



# ANNUAL 2023

RANCHING | SCIENCE | EDUCATION



# 10 YEARS

LOOKING BACK & MOVING FORWARD





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[eastfoundation.net](http://eastfoundation.net)



## About Us

East Foundation promotes the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education.

We manage more than 217,000 acres of native South Texas rangeland, operated as six separate ranches in Jim Hogg, Kenedy, Starr, and Willacy counties. Our land is a working laboratory where scientists and managers work together to address issues important to wildlife management, rangeland health, and ranch productivity. We ensure that ranching and wildlife management work together to conserve healthy rangelands.

East Foundation was created through the generous gift of the East family in 2007. To honor their legacy, we uphold their vision and values that were established more than a century ago. In pursuit of our mission, we use our abundant natural resources to build future leaders through programs that introduce students to private land stewardship. We invest in future professionals through internships, graduate fellowships, and close engagements with university programs.

We care for our land and are always exploring more efficient ways to get things done and are continuously guided by our values to conserve the land and resources.

**We do what's right for the land and the life that depends on it.**

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Neal Wilkins, Ph.D. CEO



# 10 YEARS

LOOKING BACK & MOVING FORWARD



# From the CEO **Neal Wilkins**

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Throughout our State's history, the native rangelands of Texas have been indispensable to our prosperity. Parts of this natural asset are easier to value than others. While challenging to fully quantify, most people can comprehend the agricultural value of cattle ranching. Some of the wildlife values of these rangelands are more easily understood because of hunting and other recreational opportunities – the natural allies of ranchers are our state's sportsmen. And, although we try, other values are more challenging to quantify and do not fit well into a spreadsheet. But these values are nevertheless important, and we should not be halfhearted in making the case for those things hard to measure.

This is why stories are important – and scientists and land managers should become better at telling the story of how vital it is for us to manage and maintain native rangelands in a manner that promotes conservation over generations – this is otherwise known as land stewardship. Promoting land stewardship is our mission, and as we look back at a decade of work focused on land stewardship, we can also look forward to what the future holds for the Foundation, for our partners, and for all land stewards who face new and growing challenges each day.

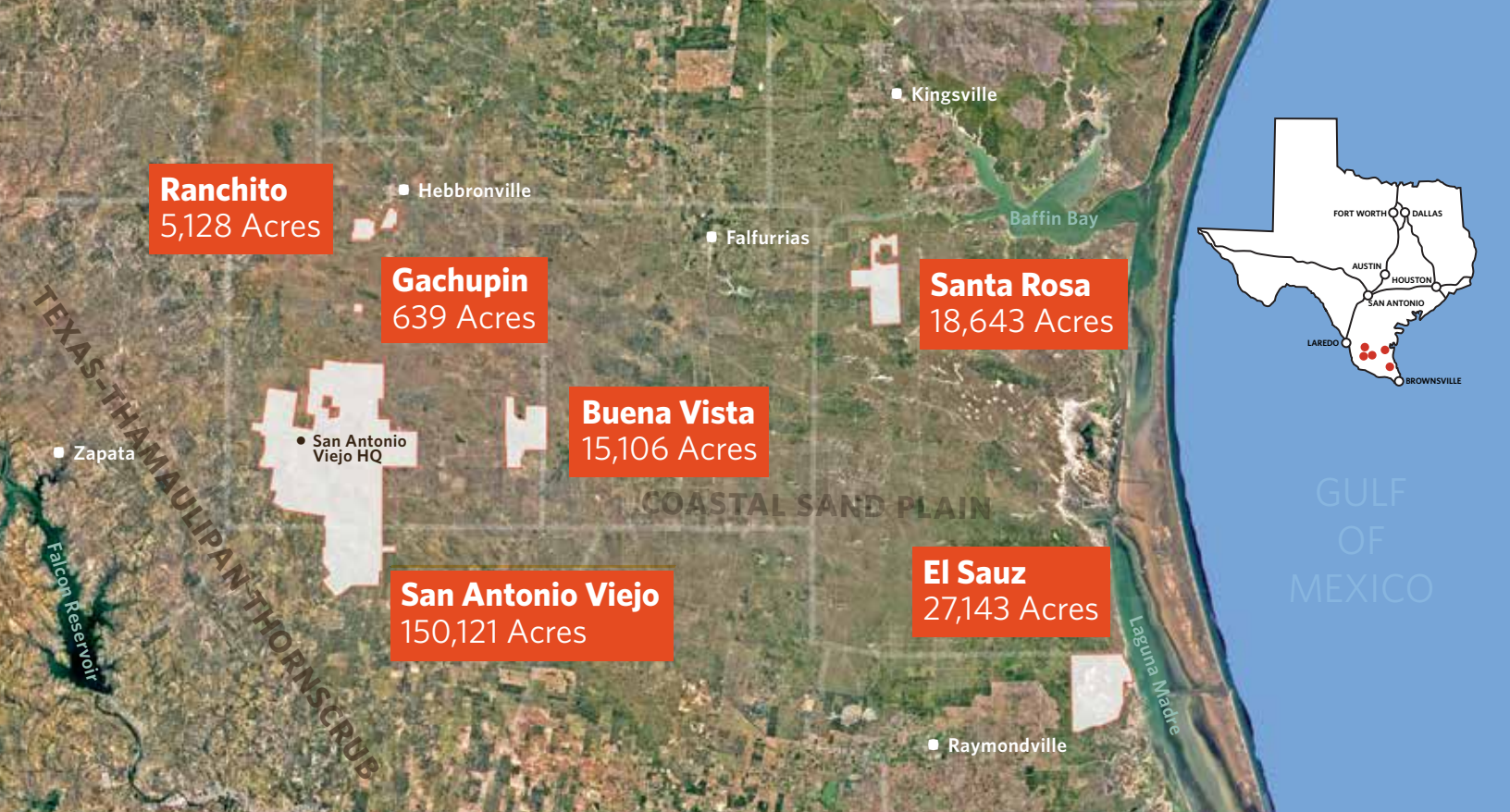
Each year's East Foundation Annual focuses on things that matter for accomplishing our mission including the reasons behind, and the relevance of, our work. As in our prior issues, we have again asked a group of noteworthy journalists to share their perspectives on our work. Asking them to present our story not only gives us an opportunity to see ourselves through the eyes of others, but it forces us to explain important things while avoiding the mental shortcuts of technical jargon. We are not yet flawless at this, as we sometimes discover that it is tough to simply explain the complexity we see in natural systems.

That said, we invite you to reach out and engage us with questions. One of our organizational values is curiosity, so we appreciate when we get questions like “Now, what does East Foundation do?” We also realize that if we seek to be a leading voice for the importance of ranching, native rangelands, and land stewardship we should speak with clarity about what we do and why it is relevant. Here is some of what you will find as you turn the pages:

- Journalist Burt Rutherford discusses progress we have made in building a cattle herd that performs consistently well in the harsh environment of South Texas. Developing such a cattle herd is central to the idea of our rangelands being a living laboratory that serves our mission and the interests of our university partners.
- Texas historian Joe Nick Patoski uncovers the past and present of our El Sauz Ranch. He puts a special focus on the scientists working toward the recovery of endangered ocelots. Our goal is to recover an endangered species on private lands while seeing that land managers remain free of the constraints that normally apply under the Endangered Species Act.
- Author T. Edward Nickens profiles our work to develop the next generation of leaders needed for innovations in natural resource science, land management, and education. Nickens interviews three East Foundation alumni, each having gone on to make impacts in their careers using experience they gained on East Foundation's lands.
- East Foundation's Claudia Delfina Cardona explains the value of our Behind the Gates education program. Claudia provides an overview of the development of our program and its strong partnerships, followed by a vision for how we will reorganize and expand the program. Through Behind the Gates, we have introduced thousands of South Texas students to the importance of ranching, wildlife conservation, and land stewardship.
- Texas A&M graduate student Lindsay Martinez shines a spotlight on a sampling of ongoing science projects, including our long-term research on white-tailed deer; the breeding ecology of rare white-tailed hawks; and our work to monitor wildlife response to prescribed fire. These projects provide important baseline knowledge for managing wildlife, and also provide training opportunities for future scientists and land managers.

Our staff and partners are serious about what we do because we know it matters. We hope the stories in this Annual resonate with you and reinforce your knowledge of our work. 

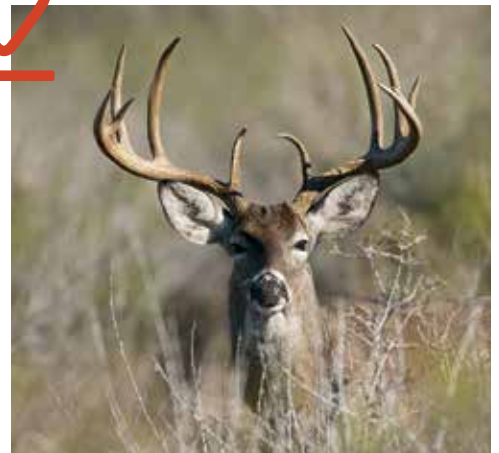





# About the East Foundation

## Our Mission

East Foundation promotes the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education. In pursuit of our mission, we use our working ranchlands and abundant natural resources to build future leaders through programs that introduce students to private land stewardship. We invest in future professionals through internships, graduate fellowships, and close engagements with university programs.





Emily Strubling

We promote the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science and education.

## Our Land & Operations

Like the East family before us, we ranch in the Wild Horse Desert, a region also known as the South Texas Sand Sheet and the Coastal Sand Plains, an area prone to both drought and extreme heat. We manage over 217,000 acres of native South Texas rangeland, operated across six ranches in Jim Hogg, Kenedy, Starr, and Willacy counties.



## Our History

The East Foundation ranchlands were acquired over a period of about one hundred years. This land was utilized as a family owned and managed ranching operation. When Robert East passed away in 2007, he gifted his landholdings to the East Foundation.

Today, the East Foundation operates as an Agricultural Research Organization, the first of its kind in the United States. Working in concert with land-grant university, agency, and other partners, the Foundation's ranches are a working laboratory where scientists and managers together address issues important to wildlife management, rangeland health, and ranch productivity. We ensure that ranching and wildlife management work together to conserve healthy and productive rangelands. [📍](#)

# BUILDING A BETTER HERD

Is there  
such a  
thing as an  
**ideal** South  
Texas cow?

By Burt Rutherford





## East Foundation intends to find out.

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**If there's an ideal cow that can tough it out in the South Texas brush yet raise a calf that meets the quality expectations of discriminating beef consumers, the East Foundation intends to develop it.**

**South Texas cattle producers have been working toward the first half of that conundrum—raising cattle that can survive the often-inhospitable South Texas environment—for several centuries. And for nearly all that time, that was enough.**

**But that was then. This is now and consumer taste for quality beef has ratcheted up. How can South Texas ranchers thread the genetic needle to produce cattle that do both?**





Emily McCartney

Knox Kronenberg

“The primary laboratory for us is the ranchland. Then we work to integrate the science program with the ranching.”

Not an easy task, that. But the East Foundation ranches are a living laboratory where innovation and science, history and legacy come to confluence to help South Texas ranches and land managers, and the vast expanse of South Texas rangeland they steward, remain sustainable for generations to come.

### IN THE BEGINNING

When the East Foundation more than 10 years ago began managing the 217,000 acres of South Texas ranchland spread out over six different locations, “The management was not necessarily what we would think of as modern grazing management today,” says Neal Wilkins, East Foundation president and chief executive officer.

“A lot of it was huge pastures, continuous grazing, no synchronized breeding season or anything like that,” he recalls. “That’s in essence the condition we found these ranches in when we took over.”

That’s changed and continues to change as the East Foundation team, ranging from post hole diggers to Ph.Ds., turns the land into a living laboratory for sustainable land stewardship in South Texas.

“What we’re focused on is making sure that ranches and native rangelands are as much a part of our future as they have been in the past.”

They’ll do that with a cattle herd poised to add to the body of knowledge that well-managed native South Texas rangeland and the cattle that roam it are essential to the economic and ecological makeup of a large chunk of the Lone Star State.

### INTENTIONAL SCIENCE

The Foundation’s mission is to promote the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education. “What we’re focused on is making sure that ranches and native rangelands are as much a part of our future as they have been in the past,” Wilkins says.

Wilkins and his team approach that mission very intentionally. “The primary laboratory for us is the ranchland,” says Jason Sawyer, chief science officer. “Then we work to integrate the science program with the ranching operation.”

With sound science as the driving force and the ranching operation as the springboard, the East Foundation considers, researches, and analyzes a dizzying number of variables including cattle production, range management, and wildlife ecology and habitat.

## THREADING A NEEDLE

Given that the land and cattle are a living, at-scale laboratory, the first order of business was to improve the ranch infrastructure. “I’ve seen a 100 percent change,” says Tio Kleberg, one of a six-member professional advisory board of experts in different areas of ranch, land, and wildlife stewardship. “When we initially came on the Foundation pastures were big, fences were almost non-existent, and cattle waterings were poor.”

Then there was reproduction, the foundation of profitability for any ranch.

The cattle previously weren’t gathered every year and when they were, some cows had two calves at side, a yearling and a baby. Others had none. That had to change.

“You think of South Texas and the cattle it takes to be efficient and successful at reproduction,” says Clay Mathis, professional advisor and Director of the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. “And you build a cow herd that can raise the absolute highest quality calf that you can.”

Once the infrastructure was in place, the focus changed to doing exactly that. “Right now, we’re at a tipping point,” says Garrett Stribling, ranch business manager. When the Foundation took over, the cattle were a genetic hodgepodge, with both *Bos taurus* or European and *Bos indicus* or Brahman-type genetics. However, they were well adapted to making a living in the South Texas brush.

**“Something we’re really interested in is how much *Bos indicus* do you really need in a cow herd in South Texas for those females to be able to stay in the herd for a long time but also produce a calf every year and weather the elements and the other variables that are out there?”**

So, with a focus on threading the genetic needle between developing cows that can make a living in a tough environment


yet produce a beef product acceptable to today’s quality-conscious consumers, Foundation staff began a crossbreeding program with purebred Red Angus bulls.

“We’re taking those F1 Red Angus calves and developing them into replacement females,” Stribling says. The F1 heifers already on the ground are returning to the breeding herd and are bred to American Red bulls, which are 75 percent Santa Gertrudis and 25 percent Red Angus.

“Something we’re really interested in,” Stribling notes, “is how much *Bos indicus* do you really need in a cow herd in South Texas for those females to be able to stay in the herd for a long time, but also produce a calf every year and weather the elements and the other variables that are out there?”



Emily McCartney



“ What we’re focused on is making sure that ranches and native rangelands are as much a part of our future as they have been in the past. ”

Knox Kronenberg



“ You think of South Texas and the cattle it takes to be efficient and successful at reproduction. And you build a cow herd that can raise the absolute highest quality calf that you can. ”



Emily McCartney

As genetics stabilize, they’ll test their progress by keeping a database of individual records. While DNA and genomic testing are a possibility, those technologies are not feasible at present with the size and scale of the operation, Stribling says. Beginning with a highly variable genetic base may seem like an overwhelming challenge. Actually, it provides a good starting point, Sawyer says. “When you have lots of variability, that means you have cattle that have a range of traits and a range of (trait) combinations.” That provides lots of genetic cards to play as Sawyer, Stribling, and the rest of the staff shuffle the deck of desirable traits.

At present, they’re aiming to stabilize the genetic mix at roughly 75 percent *Bos indicus* and 25 percent *Bos taurus*. Sawyer admits they’ll never land squarely on that combination but will bounce on both sides, “but this gives us a platform from which we

can determine the optimal level of *Bos indicus* for this environment.” As more data on the cow herd accumulates, identifying the cattle with the traits they’re looking for will guide selection and culling decisions.

## MARKET DEMAND

While the Foundation’s ranches are a living laboratory for ranching and land and wildlife stewardship at scale, the cattle are part of the economic backbone of the Foundation. As such, the herds must be managed to make a return on investment.

The ranching operation is a cow-calf outfit; its place in the industry structure is to produce the calves that, after weaning, will go to a feed yard. But how will they know if their genetics are truly threading the needle?


**“ The primary laboratory for us is the ranchland. Then we work to integrate the science program with the ranching. ”**

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That’s done by adopting a production and marketing system to optimize the value of the cattle. “Typically, we’ll wean our calves, then bring them for a short preconditioning period,” Stribling says. That allows for another round of vaccinations, so the calves stay healthy.

“Then we’ll turn them out on grass and stocker them for 90 to 120 days, depending on rainfall.” There, the calves gain weight cost-effectively. Then the calves will either be sold as feeders or retained through the feedyard.

Data is collected during the entire process and tied back to the cow herd. “We’re trying to sort the cows by like type and kind, especially the younger cattle where we know a portion of their genetics. We’re keeping those in contemporary groups and turning out specific bulls on specific sets so we can have a better estimation without actual genetic testing of what proportion, especially Red Angus and Santa Gertrudis, the cattle are,” Stribling says.

“The Foundation has a unique set of individuals and resources and a unique mindset when it comes not only to the ranch and operations, but the science and education aspects as well,” Stribling says. “We can always do better and we’re always working to discover better ways to accomplish our goals.” 







# CONSERVATION

# On Working Ranchland

By Joe Nick Patoski

**T**he historic El Sauz Ranch sprawls from the shoreline of the Laguna Madre west towards the town of Raymondville. Ownership of the land dates to 1793 as part of the 601,657-acre San Juan de Carricitos land grant let on behalf of the King of Spain to Jose Narciso Cavazos. Captains Richard King and Mifflin Kenedy took ownership of much of a portion of that land grant for what became the El Sauz division of King Ranch in 1881. The ranch was later partitioned, owned, and operated separately from the King Ranch.

The East Brothers Cattle Company completed acquisition of what is now the East Foundation's El Sauz Ranch in 1972 and Robert East bequeathed it as part of his estate to the East Foundation upon his death in 2007. Today, along with the Foundation's other ranches, El Sauz is both a working ranch and a laboratory for knowledge creation.



Katy Baldock



“ Cattle ranching has been extremely important in terms of maintaining habitat that’s beneficial to wildlife, including the ocelot. What’s good for cattle is good for lots of different wildlife species. ”



The East Foundation aims to be a game-changer for modern cattle ranching. By providing the land to test theories and work out ideas, the Foundation can offer informed guidance to stewards of working lands. Some fifty-plus research projects are presently conducted on East Foundation ranches, with the foundation’s staff working in partnership with academic institutions and government agencies.

The research addresses questions relating to managing native rangeland, wildlife, people, and livestock on a working cattle ranch. Research is conducted long-term, rather than limited to one or two years as is the case with most research projects, to yield robust data.

For example, Foundation scientists are testing the idea that twenty percent of the South Texas quail population can be harvested annually without long-term negative impacts to numbers. With the luxury of testing that theory over many years, landowners who actively manage quail populations will have more reliable and useful information to use on their own land.

Of the six East Foundation ranches, the 28,000-acre El Sauz is the most diverse – a convergence of South Texas brush country, sand sheet, coastal grasslands,

oak mottes, Tamaulipan Thornscrub, Gulf prairies and marshes, sand dunes, and several miles of coastline fronting the Laguna Madre. Little lagunas and pilas scattered throughout the property fill with water from seasonal rains. Periodic prescribed burns – part of yet another management-focused study – mimic how these habitats periodically burned before settlers arrived and introduced fire prevention.

Coyote, white-tailed deer, and javelina share this range with Santa Gertrudis and Red Angus-crossed cattle, as well as exotic Nilgai antelope. Introduced to Texas in 1929, the Nilgai are native to South Asia. They adapted to the South Texas environment to the point they can be a nuisance, as well as attractive big game for hunters. Today, an estimated 30,000 roam across South Texas. The Foundation studies their behavior to determine how Nilgai compete with cattle, deer, and other wildlife.

Texas tortoises, a state threatened species, roam the ranch. Scissortail flycatchers and green jays are among the hundreds of bird species recorded at El Sauz and other Foundation ranches. The rattlesnakes are big and plentiful when it’s hot, which is most of the time.

“El Sauz is a pretty active site for us,” said East Foundation chief science officer Jason Sawyer.



“Thirty-five to forty percent of our projects are specifically located at El Sauz, and a bit over half of our projects include El Sauz.”

Partners conducting research on the ranches include Texas A&M, Texas A&M-Kingsville, Texas Tech University, University of Texas at Arlington and eleven other ag research universities. Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management, Texas Parks & Wildlife, and others also partner with the Foundation.

Educating students, as well as landowners, is a core component of the Foundation’s mission, and the centerpiece of the ranch’s education mission is the Elliff-El Sauz Education Center that hosts more than 1,700 school children every February for El Sauz’s Behind the Gates Field Day event.

However, nothing gets attention around El Sauz like the little cat that almost no one ever sees, the ocelot. El Sauz harbors the largest known ocelot population in the United States; their only other known population is found at the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge, whose northern border is about 10 miles south. For the past decade, East Foundation, along with scientists at Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, have documented their abundance, movements, reproduction, and habitat use.

I met the El Sauz cat crew mid-morning in late March at El Sauz’s barndominium-style headquarters and maintenance facility. Other researchers were already in the field, evidenced by a line of parked vehicles with license plates from six states alongside trucks from Texas A&M AgriLife Research and Texas Parks and Wildlife’s wildlife division.

Landon Schofield, East Foundation’s range and wildlife biologist, and Dr. Ashley Reeves, East Foundation’s research veterinarian whose expertise is cat reproduction, were in good moods. “It’s been a great winter,” Reeves said.

It had been a busy week. Two ocelots and three bobcats had been trapped and worked before being released.

Trapping season runs from November through April – the coolest months of the year, under protocols approved by the US Fish & Wildlife Service. Traps are checked at daybreak and when an ocelot is trapped, the research team is alerted by text, and a team of three to five head to the ranch.



We started on the south side of the ranch, winding along a caliche road for about 15 minutes before pulling over. We walked a few yards through brush to a metal cage under the shade of a large oak.

“This is one of our trap sites,” Schofield explained. “We leave them closed during the day, open them in the evening, and they’re checked at daybreak.”

“Our ocelot trap is a [generic] live trap,” Reeves added, “It’ll trap anything.” Badgers, javelina, coyotes, raccoon, pigs, and roadrunners have found their way into traps on the ranch.

Many data points and biological samples are taken including blood, semen from males, and a pregnancy check for females, to name a few.

Assisted reproductive technologies, such as semen collection and cryopreservation and artificial insemination in felines is Reeves’ area of expertise. She trained under Dr. Bill Swanson at the Center for Conservation and Research of Endangered Wildlife (CREW) at the Cincinnati Zoo, she related as Schofield drove. “I completed my reproductive training under Dr. Swanson, who has spent his career fine-tuning feline reproductive technologies, with a special interest in ocelots in zoos.”

Current efforts are aimed at translating reproductive technologies and methods implemented in zoological institutions to the wild, where conservation efforts are needed. If methods prove to be effective for wild populations, Reeves will have a model for conserving endangered species through reproductive technologies, improving genetics in isolated populations, establishing methods for future populations, and doing it all in concert with cattle-raising.



Alongside semen collection efforts, artificial insemination (AI) procedures are performed with human-managed ocelot females in North American zoos using semen sourced from populations in South Texas.

Is the AI strategy working?

“Certain components are,” Schofield said. “We’re proving successful in collecting semen. Ashley has spearheaded those efforts and improved the collection

techniques. The next part of that puzzle is getting captive females pregnant.”

“We’ve performed eight AIs,” Reeves added. “Out of those eight, we haven’t been successful so far, but semen quality was not great with those procedures. We have tried a few techniques for semen collection and have settled on the most effective thus far [electroejaculation].

“We believe this could be our best chance to move these genetics around,” Reeves said. “We’re adjusting our protocols a little bit and if this doesn’t take, we will regroup and plan for next year. But we hope this is our year.”

“This year we’ve trapped eight males, of which six provided semen samples of good quality. Whoever’s semen thaws with the best quality, will be used for artificial insemination procedures this year.”

Ocelots on the ranch may be protected from development, but the possibility of a future weather event adds urgency to their work. This urgency arises from modeling that indicates a direct hit from a severe hurricane and the accompanying storm surge could wipe out ocelots at El Sauz. New populations on higher ground need to be established.

The East Foundation is already working with Texas A&M to identify candidate areas for a potential new population. Historically, ocelots ranged along the Texas coast into Louisiana and up to Arkansas. Site selection will be based on behavioral data tracking ocelot movement, habitat selection, along with historical records that identify where cats were once sighted.

Work is its own reward. “We hopefully will see this come full circle: the recovery of an endangered species in our lifetime,” Reeves said. And if they can crack the code, it could result in a successful birth of ocelot kittens with semen from a wild male, improve genetics in current populations, and establish an experimental population at a future release site. Reeves anticipates teaching the model the team developed to other researchers working to save and sustain other endangered species in the future.

“If we’re successful, it will come with its own set of questions. How do you train captive born cats to be wild? What would we do different?” She is eager to share the knowledge.

In the midst of all the ocelot and endangered species talk, cattle frequently came up. “Those two species

have gotten along out here for centuries,” Schofield noted. “Cattle ranching has been extremely important in terms of maintaining habitat that’s beneficial to wildlife, including the ocelot. What’s good for cattle is good for lots of different wildlife species.”

The ocelot footage Ben Masters shot for his 2022 documentary *American Ocelot* was filmed at El Sauz – a photodocumentary on ocelots never done before. Masters set up game cameras around the ranch until he got hits from ocelots. Once successive hits were recorded, he set up HD cameras for a couple of years.


When a female cat with a GPS collar started exhibiting unusual behavior suggesting she was pregnant and close to giving birth, Masters set up a camera network and was able to document ocelot kittens in the wild.

Since completion of the film, Masters has returned to El Sauz to follow the same mama cat. “We’re now into the third generation from that female,” Schofield noted. “We’re learning a lot from their behavior. It’s art meeting science.”

Ben Masters knows he couldn’t have made his film anywhere else. “The East Foundation and El Sauz represent hope that private land stewardship is a model in which endangered species can not only exist but thrive. The East Foundation isn’t coping with an endangered species, they’re celebrating that their land stewardship values wildlife and habitat so much, that the most endangered and beautiful cat in the United States is still thriving there. They’re a beacon of hope in South Texas.”

Dr. Lisanne Petracca, assistant professor of carnivore ecology at the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute and a relative newcomer to the project, assists with ocelot research on East Foundation lands. “This project provides a fantastic opportunity to lead the recovery of an endangered felid whose only American range is in South Texas,” she said. “What’s also unique is the remaining ocelots are largely found on private lands, which necessitates some creative strategies to achieve conservation goals.”

This dynamic team of researchers are now asking questions about what’s not known about ocelot in the wild. Petracca credits the East Foundation’s commitment to wildlife conservation and the incredible access it affords researchers while continuing operations as a working cattle ranch.

“We are trying to better quantify abundance, reproduction, genetic diversity, and dispersal of individuals among subpopulations. Ultimately, the goal is to get a better understanding of the current population trajectory of wild ocelots to best inform recovery efforts.” 

“ We hopefully will see this come full circle: the recovery of an endangered species in our lifetime. ”



By Lindsay Martinez

## LONG-TERM WHITE-TAILED DEER RESEARCH CONTINUES

Every fall, the East Foundation and the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute collaborate to capture white-tailed deer via aerial net gunning. A variety of measurements are collected from captured animals before the deer are released back to the landscape. Long-term deer monitoring data are used to investigate how factors like forage quality and cattle grazing impact the biology of East Foundation's mostly unmanaged deer populations.

Since 2011, the East Foundation's deer capture program has allowed for the study of white-tailed deer ecology and biology across portions of the East Foundation's San Antonio Viejo, El Sauz, Buena Vista, and Santa Rosa Ranches. During the fall 2022 deer captures, more than 400 deer were captured, processed, and released with the support of two agency partners plus undergraduate student volunteers representing 14 universities. In addition to data collection, the annual deer captures provide a unique opportunity for participating students to gain valuable, hands-on experience working with live animals.

## WHITE-TAILED HAWK ECOLOGY UNCOVERED AT EL SAUZ

The white-tailed hawk is a state-threatened raptor species in Texas. Given that much of its ecology remains a mystery, research is needed to inform conservation practices to benefit the iconic raptor on native rangelands supported by sustainable ranching enterprises. This year, the East Foundation's El Sauz Ranch proved an important site for white-tailed hawk research conducted by East Foundation in conjunction with Texas Tech University, and Texas A&M University.

At El Sauz and other private, federal, and state lands along Texas's Gulf Coast, researchers are focusing on studying white-tailed hawk breeding and dispersal behaviors. White-tailed hawk nests have been identified at the El Sauz Ranch, and other properties, to monitor nestlings' diets with cameras placed at nests. Researchers also use camera footage to study what environmental or ecological factors may impact overall nest success. Meanwhile, juvenile white-tailed hawks who are preparing to leave the nest are equipped with cellular transmitters that allow study of their dispersal and survival. Adult birds are trapped and tracked via transmitters so that researchers can follow adults' movements across seasons.





## Agricultural Research Organization




### Partnering with university programs

The East Foundation was the first organization in the United States to be officially designated as an Agricultural Research Organization (or ARO), and as such, is directly engaged in the continuous active conduct of agricultural research. As part of this designation, we partner with land grant and other agricultural colleges and universities including the Texas A&M University system, as well as the Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, the King Ranch® Institute for Ranch Management and the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University – Kingsville. The Foundation also works with other universities across Texas and the United States.

## WILDLIFE MONITORING DATA USED TO ASSESS FIRE IMPACTS

Beginning in late January of every year, a team of wildlife monitoring technicians converge on the East Foundation's San Antonio Viejo and El Sauz Ranches Working with Texas A&M University and the East Foundation, technicians spend their first months in South Texas trapping small mammals. Monitoring of mammal populations is important to understanding long-term changes in our land resources as they are good indicators of rangeland health. Every day in established grids across the two ranches, technicians check over 700 Sherman traps. Trapping efforts have documented the presence of 12 species of small mammals at El Sauz and 15 at San Antonio Viejo.

In partnership with the East Foundation, Texas A&M University researchers are currently integrating the monitoring data into studies of prescribed burns, which are routinely conducted in South Texas to enhance rangeland condition for both cattle and wildlife. Data collected from burn sites at El Sauz show that small mammal abundance does not fully recover until over a year following a burn and appears to peak around two years after a burn, but then can drop off again. This suggests that burn intervals of two-three years may be ideal for promoting high abundance of small mammals to support the carnivore species who rely on them. 





# A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP





## PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE OF LAND STEWARDSHIP

The past is never quite out of sight on the East Foundation ranches, where a century-old heritage of working on and with the land informs a present-day approach to stewardship. Here, lessons from the past help shape a forward-thinking philosophy in which the professional growth of interns, students, technicians, and researchers is never left to chance. Nourished as purposefully as the ranch's native rangelands, leadership development might not be as recognizable as a saddle or lariat, but it is a critical tool the East Foundation keeps ever at the ready.

By T. Edward Nickens



Emily Stribling



Jonathan Veil

**The Foundation will always remain dedicated to providing in-the-field learning experiences, but it now recognizes the added benefits that can result from connecting with students virtually.**

Working with land-grant universities and other institutions including the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management, and others, the East Foundation is building a network of emerging leaders whose impact will be felt within and beyond the Texas border for years to come.

There's a two-fold strategic approach to leadership development at the Foundation, according to Foundation CEO Neal Wilkins. For starters, the Foundation trains dozens of young scientists every year, and that training is rooted in a recruitment effort "that takes a missionary approach to looking for students who have the potential to be future leaders," he explains. "We bring them here and equip them with ideas and training about natural resource conservation on private lands. But we do it with a design that when they leave, they may venture far from Texas."

At the moment, East Foundation students are working in nearly two dozen states. "The idea is this – somebody, somewhere, without knowing it, is training the next Secretary of Interior, or the next Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – we are the outfit doing that on purpose. If we are going to have good leaders tomorrow, we better invest in the right people today."



Emily Strub





Trisha Lindsey



Trisha Lindsey



Emily Stribling



Jonathan Vail

**“ The idea is this—somebody, somewhere, without knowing it, is training the next Secretary of Interior, or the next Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—we are the outfit doing that on purpose. If we are going to have good leaders tomorrow, we better invest in the right people today. ”**

Dr. Roel Lopez has seen the effectiveness of such a specific approach. As Director of the Texas A&M University Natural Resources Institute, he serves as a student and professional advisor to many East Foundation researchers. It’s a two-way street to developing effective leadership, he says.

“You need people that understand the science, but also understand the basics of putting that science into practice,” he explains. “That recognition of the relationship between science and management is what makes the East Foundation approach quite unique and effective.”

It’s a kind of leadership that values listening as a critical component of communication.

“Our science team doesn’t try to impose on anyone else’s plans or management approaches, but to inform,” says Dr. Andrea Montalvo, a former East Foundation graduate student and now research scientist and director of the Hebronville office. “We’re trying to demonstrate how a working ranch can be successful and work through all the challenges of government regulations, endangered species, weather, and a changing rural culture. Translating science to the greater ranching community is a part of everyday life here.”



# HERE ARE THREE STORIES OF

# EAST FOUNDATION ALUMNI



WHO ARE TAKING THAT BRAND OF SCIENCE APPLIED TO LAND STEWARDSHIP IN VERY DIFFERENT PLACES.



JACOB DYKES

“It was a dream gig,” Jacob Dykes says. After all, where else could you spend your days crawling through thornscrub to carefully place globe thermometers, and collect fecal samples from fence crossings, and pick ticks off exotic nilgai antelope? It was all in a summer’s internship for Dykes.

Raised in North Mississippi, Dykes grew up hunting and fishing. He earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in wildlife, fisheries, and aquaculture science at Mississippi State University before landing in Kingsville for his doctoral research. There, his study used data from radio-collared white-tailed deer and cattle to look at how the animals interact with one another, and alter their movement patterns, as the heat of a Texas summer bears down for month after month.

What particularly impressed Dykes was the range of hands-on projects available. “The scale of the projects is unmatched, and there are so many different projects going on at one time that the opportunities are amazing. It is unique what the East Foundation offers.”

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Dykes was awarded his doctorate in 2018 and is now assistant professor and Extension Wildlife Specialist at Texas A&M University’s AgriLife Center at Corpus Christi. “I teach and conduct research, just like any other professor,” he says, “except my teaching could be with a landowner on the tailgate of a pickup truck or teaching a group of ranchers about feral hog management.”

It’s that idea of translation that appeals to Dykes in his current job, an outlook he found particularly grounding at the East Foundation. Institutions like the Foundation and the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute “complete the circle,” he says. In many other places, once a research project is completed, the feeling is that your work is done. But at East Foundation, the work was only getting started. “They were very clear: You’ve got to take your work to the people who are going to use it.”



VICTORIA HAYNES

## NEW HORIZONS

Victoria Haynes didn't grow up steeped in Texas cattle culture. She fished and hunted, she says, "but there was absolutely nothing in my life that had anything to do with ranching." During high school, she took an aptitude test designed to match a young

person's interests with colleges and institutions that offered corresponding programs.

"It was sort of funny," she recalls. "The test came back as saying there was not an institute for what I wanted to learn about. It came back as nothing—and I knew that wasn't good!"

Thankfully, a friend invited her to visit the Department of Rangeland and Wildlife Sciences at Texas A&M University-Kingsville, and she found a match that was beyond the ken of testing questions and algorithms. Haynes found a surprising passion: Working on a ranch.

After four years of undergraduate work at Kingsville, she began a master's program and research project on the Foundation's El Sauz Ranch, through the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute at Texas A&M University-Kingsville. She had a large study area where her project teased apart the effects of different burning seasons on the nutritional value of Gulf cordgrass. "It was a really big project," she says, "with a short window for burning, and managing around weather, and having the right crew on the ground at the right time."

Clearly, that old aptitude test was wrong.

Today, Haynes is a natural resources specialist with Texas Parks and Wildlife, stationed on Texas' Powderhorn Wildlife Management Area. In fact, she's the first biologist on staff at the WMA. "Having real-world experience with the East Foundation project and the other internships was so beneficial," Haynes says.

**"I'VE TALKED TO A LOT OF STUDENTS WHO DID MOST OF THEIR WORK IN THE CLASSROOM. TO ME, THAT'S SO CRAZY."**

As impressive as was her research experience, Haynes underscores the value of the East Foundation's broader community of staff and alumni that have continued to make a difference in her career. "They are so gung-ho about making sure everyone succeeds," she says.



ZANE HERRIN

## BACK IN THE SADDLE

Zane Herrin knows all about the allure of hands-on ranch work. He grew up south of Big Spring, Texas, where his father worked in the oilfields but ran his own small ranching operation.

"Horses and cattle and the ranching lifestyle have always been a part of me,"

Herrin says. When he was struggling with career plans, a mentor gave him rock-solid advice: "If you could wake up every morning and be excited to do something whether you got paid or not," he told Herrin, "then that's what you ought to do."

**"MY GOAL HAS ALWAYS BEEN TO BE THE GENERAL MANAGER OF A BIG WEST TEXAS RANCH, AND I'M THANKFUL TO THE EAST FOUNDATION FOR GIVING ME SUCH AN AMAZING START TO MY CAREER."**

After high school Herrin attended Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas—mostly for its rodeo program, he admits, but the school's wildlife curriculum was a solid plus. Herrin heard about the East Foundation while attending an Austin meeting of The Wildlife Society. In the summer of 2013, he started as East Foundation's first intern. It was a fortuitous match. Herrin loved long days and hard work from the saddle.

In 2020, Herrin received his M.S. in ranch management from the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management at Texas A&M University-Kingsville and returned to the East Foundation as a cattle operations manager. "I tried to bring a lot of science to that work but still utilize the cowboy traditions that I loved so much and honor the legacy of the East family."

And his work at East Foundation has given him the confidence to make his own path, he explains. Herrin now works on the 6666 Ranch, a famed west Texas quarter horse and Angus cattle breeding ranch he'd dreamed of working at. He's no longer managing a quarter-million acres. It's mostly him, 25,000 acres, and a thousand head of cattle. And he's embracing the challenge.

"My goal has always been to be the general manager of a big West Texas ranch, and I'm thankful to the East Foundation for giving me such an amazing start to my career." ◇



# Our People

Just as the East Foundation mission drives our organizational focus, our people are the boots on the ground who work diligently to promote land stewardship through our ranching operations, science-focused research, and informative educational programs. Below are highlights on the foundation's recent hires and promotions, as well as news regarding recent promotions and awards.

## RECENT HIRES

### Andy Lopez | July 2022

As Fleet Mechanic at East Foundation, Andy Lopez is responsible for all equipment repairs and maintenance including vehicles, tractors, and trailers. Prior to joining us, Andy worked for Enterprise Product, Hilcorp Energy, and M.C.C. Repairs. He brings 29 years of industrial equipment and automotive repair experience to the Foundation.



### Javier Vela | July 2022

Javier Vela is a Cowboy for the East Foundation. He is responsible for assisting the Foundation's Unit Foreman with cattle operations across all six ranches. Javier helps provide proper nutrition to our cattle herd and helps ensure body condition is adequately maintained.



He has three years of oil and gas experience specializing in well testing and production facilities and five years of law enforcement experience.

### Claudia Cardona | August 2022

Claudia Cardona is the Administrative Assistant for the Foundation's San Antonio Office. Her responsibilities include keeping inventory and processing orders, managing mail outs, organizing meetings and lunches, and assisting with administrative tasks throughout the Foundation.



Claudia joined us after two years of teaching English at McCollum High School. Claudia also assists with writing articles for our quarterly newsletter and our annual magazine.

### Dylan Durbin | October 2022

Dylan Durbin is a Unit Foreman for East Foundation. He is responsible for maintaining the health of the cattle, pasture grazing, fence stability, and other needs of his unit at San Antonio

Viejo. Before joining us at the Foundation, Dylan worked for the Bar Z Ranch in



Brady, Texas. He has a background in wind turbine construction and the gas pipeline industry and spent many years running his own cattle alongside his father and uncle in Lasara, Texas.

### Ashley Reeves | January 2023

Ashley Reeves is the Research Veterinarian for the East Foundation. She is responsible for managing carnivore and endangered species research and



provides a medical and scientific perspective to many other research projects. She develops and implements research objectives with our partners including Texas A&M University-Kingsville, CKWRI, and others. Ashley has a B.S. in Biology from

Mississippi State University, and a D.V.M., and Ph.D. in Reproduction from the University of Tennessee.

### **Landen Addison | February 2023**

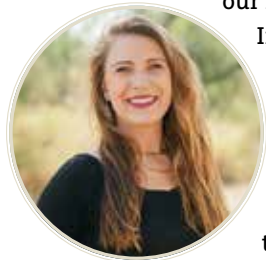
Landen Addison is the Digital Communications Coordinator for the East Foundation. She is responsible for producing and distributing digital content across multiple channels, including the Foundation's website, social media, publications, videos, and other assets. Additionally, she works to develop strategies and implement creative solutions for communications across digital media channels. Landen has an M.A. in Mass Communication from Texas Tech University.



## **PROMOTIONS**

### **Molli Foxley**

Molli Foxley is a Unit Foreman for East Foundation. She is responsible for the management of land, water, and cattle on the Coloraditas Grazing Research and Demonstration Area (CGRDA) and our Ranchito Ranch. In addition to her ranching duties, Molli is an integral part of our education team, assisting in virtual and in-person field lessons across the Foundation's ranches. Molli received her B.S. in Animal Science from Louisiana State University.



### **Margarita DeLeon**

Margarita DeLeon was recently promoted to Accounting Manager for the East Foundation. She is responsible for managing multiple accounting functions and operations. She leads daily accounting operations, which includes maintaining the general ledger system,

preparing and/or reviewing appropriate ledger entries and reconciliations, preparing monthly, quarterly, and annual financial statements,




processing payroll, working with the external auditor on the annual audit, assisting with the annual tax return and helps to prepare the annual budget. Margarita has a B.B.A in Accounting from St. Mary's University in San Antonio. Prior to joining us at the Foundation she worked for Rackspace Technology, Southwest Airlines, and KLRN.

### **Veronica Paredes**

Veronica Paredes was recently promoted to Director of Finance for the East Foundation. With a professional background in business and risk management, Veronica is responsible for the Foundation's long-term financial health and growth and oversees all financial functions and staff. She is also responsible for the Foundation's investment portfolio, manages and oversees the employee retirement plan, and has administrative oversight for organizational policies, procedures, and insurance coverages.



Veronica serves as the Secretary of the East Foundation, maintaining the Foundation's corporate governance documents, and serves as the Treasurer. Veronica holds an MBA from Texas A&M – Corpus Christi and B.A. degrees in Business Administration and Spanish from Austin College in Sherman, Texas, where she graduated with Honors. Veronica is also an Austin College Lee Posely Leadership Institute graduate. 

**Two East Foundation associates were honored by The Wildlife Society (TWS) at their 2022 Annual Conference in Spokane, Washington.**

## **Tyler Campbell Jim McDonough Award**

The Jim McDonough Award is a professional achievement award for excellence in wildlife management. It is presented to a TWS member who is also a Certified Wildlife Biologist and a member of the section and chapter where they reside. Recipients are recognized for making a significant contribution to the wildlife profession through program implementation and development of new techniques or approaches in an area or in a state or province.

## **Lindsey Martinez Ronald F. Labisky Graduate Fellowship in Wildlife Policy**

The Ronald F. Labisky Graduate Fellowship in Wildlife Policy is a graduate-level fellowship that encourages early career wildlife scholars to understand, formulate, and recommend wildlife policy on critical conservation issues and further encourages these wildlife scholars to pursue careers advancing wildlife policy issues. This year is the first time this fellowship will be awarded, making Lindsay the inaugural recipient. The East Foundation is proud of both Tyler and Lindsay and hope you will join us in congratulating both on their well-earned recognition.

# A LOOK BEHIND THE GATES

EDUCATING SOUTH TEXAS AND BEYOND

Claudia Delfina Cardona



**S**ince its inception, the primary objective of the East Foundation’s education program has been to connect students to the land, demonstrate the many values of working cattle ranches and rangelands, and introduce students to the inspiring people who live and work on those ranches—all while helping students develop crucial learning skills applicable across a wide range of subjects.

To accomplish that lofty goal, the Foundation offers learning opportunities throughout the year in the classroom, on the ranches, and virtually. The East Foundation’s education program has continued to expand as more resources, students, and like-minded partners have emerged. In the not-too-distant future, the constantly evolving and improving education program will fall under the umbrella of the Foundation’s well-known “Behind the Gates” brand, named after the highly regarded education-focused field days held at two of the Foundation’s six ranches.





Jonathan Vail



“The majority of our students are underrepresented students, and maybe the first generation in their families to go to college. We want them to continue their education in the natural resource field if they’re interested in that subject. Even if they’re not, we still want to see them pursue higher education.”





## BEHIND THE GATES EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

The titular Behind the Gates Field Days are week-long events hosted at the El Sauz Ranch during spring, and the San Antonio Viejo Ranch in the fall. This biannual program provides an interactive experience at the ranches; 5th grade students visit El Sauz Ranch and 8th graders visit the San Antonio Viejo.

About 1,500 eighth graders attend Behind the Gates at San Antonio Viejo, arriving from Brooks, Duval, Jim Hogg, Jim Wells, Kleberg, Starr, Webb, and Zapata counties. Students cycle through a variety of Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)-aligned lessons that explore land stewardship, cattle management, the settlement history of South Texas lands, and technologies used in ranching. The lessons at Behind the Gates Field Days are presented using a variety of teaching styles including lectures, competitions, songs, and interactive demonstrations.

Foundation education programming is intentionally comprehensive. In addition to Behind the Gates Field Days, the Foundation's educational program offers students and their educators many opportunities throughout the year. These include:

- **Land Stewardship Ambassadors (LSA)** - Sponsored by Texas Farm Credit, LSA selects three groups of 15 students from Bexar, Cameron, and Webb counties who are interested in the environment, natural resources, and developing leadership skills. They complete weekly assignments and participate in two-hour sessions each week during a 10-week program.
- **Field Lessons** - Field Lessons are outdoor learning experiences both at San Antonio Viejo and El Sauz. These "on the ranch" field lessons encourage students to connect to the natural world while learning about wildlife and ranching.
- **Virtual Field Lessons** - Virtual field lessons allow students from across Texas to access the same information presented in field lessons. They are offered using Zoom, and are 45 minutes in length, once a week.
- **Wildlife by Design** - East Foundation partners with Texas Wildlife Association on five unique programs for classrooms in South Texas counties and are available to kindergarten through 8th grade students.

Developed and hosted in conjunction with like-minded partners, East Foundation education offerings have developed a reputation for quality, innovation, and proven success.

"It's not enough to just tell young people about the importance of native rangelands and ranching. We have to show them — and then involve them in stories about the land," said Neal Wilkins.

Partners are critical to success, and success is possible only by collaborating with the Museum of South Texas History, Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Witte Museum, and Texas Wildlife Association. All made possible by support from Elliff Motors, Las Huellas, Makena, Texas Regional Bank, Wildlife Systems, Enbridge, Frost Bank, and the H. Yturria Family.

**"It's not enough to just tell young people about the importance of native rangelands and ranching. We have to show them — and then involve them in stories about the land."**

Recently, Texas Farm Credit has generously committed support to the Behind the Gates Education Program to help meet organizational goals and ambitions.

"Texas Farm Credit is proud to partner with the East Foundation in supporting the Behind the Gates educational program. We believe in the value of investing in the future of agriculture and conservation through education," said Jolene Curtis, COO of Texas Farm Credit. "This collaboration enables us to enrich the lives of young students, providing them with unique, hands-on experiences in land stewardship and sustainable practices that they can't get anywhere else."

## THE EDUCATORS OF BEHIND THE GATES

The East Foundation's education programming not only provides engaging science curriculum and firsthand experiences at the ranches, but also provides mentorship through community leaders like Masi Mejia, Manager of Education Programs, and Elisa Velador, Texas Wildlife Association and East Foundation Educator.

"The majority of our students are underrepresented students, and maybe the first generation in their families to go to college. We want them to continue their education in the natural resource field if they're interested in that subject," Velador said. "Even if they're not, we still want to see them pursue higher education."



Mejia emphasizes the importance of connecting her students' prior knowledge to the science curriculum. "We look at Latin root words like carne and connect them to science vocabulary like carnivore." Additionally, Mejia consistently encourages current and former students to apply for scholarships and higher education opportunities. "Some of my LSA students still reach out to me for references for applications," Mejia added.

"One of the great things we provide is exposure to natural resources professionals," noted Velador. "Sometimes it's the first time these students meet game wardens, or scientists that work with ocelots. Or they don't realize that being a cowboy is an actual job they can do."

It is without question that the East Foundation education team makes a great impression on South Texas students. As the new chapter of the Behind the Gates educational program unfolds, Mejia and Velador and their partners will have the opportunity to create lasting impacts on even more classrooms across Texas.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Over the last nine years, the Foundation's educational team has expanded their reach and resources. As one example, through the generous support of partners, the Elliff-El Sauz Education facility gained seven new education pavilions, walking trails, and much-needed utilities in 2022.

"We started with nine schools the first year and now we're up to 15 schools, which is our max. It just keeps growing," Velador said.

Moving forward, the East Foundation's education team will continue to improve and add opportunities for students across Texas.

"2024 will be the tenth year of Behind the Gates," said Tina Buford, director of the Foundation's education programs. "Having nine years under our belt and reviewing how we're using those nine years as our foundation for the coming years is appropriate. It is an ideal time to revise and update our programs, as well as rebrand ourselves to better reflect what makes our education program so unique and effective."

Rest assured, Behind the Gates will continue to connect students to the land. Using science-based curriculum and hands-on learning, the program will help demonstrate how land stewardship on working lands provides quality of life for both people and wildlife.



“ 2024 will be the tenth year of Behind the Gates. Having nine years under our belt and reviewing how we’re using those nine years as our foundation for the coming years is appropriate. It is an ideal time to revise and update our programs, as well as rebrand ourselves to better reflect what makes our education program so unique and effective. ”

Looking to the next ten years of the Behind the Gates educational programs, Buford has developed foundational principals for their program:

- **Promote the advancement of land stewardship** - The East Foundation has always valued land stewardship as part of their mission, so a focus on sound stewardship principles is foundational to Behind the Gates educational programming.
- **Use science-based curriculum** - “We have access to things most people don’t on our ranches,” Buford said. “That resource is what makes us unique. We incorporate science, ranching, and education in our operations. Combining land management with education is what makes us special.”
- **Serve as mentors** - The educators that work for East Foundation are not only educators, but also serve as mentors who show students the way in the fields of science and ranching.
- **Use (pre and post) tests and surveys to audit for quality and knowledge retention** - “This is an area where nonprofits can fail, when they can’t accurately report impacts. We analyze program results to ensure our programs are effective,” said Buford.
- **Utilize partnerships for increased impact** - Partnerships provide support and help amplify the message and reach of Behind the Gates.



Emily Strubling

## Education



The East Foundation has been working hard to expand our education opportunities in South Texas, while ensuring that we are developing future land stewards. Our education programs focus on delivering effective programs in the classroom, on the land, and in partnership with like-minded organizations. During the 2022-2023 school year, our educators have reached:



**9,639**

**Classroom Students Reached With Wildlife By Design Programs**



**1,731**

**Virtual Field Lessons**



**38**

**Graduated Land Steward Ambassadors Program**



**1,701**

**Students On Ranch Field Lessons**



**3,961**

**Students At El Suaz Ranch Behind The Gates**

East Foundation is committed to providing future generations with the tools to make educated decisions and do what is right for the land and the life that depends on it.



Jonathan Hall

“What makes Behind the Gates, Behind the Gates? How can we make something that isn’t a marketing gimmick, but truly better and more effective?” These are the questions Buford pondered when developing the core principles with her team. “Anything we do two, five, twenty-five years from now that checks off those boxes is a good Behind the Gates program.”

**“ I hope that with this rebranding and expansion, every classroom we visit gets to also make it out on the ranch so the students can say they’ve been on a working ranch.”**

There are many anticipated developments on the horizon for Behind the Gates, but what will remain evergreen is the commitment to getting students to connect with the land.


“I hope that with this rebranding and expansion, every classroom we visit gets to also make it out on the ranch so the students can say they’ve been on a working ranch,” Mejia said.

“In Laredo, when talking to students about our Field Lessons and the ocelots at El Sauz, I tell them I could load them on a bus, take them to El Sauz, and bring them back within the school day. My hope is that they understand how close and connected they are to these ranches. I know that realistically, all Laredo students will not make it out to El Sauz – but I like to leave them with that wonder and sense of possibility!”

When asked what she most looked forward to, Velador said, “Growing our education team, and inviting more people and having more community events. I just want to provide more experiences for more people.”

Behind the Gates educational programing has evolved over the past nine years, but what remains constant is the dedication to bringing awareness of natural resource conservation to K-12 students across South Texas and beyond.

“These students – and their teachers – walk away with an entirely different view of wildlife management and cattle ranching. And it’s a view that sticks with them and changes how they think,” Wilkins noted.

Whether it is virtually, in the classroom, or behind the actual gates of the Foundation’s working cattle ranches, the East Foundation will continue to encourage both children and adults to learn about and participate in the management and conservation of Texas’ most important resources. 



Trisha Lindsey



Trisha Lindsey



**Behind  
THE GATES**  
EAST FOUNDATION

“ These students—and their teachers—walk away with an entirely different view of wildlife management and cattle ranching. And it’s a view that sticks with them and changes how they think. ”



Emily Stribling



# PROUD PARTNER



For the past nine years, **Behind the Gates** has referred to weeklong events hosted on the El Sauz Ranch in Willacy County and the San Antonio Viejo Ranch in Jim Hogg County. Behind the Gates has grown to be synonymous with the message of land stewardship and has generated a decade of data that demonstrates value for both students and teachers. We believe the magic is not in the “event” model, rather the underlying principles that guide the way we engage students. Texas Farm Credit agrees.

“Texas Farm Credit is proud to partner with the East Foundation in supporting the Behind the Gates educational program. We believe in the value of investing in the future of agriculture and conservation through education.” said Jolene Curtis, COO of Texas Farm Credit.

With Texas Farm Credit’s investment in South Texas students, over the next year, we will apply the underlying principles that make the “event” a success across all our educational efforts. How better to celebrate nine years of success than to build a bigger tent for more players to connect students to the land!

“TEXAS FARM CREDIT IS PROUD TO PARTNER WITH THE EAST FOUNDATION IN SUPPORTING THE BEHIND THE GATES EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM. WE BELIEVE IN THE VALUE OF INVESTING IN THE FUTURE OF AGRICULTURE AND CONSERVATION THROUGH EDUCATION.”



TEXAS  
FARM CREDIT



# SPONSORS

Investing in a Bright Future for South Texans

Engaging with like-minded Sponsors is an important aspect of the East Foundation’s mission to promote the advancement of land stewardship through ranching, science, and education.

Support from our Sponsors functions as a force multiplier for the Foundation, enhancing our ability to deliver on our mission and programs. Together, we educate and promote future leaders, professionals, and conservation-minded citizens who will value and support Texas’ rangelands, as well as the private land stewards who make Texas a vibrant, diverse, and unique place for people and wildlife to live.

A special thanks to the following Sponsors that have invested in the East Foundation’s mission, programs, and facilities, allowing us to reach over 6,000 students at the East Foundation-Elliff Education Facility this year.



**H. YTURRIA FAMILY**

**ROY W. AND ELLEN S. QUILLIN FOUNDATION**

And a special thanks to the following individuals for their contributions to the Foundation – Kim & Dwayne Baker, GeoSouthern Energy Partners, Pamela & Laurence Tarica Foundation, and Tom & Sonja Vandivier Charitable Foundation.

To find out more about partnering with the East Foundation through sponsorship opportunities, contact James Powell at [jpowell@eastfoundation.net](mailto:jpowell@eastfoundation.net).

# Thank You To Our Partners

East Foundation engages with like-minded partners, both at the individual and organizational level, to fulfill our mission. Our partners consistently demonstrate a commitment to excellence in land stewardship and education regarding the conservation of our natural resources.









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