



A CONSERVATION NOTEBOOK by Homer Stevens

Originally this edition was to be about Spanish Oak trees, but on receiving a copy of Jim Stanley's "Ecology of the Texas Hill Country" for Christmas, I was so impressed that I cannot resist the opportunity to promote his book and his ideas regarding Land Stewardship. Hopefully, quoting from Jim's introductory statement will give insight into the mission of the book. "This book is a labor of love for me because it is about the Hill Country, or at least the native, natural part of the Hill Country. And my purpose for writing it is to teach others about the natural part of the Hill Country."

This statement most certainly exemplifies my own mission in contributing to the Heart Beat every quarter. Jim's "Hill Country Landowner's Guide" was published by the Texas A&M Press, and he was awarded the Carroll Abbott Memorial award by the Native Plant Society of Texas in 2012. In 2014 he published a second book, "A Beginner's Handbook for Rural Texas Landowners, How to Live in the Country Without Spoiling It."

My personal introduction to Jim and the Master Naturalist Society that he so strongly represents came in the Fall of 2012. Having read about the program in the Kerrville Daily Times, I requested and was granted permission to enroll in the sessions. Although I have lived in the Hill Country for some 75+ years and profess to have been an avid conservationist and Land Steward for most that time, the program served me with numerous new concepts and reminded me of forgotten facts.

Two of the most important aspects of Land Stewardship for me would quite likely be growing grass and preserving water. We cringe at the idea of the businesswise, successful early retired couple who purchase 40 acres of Hill Country land, build a large home with a large yard of St. Augustine grass, stock the pasture with 5 Longhorn cows, a bull, goats, a pet llama, maybe a buffalo, a flock of chickens with a few guineas, two dogs, 8 cats, and a pony for each of

the 5 grand kids. These scenarios present a challenge to good Land Stewardship that requires research and thought processes even if the economics of the feed bill is not a factor.

Our Hill Country can easily be classified as a green desert as you look out over the hills. What you see is green due to the abundance of Ash Juniper (cedar). In wet years blue stem grasses grow in abundance. Appearances are very deceiving; even the stated average rainfall of 32" is misleading. There are many more drier than average years than above average years, and the average is supplemented by floods that may last only a few days. It is adaptation to these conditions and issues that Jim's books address, and in my own small contributions, an effort is made to add bits of information gained though many years of firsthand experience.

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