



Hill Country Land, Water, Sky and Natural Infrastructure Plan

July 6, 2023 | Webinar

Speakers



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texas hill country conservation network



POPULATION GROWTH IN UNINCORPORATED AREAS, 1990 - 2020



The Hill Country population in unincorporated areas has grown by **103%** since 1990. **Darker shades** indicate faster growth rates by county.

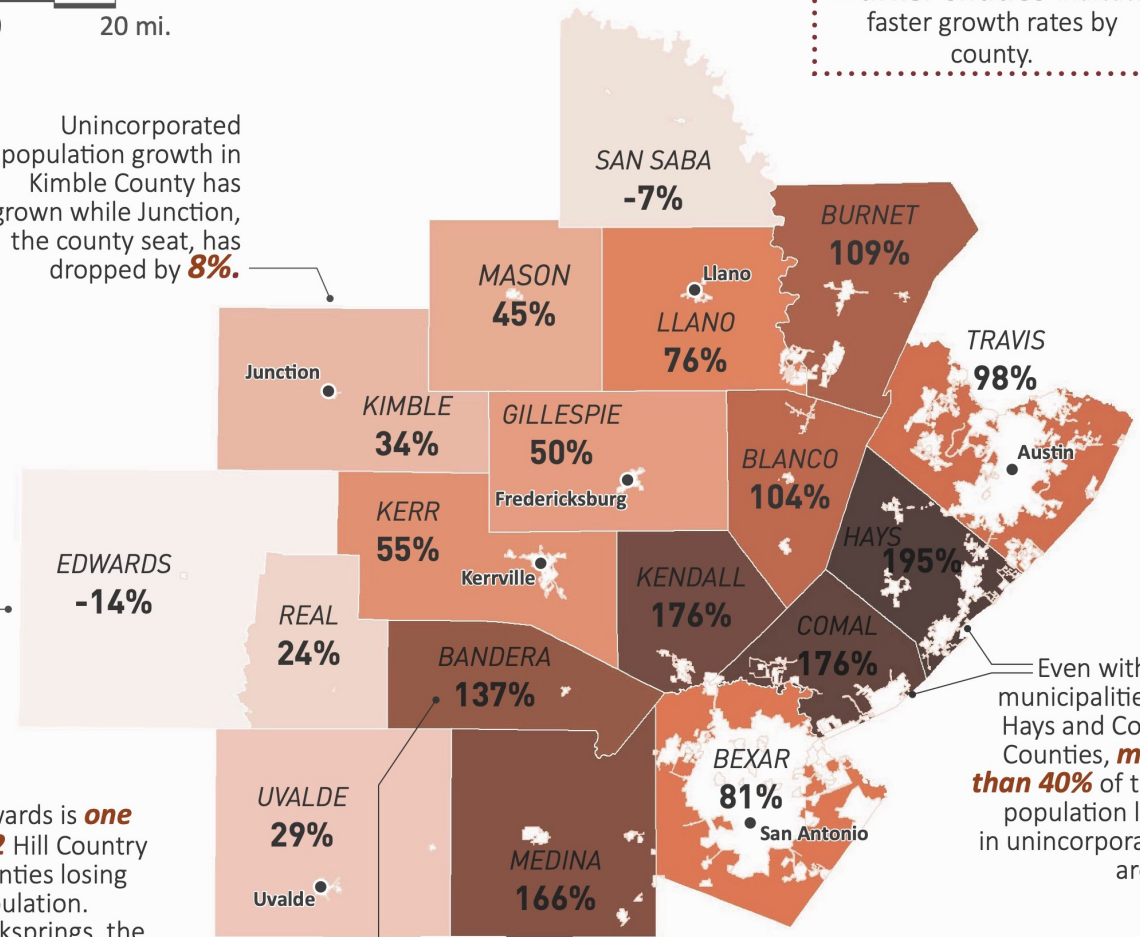
Unincorporated population growth in Kimble County has grown while Junction, the county seat, has dropped by **8%**.

Edwards is **one of 2** Hill Country counties losing population. Rocksprings, the county seat, is shrinking at a similar rate.

96% of Bandera County's rapidly growing population lives in unincorporated areas.

Even with 19 municipalities in Hays and Comal Counties, **more than 40%** of their population lives in unincorporated areas.

White spaces indicate incorporated areas.



STATE OF THE HILL COUNTRY

8 KEY CONSERVATION AND GROWTH METRICS FOR A REGION AT A CROSSROADS

February 2022

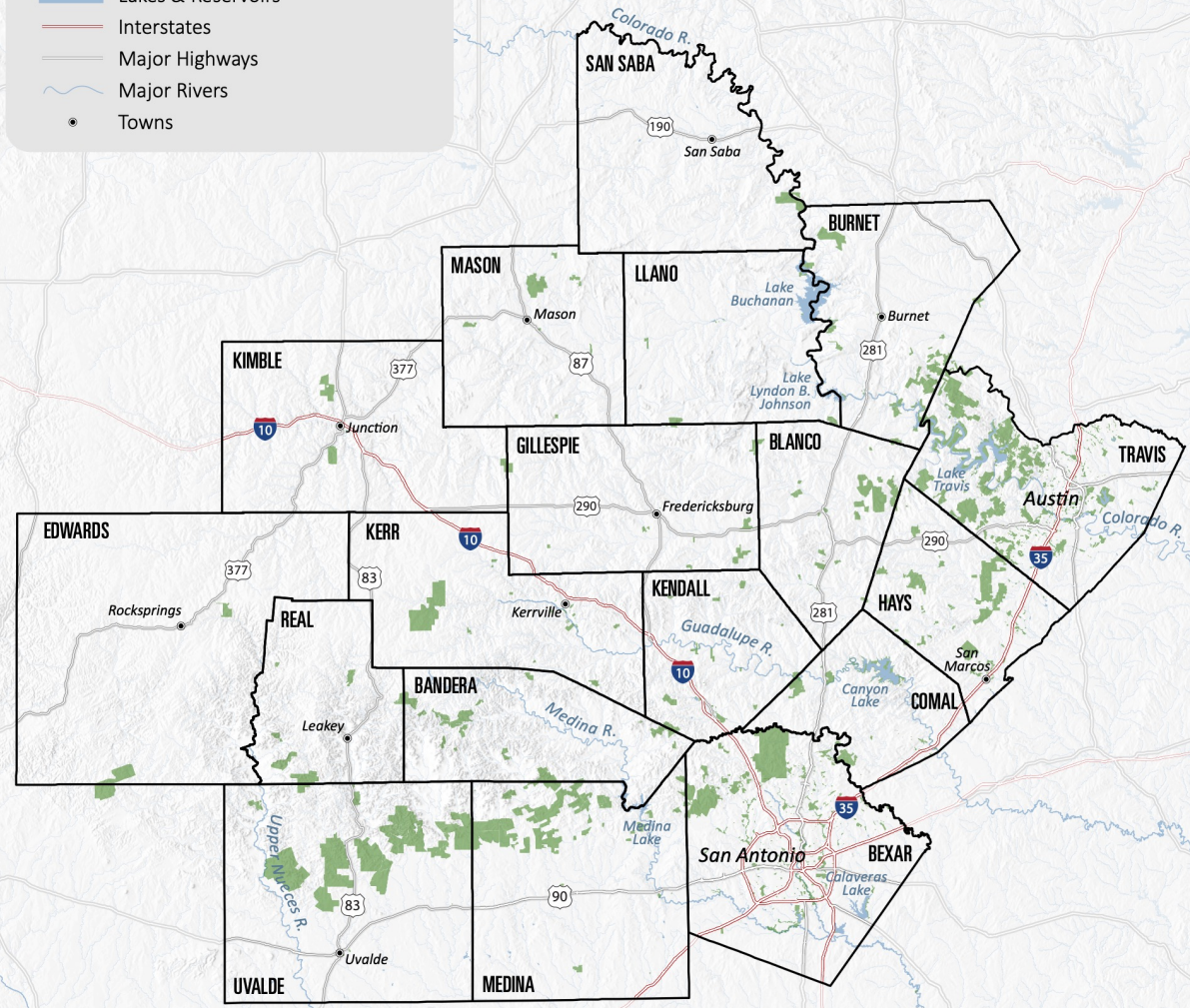


Produced by:





-  Counties
-  Existing Conservation & Public Lands
-  Lakes & Reservoirs
-  Interstates
-  Major Highways
-  Major Rivers
-  Towns



THE HILL COUNTRY STUDY AREA

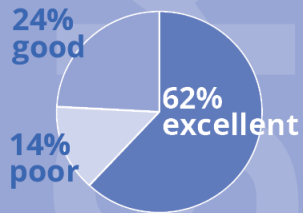
By the Numbers

12
designated dark sky places



14
friends of the night sky groups

Night Sky Visibility



3.9
million residents



5.2
million projected population in 2040

32
million annual visitors¹⁵

864,336
unincorporated areas in 2020;

103%
increase from 1990

Headwaters of

12
Texas Rivers

1,142
pristine streams



Home to iconic spring-fed swimming holes

191
gallons of water consumed on average per capita per day (wide variation)

17,760
square miles

11
million acres

18
counties

11 ecoregions represented

15 State Parks & Natural Areas

403
plant & animal species of greatest conservation need¹⁶

PUBLIC FUNDING FOR CONSERVATION
\$1,400,000,000



90%
unincorporated land

565,889 ACRES

5%
conserved land¹

273,807 ACRES

2.5%
permanently protected by conservation easements

942,802 ACRES

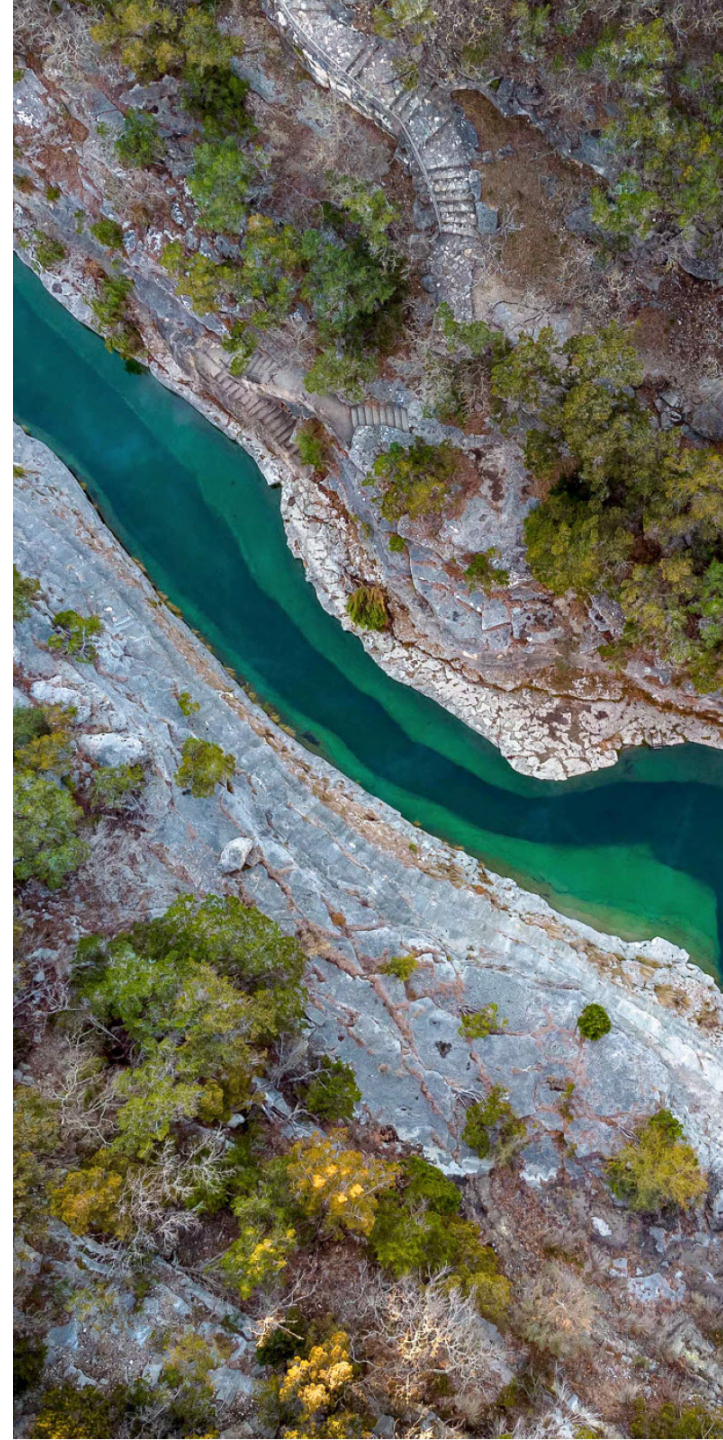
8.5%
developed land

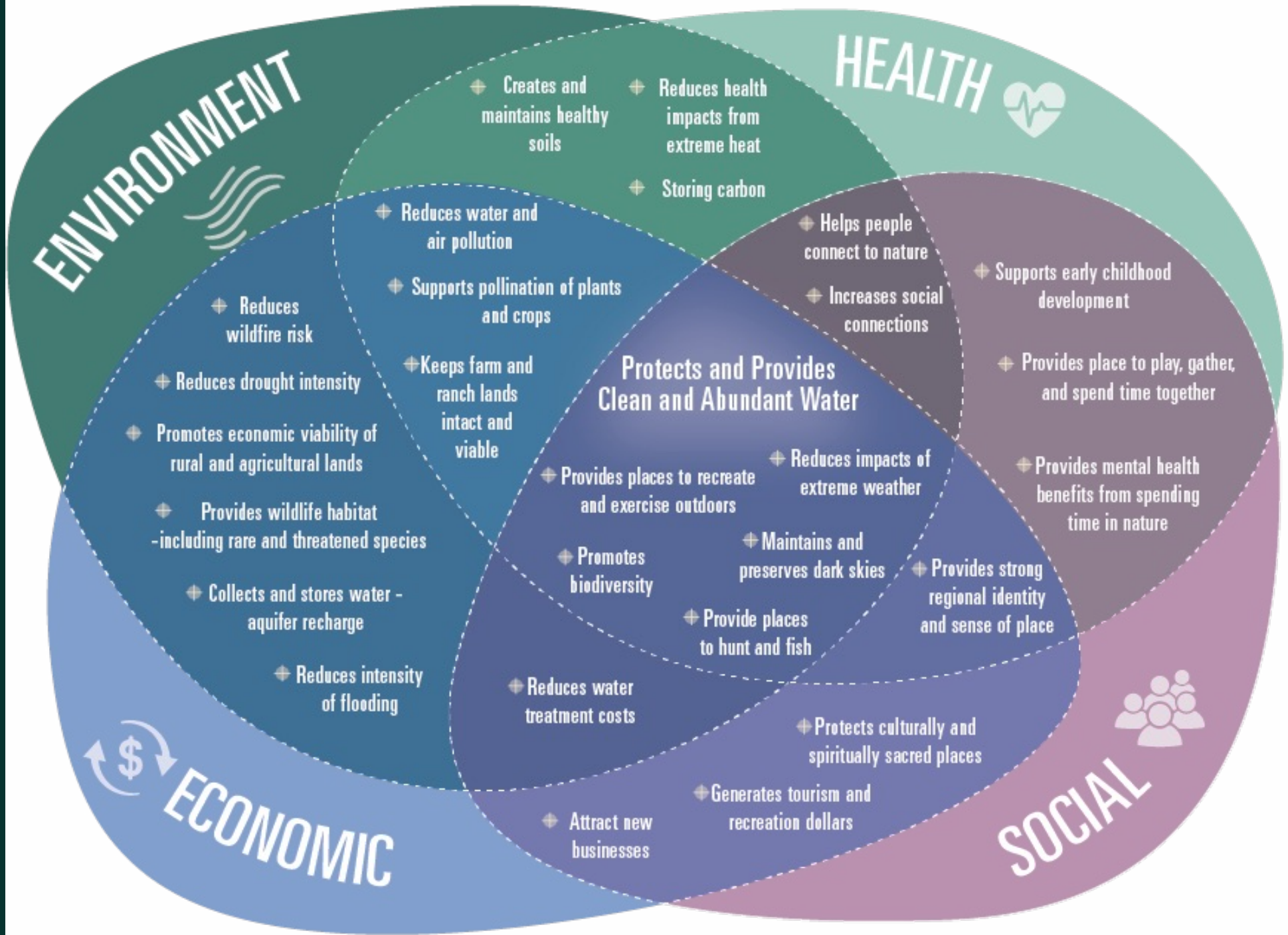
More endemic plants than any other region of Texas

Endangered species include golden-cheeked warblers, karst invertebrates, and spring salamanders

What is Natural Infrastructure?

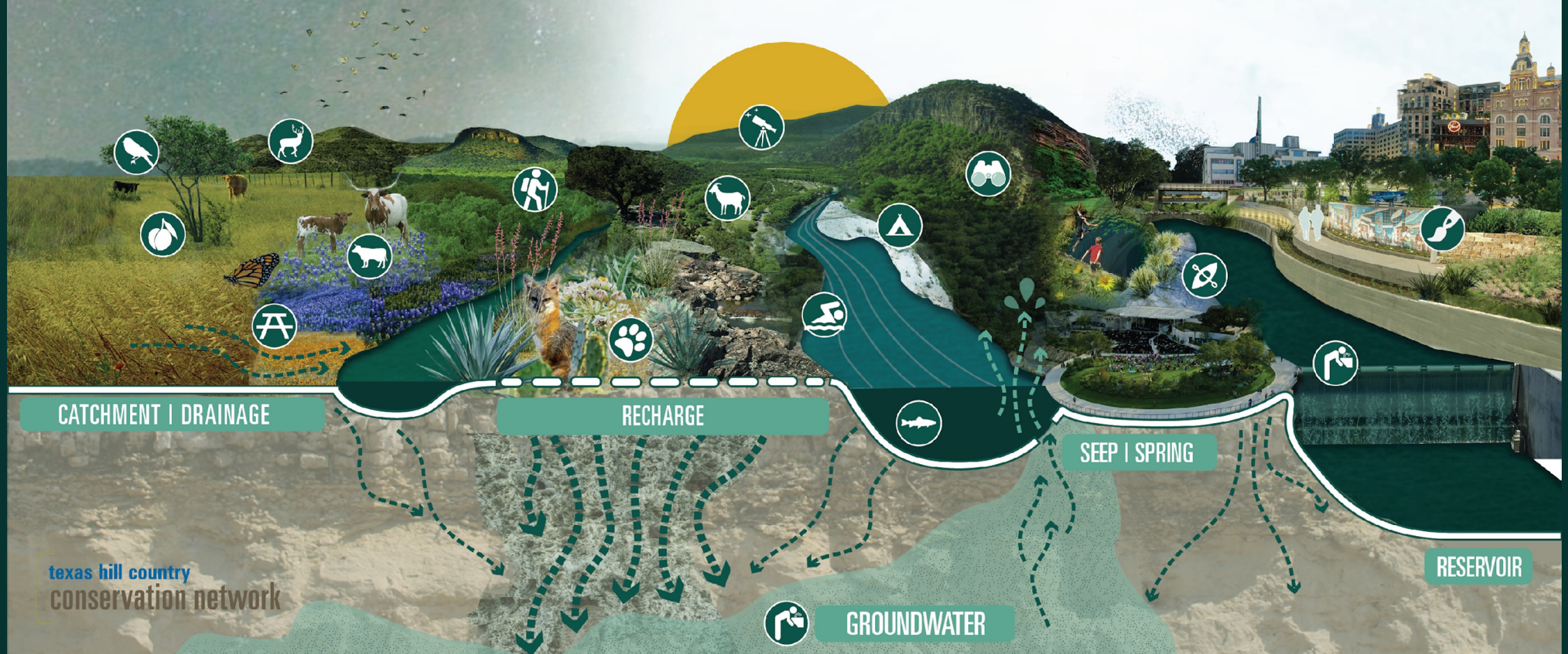
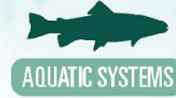
- Natural Infrastructure uses, restores, or emulates natural ecological, geological, or physical processes.
- From healthy rangelands and soils that allow rainwater to percolate into aquifers below our feet to star-filled night skies overhead, natural infrastructure in the Hill Country is complex, interconnected, and underpins our very existence and quality of life in Central Texas and beyond.





NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE

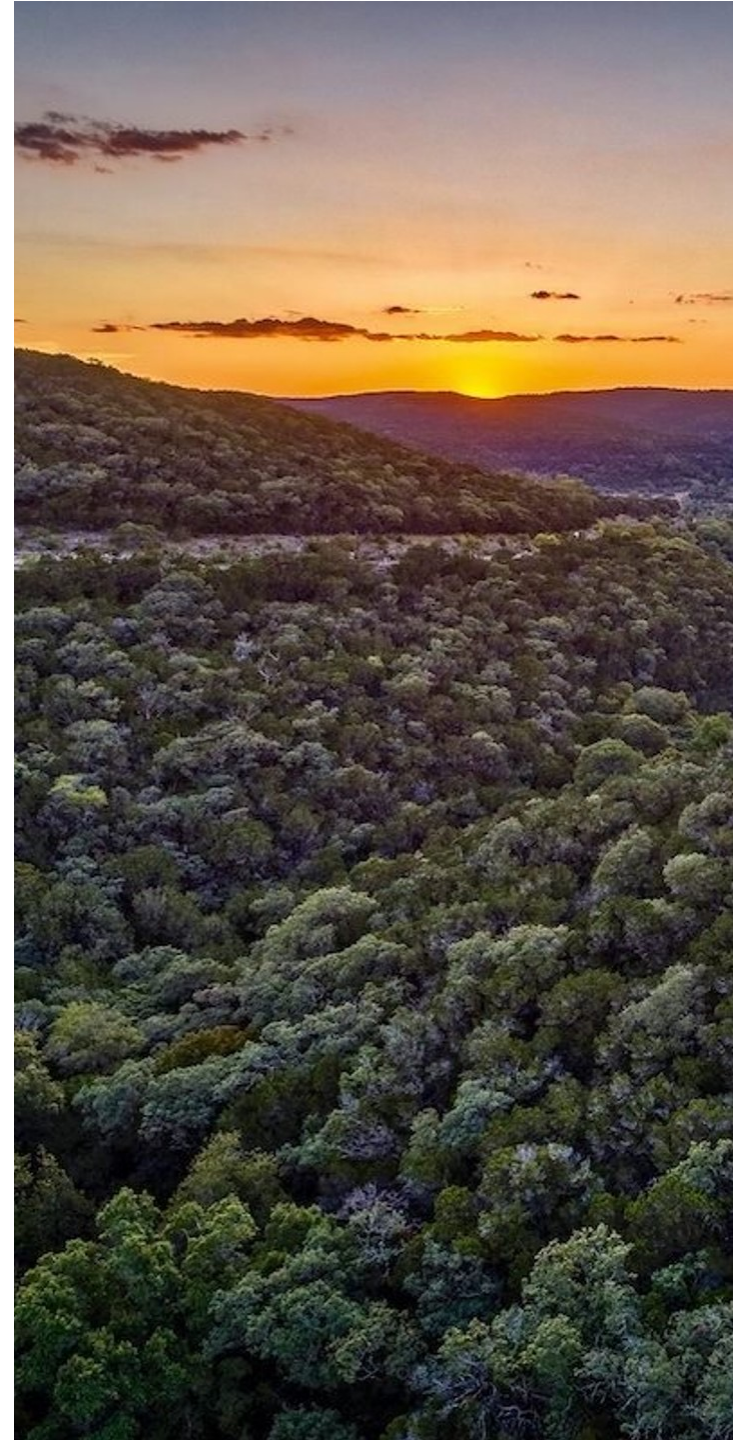
OF THE TEXAS HILL COUNTRY



texas hill country
conservation network

Why create a plan?

1. Iconic region with strong conservation and stewardship ethic.
2. Dozens of existing studies, plans, and documents that informed our work.
3. Strong support for conservation in Central Texas, with over \$1.4 billion in voter-approved conservation since 1990.
4. More local interest in investing in conservation, requiring **strategic** action and informed support.



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FINAL CONSERVATION GOAL & CRITERIA WEIGHTING



WATER SUPPLY 26%

- 39% - Protect lands in aquifer recharge and contributing zones
- 31% - Protect all contributing streams to reservoirs
- 20% - Protect perennial named streams and rivers
- 10% - Buffer public water intakes



WATER QUALITY 23%

- 41% - Protect natural lands along streams, rivers, wetlands, and arroyos
- 23% - Protect pristine streams
- 18% - Buffer natural springs
- 18% - Protect areas of high erosion potential



CLIMATE RESILIENCE 22%

- 30% - Protect flood-prone areas from development
- 30% - Protect intact forest areas
- 21% - Protect more resilient landscapes
- 19% - Protect areas of increased threat of wildfire



WILDLIFE HABITAT & CONNECTIVITY 12%

- 39% - Protect areas with general high habitat value
- 31% - Protect habitat for rare, threatened, or endangered species
- 30% - Protect lands with close proximity to other conserved lands



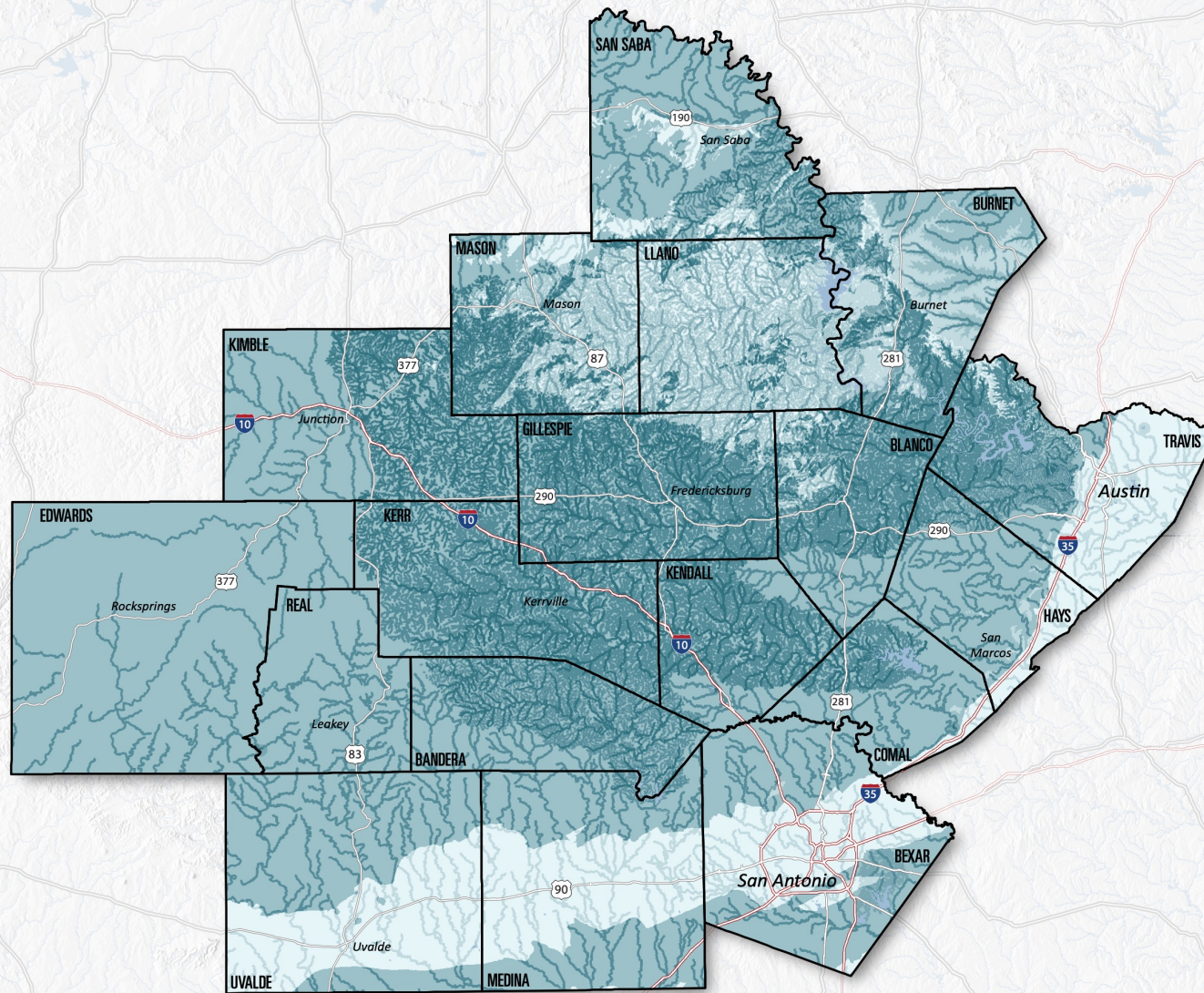
WORKING LANDS 10%

- 39% - Protect larger parcels on the landscape
- 31% - Protect working lands facing development pressure
- 30% - Protect areas of prime and significant soils

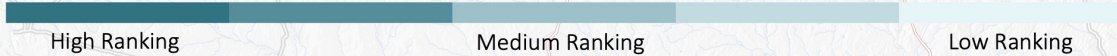


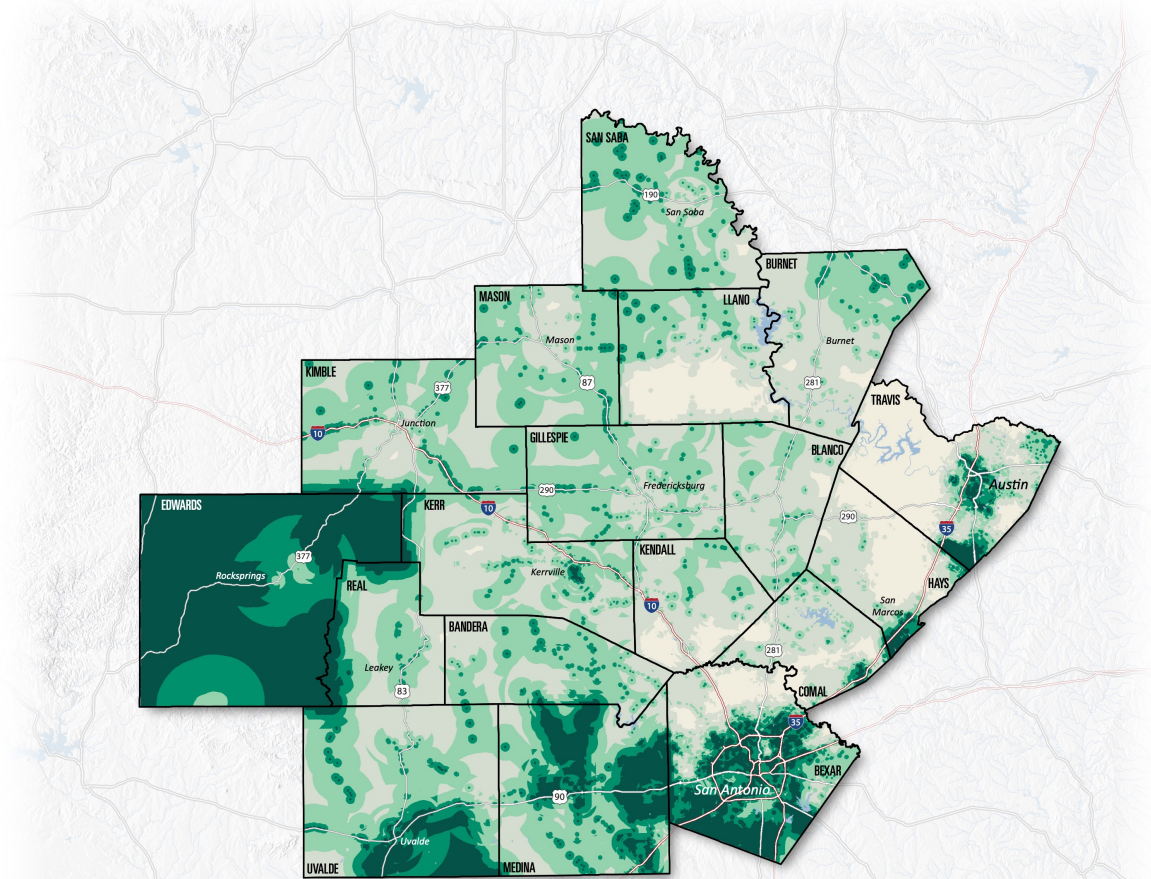
ACCESS TO OUTDOORS & NATURE 7%

- 28% - Provide open space to improve public health
- 26% - Preserve open space in or near low income/underserved areas
- 26% - Improve access to aquatic recreation opportunities
- 20% - Prioritize protection of areas furthest from existing public lands

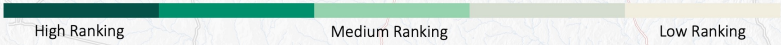


WATER SUPPLY RANKING AREAS

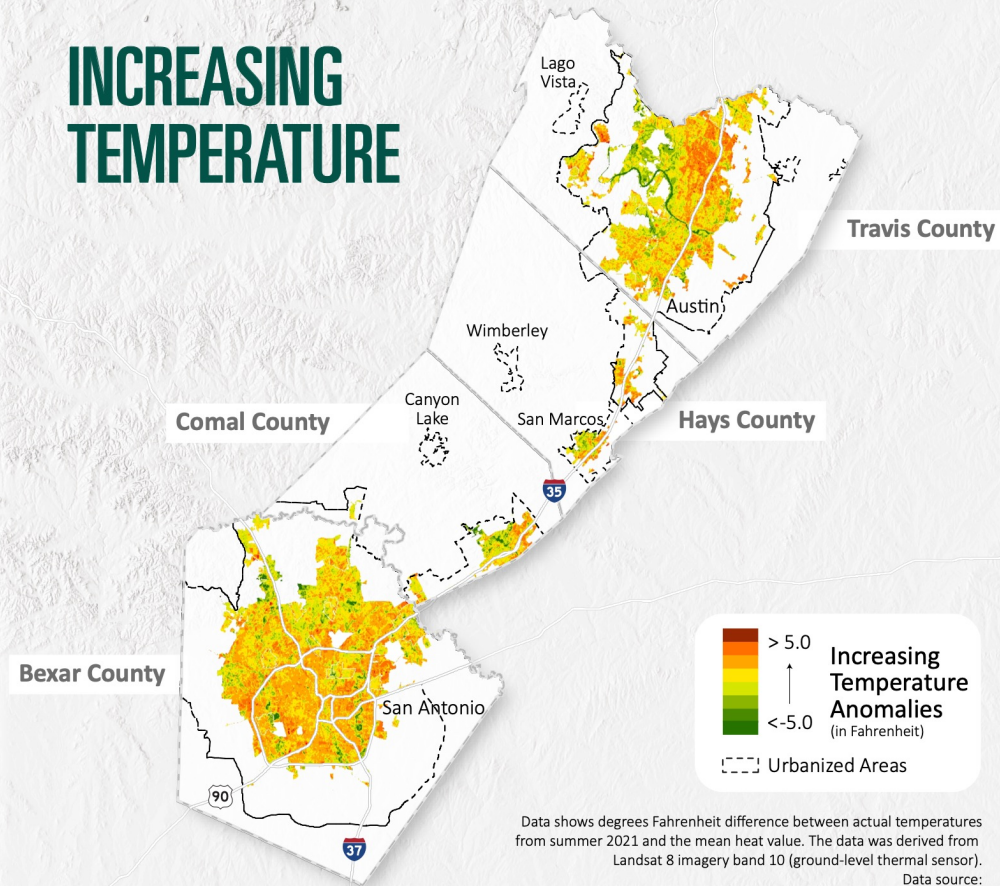




ACCESS TO OUTDOORS & NATURE RANKING AREAS



INCREASING TEMPERATURE



Data shows degrees Fahrenheit difference between actual temperatures from summer 2021 and the mean heat value. The data was derived from Landsat 8 imagery band 10 (ground-level thermal sensor).
 Data source: <https://www.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=ec2cc72c3de04c9aa9fd467f4e2cd378>

NIGHT SKIES MAPPING

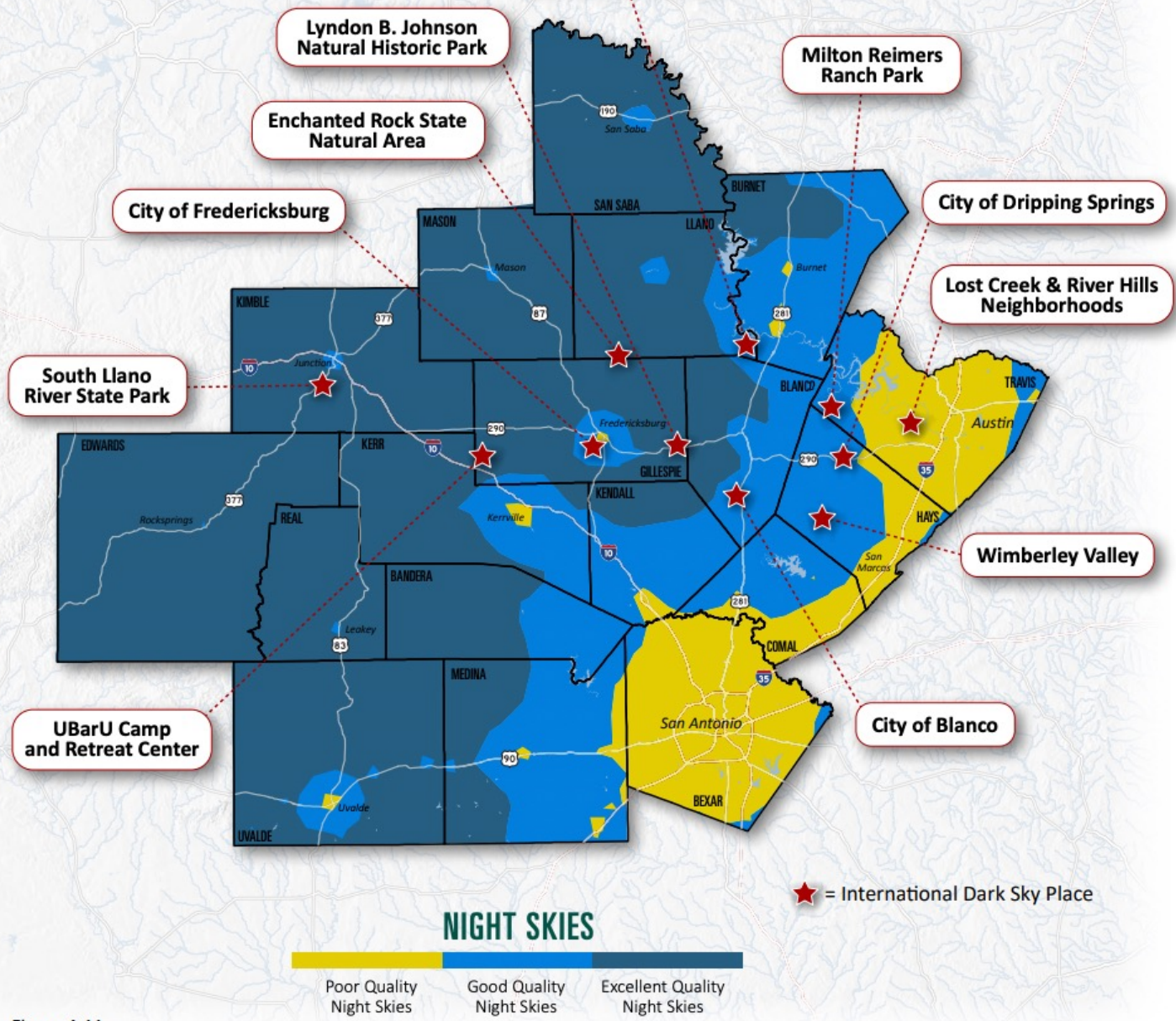


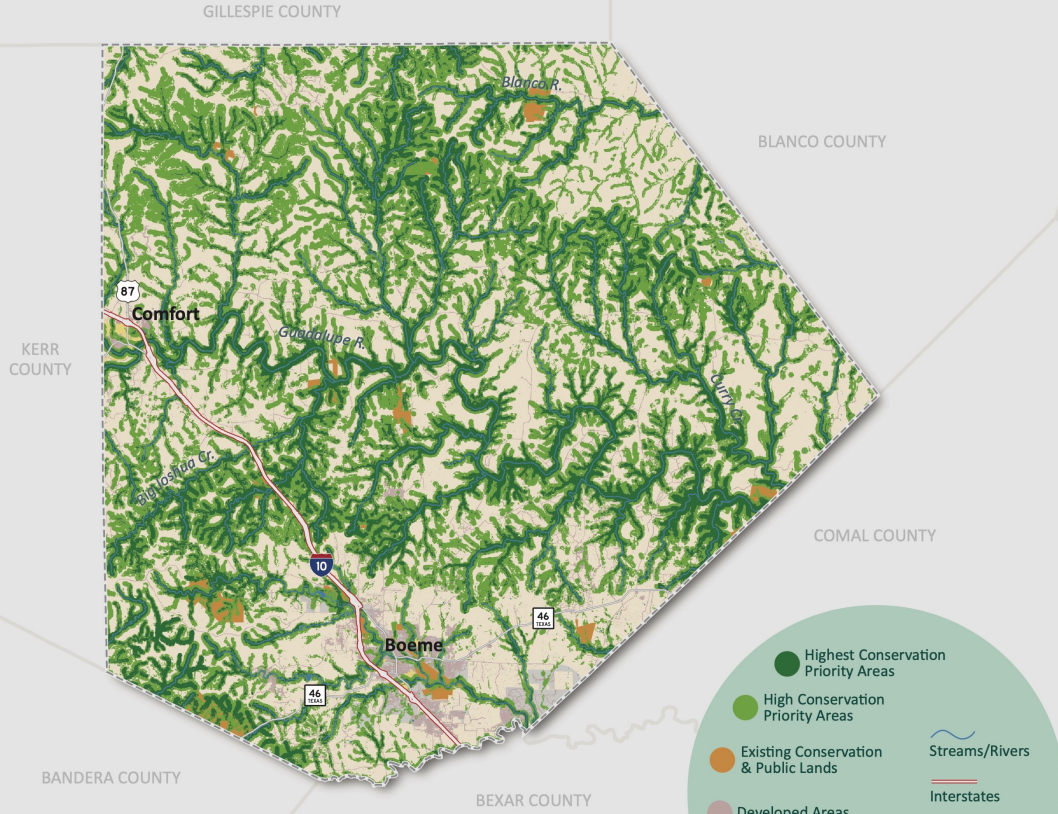
Figure 4-11

KENDALL COUNTY

88,616

Acres of Highest Priority Natural Infrastructure Areas

Land Area - **422,904 acres**
 Lakes & Reservoirs Area - **1,416 acres**
 Streams & Rivers - **1,679 miles**
 2020 Population - **44,279**
 2020 Pop. Density - **66.8 ppl/sqmi**



Percent Developed Areas (2019)



Percent Conservation Areas (2021)



Public Investment in Conservation (2010-2022)



Rate of Population Growth (2010-2020)



Diversity Index (2020)



Persons in Poverty (2020)



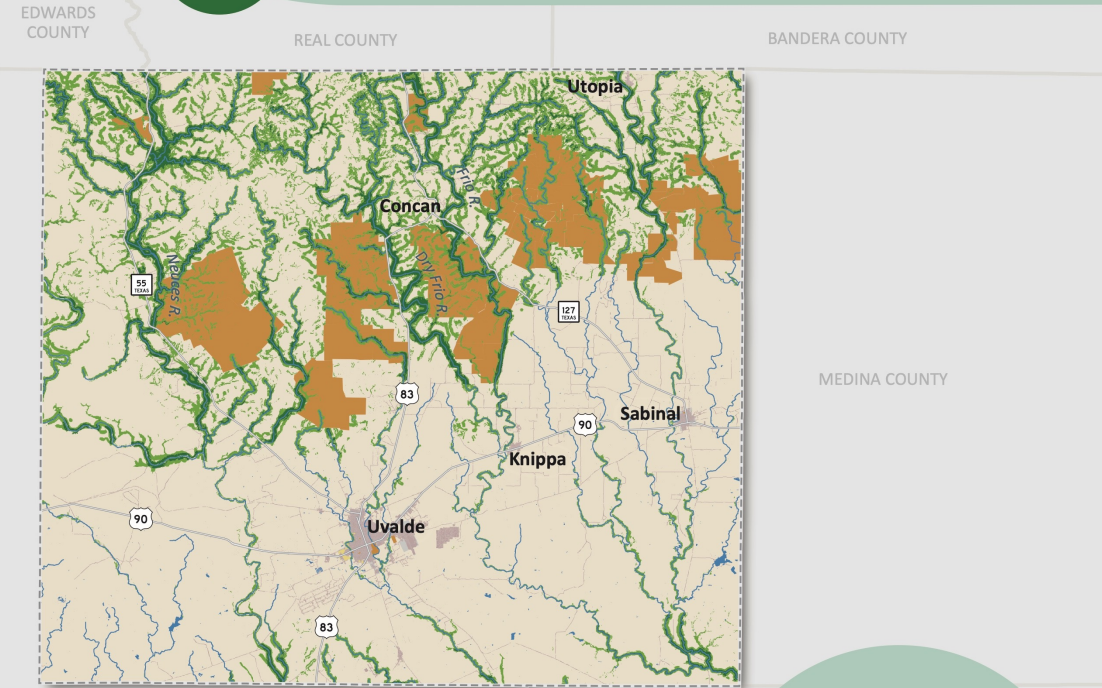
Social Vulnerability (2020, out of 100)

UVALDE COUNTY

24,564

Acres of Highest Priority Natural Infrastructure Areas

Land Area - **990,600 acres**
 Lakes & Reservoirs Area - **2,660 acres**
 Streams & Rivers - **3,141 miles**
 2020 Population - **24,564**
 2020 Pop. Density - **15.8 ppl/sqmi**



Percent Developed Areas (2019)



Percent Conservation Areas (2021)



Public Investment in Conservation (2010-2022)



Rate of Population Growth (2010-2020)



Diversity Index (2020)



Persons in Poverty (2020)



Social Vulnerability (2020, out of 100)

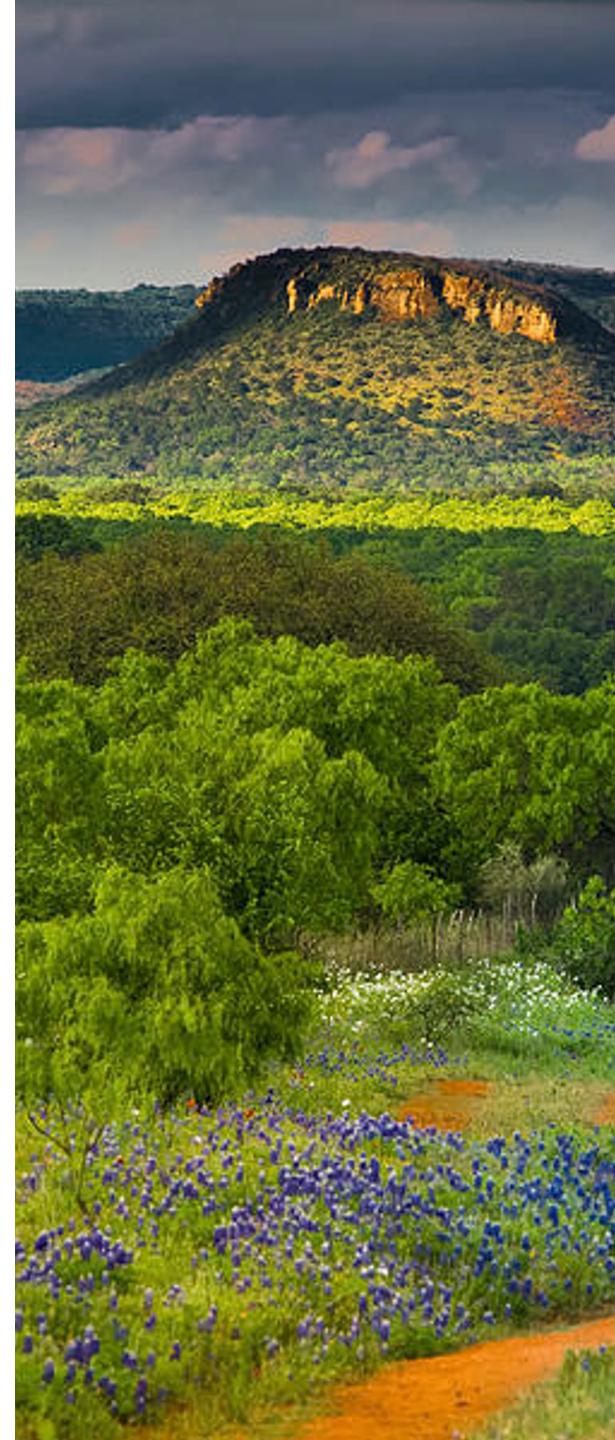
Key Takeaways

- Investment in natural infrastructure is a low-cost way to protect drinking water, mitigate flooding, and increase quality of life.
- There is overwhelming support for increasing investment in conservation. With over 2,800 survey responses, 85% of respondents support increasing public funding for conservation.
- The benefits of natural infrastructure are not enjoyed equally across racial, socioeconomic and urban/rural divides.
- Action can be taken locally to reduce our footprint and increase natural infrastructure function.



What's Next?

- Conservation community will work to accelerate investment in strategic conservation at the local, regional, and statewide level.
- Drive incentive-based policies protecting natural infrastructure.
- Emphasize low-cost solutions to flooding, drought, habitat loss, air quality concerns.
- Work with local elected officials to inform their efforts.
- Increase equitable access to the benefits of natural infrastructure.



Acknowledgements

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Questions ?

OurTXHillCountry.org