and evaluate how effective they are.

**Q:** What challenges, if any, are you facing here as they relate to water issues?

Kathy: Water is scarce in Menard County. One of the big issues here is that large tracts of land are being purchased and divided up. With these smaller plots, there often isn't any plan to get water to the houses on them. Many of these people come from wetter places and assume that they'll be able to get water—which is not the case. For example, consider the well that we put our logger in (only yards away from the San Saba River); we drilled three dry holes before we drilled that. Water is not a given here.





Top left: Kyle Garmany, TNC Texas Water and Agriculture Program Director, takes flow measurements on the San Saba. Top right, from left to right: Kathy Mews, Kyle Garmany, and Paul Mews review data taken from a well. Bottom: Daphne Mews helps feed the cows at the family ranch. © Kenny Braun

## **DID YOU KNOW?**



The San Saba River flows for **140 miles** before ultimately draining into the Colorado River.

#### **Q:** What are your thoughts on collaborating with TNC, so far?

**Kathy:** It's been refreshing to see that TNC has a more holistic view on agriculture. I think TNC has a story to tell within the agriculture community that would resonate with others.

**Paul:** It takes working with others to achieve anything. The only way that farmers and ranchers are going to survive is by connecting with larger organizations that resonate with everybody-everyone wants more plant life, everyone wants better rivers and streams. If our practices can actually benefit the land, we need to broadcast that information to the masses to make a difference.







# FROM GRAY TO GREEN: Using Green Stormwater Infrastructure...

# ...to Bridge Flooding Challenges in Dallas

The Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex may be one of the most rapidly growing areas in the U.S., but it's no secret that the Big D is facing mounting environmental challenges.







Rain gardens with curb cuts align Elm Street in Deep Ellum to capture and filter surface stormwater runoff. © Matthew McDaniel

hile a thriving economy and rising population mean prosperity and growth, sprawling development has also chipped away at our remaining natural areas and greenspace in Dallas, causing increased urban flooding as more frequent and intense storms become the norm. Yet, nature itself presents many solutions that can help manage and improve this issue while providing valuable services to people.

Enter green stormwater infrastructure (GSI). It may seem like a mouthful, but GSI is based on the simple concept of using engineered plant and soil systems that mimic nature's natural ability to absorb and filter water. The term stormwater likely brings to mind images of drains, pipes, and other gray infrastructure, which merely convey rainwater to another location. However, GSI—such as bioretention areas, rain gardens, and rainwater harvesting cisterns—delivers a number of benefits: it captures, slows, and treats stormwater at the source, improving water quality and reducing urban flooding.

With funding from Lyda Hill Philanthropies, The Nature Conservancy and Texas A&M AgriLife (AgriLife), in collaboration with the City of Dallas and the Trust for Public Land, set out to discover what nature could do for Dallas' stormwater. Together, this group of partners conducted a study to determine where different types of GSI could most effectively enhance urban flood management within the city, especially when considering capacity, cost, and the future effects of climate change. The results tell an interesting story of what could be for Dallas.

TNC and AgriLife found that there are substantial costeffective opportunities to use GSI to improve stormwater management and reduce flooding in Dallas. Models also indicated that implementing GSI could be 77% less expensive than upgrading gray infrastructure alone. Bioretention areas, especially those placed in existing parking lots, may offer the greatest return on investment as a widely available, yet untapped, way to incorporate GSI. Bioretention areas in parks and planting strips also represent important opportunities, as do distributed rain gardens and cisterns at homes and businesses.

Overall, the research reveals that GSI practices, along with additional greening efforts, can provide multiple benefits, support community health, and contribute to resilience within Dallas. With these findings in hand, we will continue to increase awareness and investment in GSI with partners, decision-makers, and Dallas residents—specifically, where data has indicated the greatest need and opportunity to make an impact before the next big storm.



A variety of green stormwater landscapes demonstrated at the Tarrant Regional Water District. © Matthew McDaniel

As we look toward the next chapter in the stormwater story, implementation will be key. Science has shown us that nature has the ability to make our urban environments better, more livable places and, with the support of our partners, we can begin to rethink the way we build our cityscapes in Dallas and beyond.

Read the full report at nature.org/DallasGSI

"This analysis provides important data on how and where decision-makers and investors in Dallas can best leverage the benefits of nature to reduce urban flooding. When integrated into the fabric of our cities, nature can help create thriving and resilient places for everyone."

Dr. Kathy Jack, TNC Texas Dallas Healthy Cities Program Director

## **DID YOU KNOW?**

Dallas-Fort Worth is the fastest growing metropolitan area in the United States, with a population of **7.6 million** people. GSI was found to be 77% less costly than upgrading gray infrastructure alone.

Previous page: Reflections of the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge and downtown Dallas in the flooded Trinity River. © Sean Fitzgerald

© Kathy Jack, TNC Texas





The study found that potential flooding hotspots increased **26%** on average under climate change conditions.

## EL RANCHO CIMA: A Campfire Tale of Conservation and Community

For 60 years, El Rancho Cima camp was owned and operated by the Sam Houston Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America. Each year, scouts from across Texas flocked to the property to hike its hills, swim in the turquoise waters of the Blanco River, and make lasting memories in the heart of the Hill Country wilderness.

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"The Nature Conservancy in Texas is grateful for the opportunity to once again partner with Hays County leadership, who stepped up to make the purchase of El Rancho Cima possible. This collaboration is creating public parkland that will not only protect invaluable Hill Country acreage, but also provide future generations of Texans with access to nature."

Jeff Francell, TNC Texas Land Protection Program Director

hen the camp closed its doors and was put on the market, The Nature Conservancy knew it needed to act quickly to safeguard this pristine property in one of the fastest growing and subdividing areas in the entire nation. This region supports a number of wildlife, aquatic, and rare plant species that are threatened by habitat loss and degradation—including fish, freshwater mussels, and the federally endangered golden-cheeked warbler-making it that much more important to preserve from encroaching fragmentation.

TNC purchased a 535-acre portion of the camp, including all of its river frontage that stretches for one mile along both banks of the Blanco. By purchasing the land, TNC can protect the frontage and prevent future development along its floodplain. This, in turn, will reduce water quality degradation and increase the resilience of the river's functionality, particularly during flooding events like the devastating 2015 Memorial Day floods.

But like many land transactions, TNC couldn't complete this purchase alone. While the old adage, "It takes a village," often rings true, sometimes it takes an entire county. In 2019, TNC bought the camp acreage for a total price of nearly \$13 million. Hays County generously contributed \$7 million to the purchase, using bond money set aside for golden-cheeked warbler habitat protection. Yet, the county recognized that it had an even bigger role to play in making this property available to the public as a park.

When bond elections took place in late 2020, Hays County came through in an important way; residents showed up and spoke out for nature by voting to pass Proposition A by a resounding 70% margin. The act has committed \$75 million in bond funding to county parks, trails, and open spaces. This includes funding for the purchase of El Rancho Cima from TNC as a future park and preserve.

Once Hays County takes ownership, a conservation easement will protect this piece of Hill Country history in perpetuity while offering public access to nature for all Texans. A limited reservation system will be implemented to ensure the property is used sustainably by the public without degrading natural resources—an approach that thoughtfully considers the needs of both people and the environment.

The purchase of El Rancho Cima illustrates that partnerships, like the one TNC has with Hays County, are paramount to protecting the nature we have left. It's only through the power of partnership that the legacy of El Rancho Cima has come full circle and will once again provide Texans a chance to enjoy and explore nature's glory—just as the land was originally envisioned.

Lower left: Hikers trek along the banks of the Blanco. © Christopher Zebo

Lower right: An endangered goldencheeked warbler, which only nests in Central Texas. © Rich Kostecke

the Texas Hill Country. © Christopher Zebo

**DID YOU KNOW?** 



Proposition A passed by a 69.5% margin, resulting in **\$75 million** in bond funding for county parks, trails, and open spaces.

Previous page: Kayakers explore the pristine waters of the Blanco River at El Rancho Cima. © Christopher Zebo



The Blanco River stretches 87 miles long through three different counties in Texas.





at the Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary. © Kenny Braun





TNC's M . © Kenny Brau







Barton Creek Habitat Preserve. © Pierce Ingram

Dolan Falls Preserve. © Ian Shive

Love Creek Preserve. © John Freud

Davis Mountains Preserve. © Kenny Braun



#### Roy E. Larsen Sandyland Sanctuary. © R.J. Hinkle

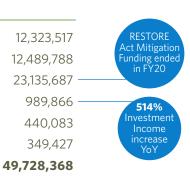
FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2021

ACTUAL 2021

ACTUAL 2020

#### REVENUES

| Dues & Contributions-Includes Membership           | 9,056,879  |
|--|------------|
| Government Grants & Contracts                      | 378,893    |
| Private Contracts & Mitigation                     | 3,171,439  |
| Investment/Interest Income (Loss)                  | 6,082,143  |
| Other Income                                       | 342,530    |
| All Other Transfers from/(to) other TNC Mgmt Units | 82,747     |
| TOTAL REVENUE & SUPPORT                            | 19,114,631 |



#### ASSETS

| Cash & Investments                       |
|--|
| Government Grants & Contracts Receivable |
| Pledges Receivable                       |
| Property & Equipment-Net of Depreciation |
| Conservation Lands & Easements           |
| Other Assets                             |
| TOTAL ASSETS                             |
|  |

#### **EXPENSES**

| 6.839.390    |   |
|--------------|---|
|              |   |
|              |   |
| 1,519,017    |   |
| 12,937,821 — |   |
|              |   |
| 7,822,169    |   |
| (13,788,481) |   |
| (334,242)    |   |
|              |   |
| (6,300,554)  |   |
|              |   |
| -            |   |
|              |   |
| 30,489,993   |   |
|              | <b>12,937,821</b><br>7,822,169<br>(13,788,481)<br>(334,242)<br><b>(6,300,554)</b> |

| <br><b>\$1.7 M:</b><br>Galveston<br>Bay Oyster<br>Reef Project<br>in FY21 |
|---|
| <br>-14%:<br>Expenses<br>decrease   |

#### LIABILITIES

| TOTAL LIABILITIES                      |
|--|
| Lease Liabilities                      |
| Accounts Payable & Accrued Liabilities |
| Deferred Revenue & Refundable Advances |
| Internal LPF Loans                     |
|  |

#### **NET ASSETS**

| TOTAL NET ASSETS                    |
|-------------------------------------|
| NET ASSETS (PERMANENTLY RESTRICTED) |
| NET ASSETS (TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED) |
| NET ASSETS (UNRESTRICTED)           |
|                                     |

#### **TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS**....

| ADMINISTRATION EXPENSES <sup>†</sup> |
|--------------------------------------|

 $^\dagger$ As Percentage of Total Expenses & Purchases of Conservation Land & Easements



|   | ACTUAL 2020 | ACTUAL 2021 |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| 24%   |             |             |
| increase in<br>Endowment                                      | 29,903,774  |             |
| Funds   | 94,863      | 148,597     |
|   | 1,317,850   | 1,860,831   |
|   | 2,926,655   | 2,556,301   |
|   | 316,299,250 |             |
|   | 1,846,582   | 1,375,130   |
|   | 352,388,974 | 360,399,045 |
|   |             |             |
|   |             |             |
|   | 9,161,495   | 9,135,593   |
|   | 1,312,516   | 1,244,329   |
|   | (13,177)    |             |
|   | 1,726,003   | 1,356,518   |
|   | 12,186,837  | 11,775,232  |
|   |             |             |
|   | 327,875,618 | 333,353,098 |
|   |             |             |
| 41.7%   | 6,850,509   |             |
| Operating Net<br>Assets increase                              | 5,476,010   | 5,634,584   |
| YoY and <b>\$8.4M</b><br>increase in<br>Net Assets<br>overall | 340,202,137 | 348,623,813 |
|   | 352,388,974 | 360,399,045 |
|   | 9%          | 13%         |
|   | 000/        | =40/        |

82%

**9**%

.74%

..13%

# Our Donors Are Stars

Thank yoù to our donors and friends from FY21 (July 1, 2020 -June 30, 2021) who helped make this incredible work possible.

#### \$25,000 - \$99,999

Anonymous Anonymous Anonymous Dana S. Anthony Austin Community Foundation Paula and Thomas Barbour Suzanne Deal Booth<sup>+</sup> Communities Foundation of Texas Carol E. Dinkins Anne and Charles Duncan, Jr.\*\* Favrot Fund<sup>+</sup> Katrine and Bill Formby George and Mary Josephine Hamman Foundation Arlene and Kent Graziano Jr. Margo and James E. Griffin III Beth and Michael Harper Mary and Bill Hayes\* John P. McGovern Foundation

Kronkosky Charitable Foundation H-E-B Raymond Hitt Henley and David Honeycutt\* JW Couch Foundation The Jacob & Terese Hershey Foundation Melanie and Charlie Jones Beth E. Kirkhart Linda and David W. Knowles Gary Krause Marilyn G. Lummis Lyda Hill Philanthropies Malcolm C. Damuth Foundation Marathon Petroleum Corporation The Orr Family Foundation Nancy and Clive Runnells Foundation Nancy and Mark A. Picus Pierce Runnells Foundation Pioneer Natural Resources Company Ann and Matt Schooler Lyn and Peter C. Selig The Skiles Foundation St. David's Foundation\* The Tim and Karen Hixon Foundation The Tuckerman Foundation\* Thomas H. Uttormark Wortham Foundation Yeti



#### \$1,000,000+

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#### \$100,000 - \$999,999

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#### \$10,000 - \$24,999

Jaxie and Alexander Alt Anonymous Anonymous Margaret and Robert Ayres Marc W. Bacher Michael E. Barrett John M. Biesmann Ann R. Blankinship Jennifer and Jeffrey Bridges Terry and Stephen Casey William J. Cassell Mark T. Coughran The Crain Foundation Stephanie E. Donaho **Durham Family Foundation** Eva Fernández Garza and Gabriel Senior\* Michael L. Grav Nancy Holmes Harris and Eliza Kempner Fund Lucy Hairston Susan Hairston and Charles Soparkar Joseph R. Holahan Ginger R. Hurst Patsy and Tom Inglet Kay W. Kennon Claire Kohler Jennifer Leogier and Jamie D. Schultz Wendy and Paul Leung Robert McCurdy Katherine G. McGovern Sally R. McIntosh Linda Moore Mark Muller Donald A. Molony Karen L. Oberling<sup>+</sup> Susan and Larry Pain Anne and Charles Parrish Beth and Bryan Plater Sharu and Rajeev Puri\* Carol and Pat Robertson Margaret and Christopher Runk Carl E. Ryan Marilyn and Phillip Shelp Ed Segner Thomas Shelton Shirley & William S. McIntyre Foundation Sinclair Black Family Charitable Trust Colleen and Luke Smart Texas Water Trade **Tiny Pebbles Foundation** Uplands Foundation Cindy and Jack Waldrip Pam and Rom Welborn

### The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

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