



NEWS RELEASE

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Conservation Deal Saves the World's Largest Bat Colony on Halloween

City of San Antonio, The Nature Conservancy & Bat Conservation International purchase \$20.5 million property in the Texas Hill Country to safeguard bats, water supply and endangered songbirds

SAN ANTONIO (Oct. 31, 2014) – Today the City of San Antonio, The Nature Conservancy and Bat Conservation International (BCI) have secured 1,521 acres adjacent to BCI's Bracken Bat Cave, home to the largest colony of Mexican free-tailed bats in the world. The property, known as Crescent Hills, was purchased for \$20.5 million and was previously slated to become a 3,500-home subdivision.

“With passion and commitment, hundreds of citizens, community leaders and organizations came to together to protect a globally important piece of the Texas Hill Country,” said Ron Nirenberg, San Antonio District 8 City Councilman who led the City effort. “This is a huge win for San Antonio and the entire state of Texas.”

Crescent Hills is located 30 minutes northwest of San Antonio in one of the fastest growing corridors in the state of Texas. The property is ecologically valuable on a number of fronts. In addition to its close proximity to the globally renowned bat cave, the property lies entirely within the Edwards Aquifer Recharge Zone. As one of the most prolific artesian aquifers in the world, the Edwards Aquifer provides drinking water for roughly two million central Texans, including the entire city of San Antonio. Conserving land in this area is critical for protecting regional water supplies. The property also contains habitat for federally endangered golden-cheeked warblers, which nest only in the Texas Hill Country.

“After years of work, this highly complex conservation deal came together with decisive action and investment from a broad spectrum of trusted partners,” said Laura Huffman, Texas state director of The Nature Conservancy. “Our collective efforts have resulted in a trifecta of conservation success for the entire region: safeguarding Bracken Bat Cave, preserving important habitat for warblers and safeguarding Texas’ most valuable resource: clean, fresh water.”

The conservation effort also ensures a valuable ecosystem service: pest control. At the height of summer, the Bracken bat colony eats 140 tons of insects each night, as more than 15 million bats are foraging in the surrounding countryside. Nationwide bats save farmers \$23 billion annually in reduced crop damage and pesticide use.

“The emergence of these millions of bats, as they spiral out of the cave at dusk for their nightly insect hunt is an unforgettable sight,” said Andrew Walker, executive director of Bat Conservation International. “The protection of Crescent Hills helps ensure this centuries-old wildlife habitat will continue to provide a safe home for one of the region’s most unique and important inhabitants.”

Bat Conservation International and The Nature Conservancy now own Crescent Hills in fee title and the City of San Antonio will hold a conservation easement on the property. The public will be invited to hike, bird watch, view evening bat flights and engage in other low-impact recreational uses during hosted events. In addition, the many high schools, colleges and universities that use Bracken Cave Preserve and the Conservancy's Cibolo Bluffs Preserve—which is adjacent to Crescent Hills—for education and research will have an opportunity to expand their work to this newly-protected area.

San Antonio provided \$10 million towards the purchase price using \$5 million in Proposition 1 funds, a voter-approved program designed to protect water quality in the Edwards Aquifer by protecting land within the aquifer's recharge and contributing zones. The City provided an additional \$5 million through a sale of impervious cover credits to real estate developer Forestar.

Further public funding for the project included \$100,000 from the U.S. Army to advance its goals to protect habitat for the golden-cheeked warbler, a \$500,000 contribution from the Edwards Aquifer Authority and a \$500,000 contribution from Bexar County.

The Nature Conservancy and Bat Conservation International raised an additional \$5 million towards the purchase price through private donations—including contributions from life-long Texas conservationists Tim and Karen Hixon, the San Antonio-based Kronkosky Charitable Foundation and the Mays Family Foundation.

A \$5 million funding gap remains; however, the partners were able to close the transaction by Halloween due to a bridge loan secured by The Nature Conservancy. Fundraising efforts are ongoing.

“Today's victory would not have been possible without the support of the many individuals and organizations who helped draw national attention to this issue—including State Representative Lyle Larson, Texas House Speaker Joe Straus, Congressman Joaquin Castro, the Green Space Alliance, the Greater Edwards Aquifer Alliance and nearly one dozen individuals, organizations, municipalities and foundations that provided essential funding for the acquisition,” said Councilman Nirenberg. “The protection of Crescent Hills was a true conservation partnership.”

For more information on the project or to donate, visit www.SaveTheCave.US and <http://Nature.org/Texas>.

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City on the Rise: San Antonio

San Antonio is a city on the rise for the new face of America—a diverse, progressive and globally competitive city with a solid vision for national and international economic development. The City of San Antonio maintains a strong financial position with a “AAA” general obligation bond rating from all three major rating agencies. In 2014, Forbes labeled San Antonio the “Best City in the Southwest” for adults ages 18-34 for its dynamic economy, employment opportunities and affordable living. As the seventh-largest city in the United States, San Antonio is experiencing solid economic growth in 21st century industries such as bioscience, aerospace, cybersecurity and healthcare, which contribute billions to the local economy. San Antonio has also positioned itself at the forefront of the New Energy Economy in the United States, committed to investing and creating employment opportunities in green industries. San Antonio continues to experience the addition of missions at its several military commands, further fostering a significant relationship spanning more than 200 years. Nearly

30 million visitors come to San Antonio every year, generating more than \$12 billion annually and making the travel industry a vital asset to the city's economic health. For more information, visit www.sanantonio.gov.

Bat Conservation International

Bat Conservation International is a non-profit organization based in Austin, Texas that works around the globe to protect the world's 1330 species of bats and their essential habitats. BCI is dedicated to creating a world in which bats and humans successfully coexist. In pursuit of this vision, BCI works worldwide with local, regional, national and multinational public and private partners to respond rapidly and effectively to bat conservation crises, preventing the extinction of threatened bats and the extirpation of globally significant populations of bats. For more information, please visit www.batcon.org.

The Nature Conservancy in Texas

The Nature Conservancy in Texas (nature.org/texas) maintains 38 ecologically important preserves and conservation projects statewide and, with partners, has conserved nearly one million acres of land and water in Texas. The organization has also led significant marine habitat restoration efforts along the Gulf of Mexico that benefit terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and help protect Texas communities from hurricanes and tropical storms. In addition to a dozen initiatives benefiting Texas rivers and streams, the Conservancy also works with private landowners and municipalities, such as the cities of San Antonio, Austin and San Marcos, to protect critical freshwater resources like the Edwards and Trinity aquifers. Over the past 50 years, the Conservancy has worked with state and federal agencies to create and expand beloved public areas, including Enchanted Rock State Park, Big Bend Ranch State Park, Powderhorn Ranch and Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge.

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