



Unique Partnership: East Foundation & Texas Wildlife Association Foundation

A connection between like-minded organizations to expand natural resource education opportunities in South Texas

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Photos courtesy of TWA CONSERVATION LEGACY PROGRAM AND EAST FOUNDATION

What if...every child in Texas knew without hesitation where their water comes from, what type of bird, mammal or insect share this world with us; knew that healthy soils support the habitat that provides shelter for wildlife and supplies us with oxygen? And knew how everything in life is connected.

the science-based and ethical connections in order to acquire and live a healthy, happy and productive life.

Realizing how important citizens who are natural resource literate are to wildlife conservation efforts and the quality of land stewardship in Texas, the East Foundation (EF) and the Texas Wildlife Association Foundation (TWAF) have carefully



IDEA Public School students follow Dr. Tyler Campbell East Foundation Chief Program Officer and Principal Scientist between stations at the "Behind the Gates" Field Day on the El Sauz Ranch.



Elisa Velador shares her natural resource knowledge with family members at a local community event.

Children need to experience and learn these foundational things and acquire local knowledge because it directly affects the choices they make every day throughout their lives. By encountering pertinent, engaging and high quality learning opportunities, people of all ages will learn how to be stewards through personal awareness and appreciation of wildlife and wild places, while being actively engaged in their local communities and connected to their family cultures.

Why gain a better understanding of stewardship and the living and nonliving systems we are all part of? Because *everyone* is dependent on the healthy habitats and associated natural resources and must be aware of and gain understanding about

developed a unique partnership supported by their individual missions. The EF supports wildlife conservation and other public benefits of ranching and private land stewardship. Their mission is achieved through research, education and outreach. TWAF's mission is increasing natural resource literacy and promoting conservation and educational programs that connect Texans to the land.

Through the strong convergence of their missions, the location of East Foundation lands and the mutual agreement to combine resources for maximum impact, the EF and TWAF partnership strives to expand natural resource education opportunities targeting the underserved communities of South Texas. The EF





Students learn about a working cattle ranch during the “Behind the Gates” Field Day on the East Foundation’s El Sauz ranch.



Elementary students enjoy a “Skins & Skulls” hands-on experience.



and Texas Wildlife Association (TWA) staff have hired and trained two contract educators responsible for implementing the Learning Across New Dimensions in Science (L.A.N.D.S.) Youth Stewardship Initiative into the classrooms as well as taking students out on East Foundation lands for first-hand learning experiences that will lead to a better understanding of private land stewardship, wildlife conservation and ranching in South Texas.

Kassi Scheffer, TWA Director of Education – L.A.N.D.S. Outreach has been instrumental in working with Tina Buford, EF Education Project Manager, on the development of the specific educational objectives of the partnership agreement.

“It has been a very rewarding experience to work alongside the EF to impact students especially in South Texas.” Scheffer said. “Not only has the East Foundation supported L.A.N.D.S educators on the ground, their collaboration on *Stewarding Texas – A Scientific Exploration* Resource Guide is a testament to both organizations’ commitment to educating young Texans as to the importance private land stewardship.”

Both South Texas L.A.N.D.S. educators are actively presenting the Wildlife by Design modules in classrooms and engaging students in experiential outdoor field learning with natural resource professionals, historians and ranchers from the local area.

According to Masi Mejia, one of the South Texas L.A.N.D.S. educators, she uses the excellent tools at her disposal.

“I engage students and teachers during our *Animal Adaptations: Skins and Skulls* presentation, by communicating facts about different native species in Texas,” she said. “Many of the students are familiar with the animal but get excited at the opportunity to see their skull and skin up close.”

“Every day is a new day to impact a student’s mind about their behavior towards the environment and making them more aware of their environment.”

South Texas L.A.N.D.S. educator Elisa Velador said, representing both “TWA and the East Foundation allows me to combine two things that I love, teaching and natural resource conservation. I’m extremely proud to be able to give something valuable such as



Masi Mejia facilitates learning as students actively engage in the *More than a Drop* Wildlife by Design module.

knowledge about natural resources to my community and instill in them the urgency of its conservation on private land.

“It is really great to be a part of both TWA and the East Foundation because the work that both organizations do benefits people all over Texas by helping to provide food, clean water, fiber and most importantly wildlife habitat. On a personal level, since I got hired with TWA and the East Foundation, my appreciation for our land, wildlife and hunting has increased, and I’m enjoying sharing that with my family, especially my husband and two young boys.”

Velador said, “I always encourage students to spend time in their local nature centers, state parks or national wildlife refuges giving them the name of the closest one to them and stressing the affordability of a weekend visit. A lot of the time I find out that they didn’t even know those places existed.”

“Additionally,” she said, “I like to give examples of things they can find while exploring their own backyard such as, different shapes of leaves, rocks, insect eggs, larvae or types of birds.”

“When introducing the two organizations,” she said “I like to tell students that even they can become a member of TWA if they are interested in Texas wildlife, and I love to tell the story of the East family of cattle ranchers from our very own South Texas. This really spikes their interest because they feel like they can be a part of something and can be connected to other people in some way, whether it is through a membership or through the history of their land.”

Exceptional L.A.N.D.S. educators are key to deploying TWA’s educational programming. How very fortunate to have these





L.A.N.D.S. Educator Elisa Velador interacts with an eager group of 1st graders wanting to learn more about metamorphosis.



Students learn about the stages of the life cycle of various animals during the *Investigating Life Cycles Wildlife by Design* module.

two join the Conservation Legacy educational contingent of staff and fellow L.A.N.D.S. educators who through their professional diligence and passion increase the educational reach of TWA's programming year after year to hundreds of thousands of youth in Texas.

"Kids learn better when they are outside. They get into the middle of real (native) plants and animals. This makes them overall better students; and in the end better teachers, biologists, engineers, electricians or whatever they can dream," said Dr. Neal Wilkins, East Foundation President and CEO.

This distinct partnership is a new model and allows for exponential growth that will continue to increase natural resource literacy and promote conservation and educational programs that connect Texans to the land. Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Tarrant Regional Water District have been and remain key partners and have been integral in the creation, development and expansion of TWA's education programs since inception.

At TWA, the successes from the EF partnership will be used to help figure out how to work with more partners. The key is to work with entities that share common visions for wildlife conservation and find ways to work together expanding the reach.

"With the help of partners like the East Foundation, we are able to leverage resources and reach more students with the critically important message of land stewardship and conservation of natural resources," said David Yeates, TWA CEO. 🌱

