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501(c)(3) non-profit, working to preserve what we all love about Blanco County while accommodating sustainable growth and development

**History:**

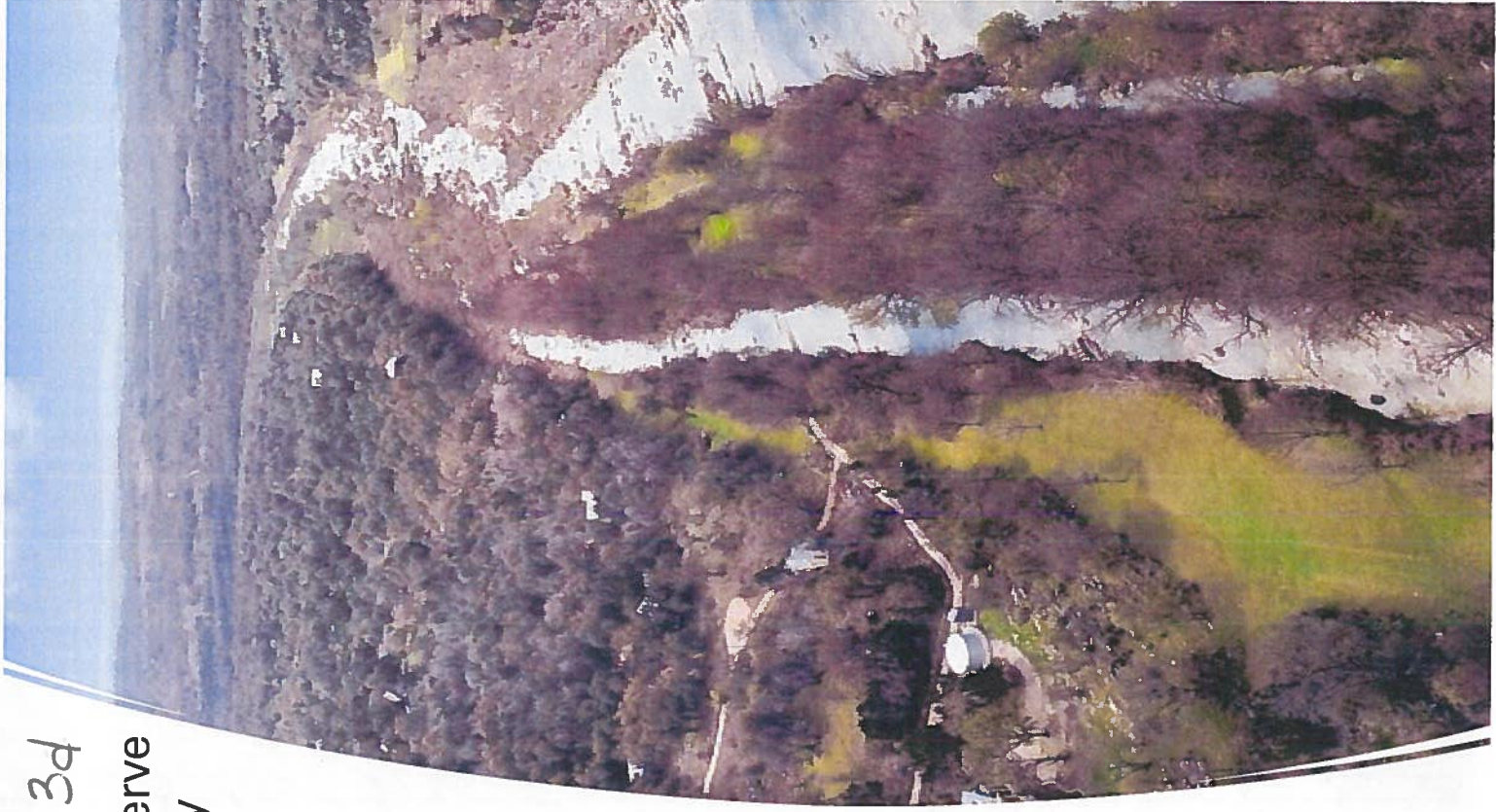
- Public meeting 9/2022; concern with Highway 281 expansion and BC growth
- Attendees encouraged forming an organization to educate on conservation
- Top issues: Ground and Surface Water Conservation, Landscape and Wildlife, Night Sky, and Rural Character and History Preservation

**Status:**

- BCCI formed in 2/2023. Over 200 folks on email distribution
- Quarterly public meetings on conservation topics at Gem of the Hills
- Developed draft Best Practices
- Monthly newsletter on topics of interest

**Next Steps:**

- BCCI website live by summer; information portal, Best Practices
- Engage with local government officials, developers and others to share Best Practices
- Blanco County Runs on Water poster team, participation at local fairs



## **Blanco County Conservation Initiative**

### **Best Practices for Developments and Landowners in Blanco County**

#### **Background:**

Significant development is occurring in Blanco County and across the Hill Country, as the region is recognized as one of the top areas to live and visit in Texas. A recent study, "State of the Hill Country," prepared by the Hill Country Conservation Network, concluded that conservation efforts may not be keeping pace with this growth. Without thoughtful planning, development has the potential to adversely impact the natural infrastructure of the Hill Country that makes it such a desirable area, including our dark night skies, water availability, natural landscape, native animals and vegetation, and rural character. Growth and wine tourism, with increasing demands on water supply, could also threaten the viability of existing farms and ranchland.

These best practices were developed by the Blanco County Conservation Initiative (BCCI) in response to a grass roots effort by over 200 people concerned about the effects of developments on Blanco County. The top concerns were prioritized into four subcategories: Ground and Surface Water Conservation, Landscape and Wildlife Conservation, Night Sky Preservation, and Preservation of Agricultural Production and Protection of Rural Character and History. BCCI then surveyed existing literature on approaches to address these concerns. The best practices summarize practical approaches that can be used to successfully address the concerns. They contain brief summaries of key issues that should be considered during planning along with links to more detailed resources that can be used to create actionable plans.

#### **Intended Use of Best Practices:**

- Will be broadly shared with developers, builders, real estate brokers, landowners, and governmental bodies to provide information on practical methods for conserving and preserving Blanco County.
- Developers will be encouraged to adopt the best practices in any development plans.
- POA's can implement the best practices, such as allowing rainwater harvesting and requiring dark-sky-compliant lighting, into deed restrictions, covenants and by laws.
- Landowners will be encouraged to adopt best practices in their land management plans.
- Government officials can encourage adoption of the best practices throughout Blanco County and where appropriate, reference best practices in County/City resolutions, ordinances, and development rules.

## **Best Practices for Developments and Landowners in Blanco County**

**Ground and Surface Water Conservation:** Ground and surface water are limited and precious resources in Blanco County. Developments should strive to maintain healthy waterways, conserve water, and maintain good surface and groundwater quality. Groundwater questions can be directed to the Blanco Pedernales Groundwater Conservation District.

- ***Developers and landowners should identify and protect aquifer recharge features.***
- ***Rainwater harvesting should be used where practical to supplement or replace the need for groundwater and reduce strain on public water systems.***
- ***Sustainable landscaping should be used to promote water capture and minimize irrigation water requirements.***
- ***Minimize or do not discharge treated wastewater into pristine stream and rivers. Consider alternatives including repurposing gray water for irrigation and use of drain fields. If discharge cannot be avoided, treat to lowest practically achievable phosphorus levels.***
- ***Adhere to drought -stage water restrictions.***

**Landscape and Wildlife Conservation:** Protect the diverse landscape, native vegetation, and wildlife of Blanco County.

- ***Maintain healthy riparian habitat along rivers and streams. Consider setting aside green space along waterways in development plans.***
- ***Avoid clear cutting. In addition to oak trees, many other native trees, shrubs, and grasses are critical to maintaining a healthy and diverse landscape.***
- ***Prevent damage to oak trees that could cause Oak Wilt.***
- ***Adopt practices to minimize fire risk.***
- ***Conserve open spaces and scenic views and other areas of unique beauty and character using approaches such as establishing more parks and greenways.***

**Night Sky Preservation:** The dark night sky is one of the outstanding features of Blanco County

- ***Landowners, businesses, and developers are encouraged to adopt dark sky lighting practices. Subdivisions should adopt dark sky lighting practices in deed restrictions.***

**Preservation of Agricultural Production and Protection of Rural Character and History:**

- ***Consider strategies such as voluntary, negotiated conservation easements to preserve agricultural lands.***
- ***Prevent damming of seasonal creeks and tributaries that have historically been used for agriculture and livestock.***
- ***Minimize community disruption and the impact of traffic from new developments.***
- ***Identify and preserve historic and archeologic sites and features.***
- ***Promote the history and rural character of Blanco County***