The Bennett Trust Endowment originated from one landowner’s deep appreciation of and desire to preserve the Edwards Plateau, and AgriLife Extension’s wish to carry on these values. Eskel Bennett, a native Texan who retired in Dripping Springs, provided an endowment for AgriLife Extension to continue his tradition of education and preservation of the Edwards Plateau. Bennett was an advocate for land stewardship and used this endowment as a way to continue his work in land stewardship even after his passing in 2006.

“His desire was for us to be able to conduct land stewardship programs in the Edwards Plateau, because that is where they (the Bennetts) lived and that is a property they loved,” says Dr. Larry Redmon, the first Bennett Trust AgriLife Extension specialist.

The endowment is the first one given directly to AgriLife Extension. “Mr. Bennett’s gift is an enduring legacy and our ability to conduct stewardship programs out there will go on indefinitely,” Redmon says.

The endowment funding formed the Bennett Land Stewardship program. Through conferences, the program specifically addresses the land management issues of the Edwards Plateau, including brush control and prescribed burning. Conferences also cover topics that are applicable outside the region, such as estate planning, water management and livestock stocking rates.

The third annual Bennett Trust Land Stewardship Conference will be held April 14-15, 2016, in Kerrville.

The Women’s Natural Resource Management Con-

Stewardship Education Opportunities Abound

Classes, websites, online training, field days, conferences and more — opportunities are out there for landowners to learn about what it takes to be a good steward of their land and resources.

By Sara Carney
ference, also funded by the Bennett Endowment, will take place in Fredericksburg Oct. 5-6, 2015, at the Inn on Barons Creek. This conference is devoted to helping women manage natural resources in the Edwards Plateau.

Learn more about the Bennett Trust at bennetttrust.tamu.edu.

Ranch Management University

For a new or novice landowner, understanding the responsibilities associated with maintaining a ranch can be intimidating. Ranch Management University, a 5-day event held each April and October in College Station, serves as an introductory course and one-stop shop for beginning ranchers. The workshop covers a wide range of topics associated with ranching and provides a support network to its participants.

Participants receive specific training on livestock management practices such as administering vaccinations and dehorning, and land management practices such as managing for introduced and native forages. Landowners also learn about land stewardship issues, including stocking rates (the amount of livestock a particular area can support). “When they go home, they actually have the resources to go back and do what we discussed during the week,” says Redmon, coordinator for the program.

The workshop also provides a unique opportunity for participants to interact with experts including Texas A&M University faculty and AgriLife Extension specialists. This mentorship does not end when the workshop ends. Faculty and specialists make themselves available to participants needing additional support.

“We do not expect them to be perfectly knowledgeable when they come out, but at least they know some of the questions to ask and some of the things to be aware of,” Redmon says. “And they know who they can contact, because we give them a list of the entire faculty involved in the workshop, and they can contact those people at any time to ask questions.”

The next workshop will be held Oct 26-30, 2015, in College Station.

Learn more about Ranch Management University at forages.tamu.edu/workshop.html.

Lone Star Healthy Streams

There are 273 water bodies in Texas considered impaired by bacteria; affecting the health of Texas eco-
Lone Star Healthy Streams (LSHS) is combating bacterial contamination by educating farmers and ranchers on the impacts of bacterial runoff and on how to reduce runoff caused by feral hogs, horses, beef cattle, dairy cattle and poultry. LSHS provides resources for rural landowners such as presentations, manuals and an interactive website and an online course.

The program was developed in 2007 through a partnership between the Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board (TSSWCB), the Texas Water Resources Institute (TWRI) and AgriLife Extension, with funding from the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Clean Water Act 319 program. Since its inception, LSHS has sought to equip rural landowners with the tools necessary to manage land to support healthy waters. The educational material provided by LSHS allows landowners to understand both the risks of bacterial contamination and how they can voluntarily implement BMPs such as proper grazing, feral hog management and riparian area protection.

Livestock producers can more easily make wise choices for reducing the pollution originating on their
operations if they know the water quality laws and policies; the ways in which bacteria can enter water; and the range of solutions available to reduce water quality problems, according to Redmon, who leads the LSHS program.

“A lot of those things are either zero cost or very low cost, and easy to implement in many cases, so it is basically a matter of making people aware of the issues and the solutions,” he says.

Each manual produced by LSHS has been endorsed by natural resource agencies and industry associations. These organizations include the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), and Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association.

To learn more about Lone Star Healthy Streams, visit lshs.tamu.edu.

Texas Riparian and Stream Ecosystem Education Program

Riparian areas are green vegetation zones along streams, rivers and lakes that are vital, though often overlooked, ecosystems; supporting water for wildlife, livestock and human consumption. Degradation and erosion of riparian areas often reflect poor ecosystem health of the surrounding area. The Texas Riparian and Steam Ecosystem Education Program (Texas Riparian) recognizes the importance of riparian areas and the role of landowners in conserving them, and spreads this knowledge through educational programs throughout Texas.

“This program helps establish a larger, more well-informed citizen base working to improve and protect local riparian and stream ecosystems,” says Nikki Dictson, TWRI Extension program specialist and co-ordinator for the program.

To create this well-informed citizen base, Texas Riparian offers several resources including trainings, online tools on its website, and social media outreach. Trainings provide general information on riparian areas and address concerns at the local level, Dictson says. They are typically in locations with impaired watersheds, where stakeholders are working on a watershed protection plan (WPP) or total maximum daily loads (TMDL). Local technical resources and BMPs are discussed to give participants practical knowledge.

Workshops are generally 1-day events and include classroom presentations and walks along local rivers, streams and bayous. Dictson says that the workshops connect landowners with local technical and financial resources to improve management and promote healthy watershed and riparian areas on their land.

“Restoring and protecting riparian areas through improved management is one of the most important things a landowner can do to protect the streams and rivers running through their land,” says Dr. Kevin Wagner, TWRI’s associate director. “This program educates landowners on how streams and rivers work and how important riparian area management is to stream health.”

Texas Riparian is funded by an EPA Clean Water Act grant through TSSWCB and is managed by TWRI. The program has a number of partners including Texas Riparian Association, Texas A&M Forest Service, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, USDA NRCS, Nueces River Authority, Texas A&M AgriLife Research Ecosystem Science and Management Department and Texas Tech University Llano River Field Station.
Texas Watershed Steward

A vital part of watershed protection and management includes the participation and education of the watershed’s stakeholders. The Texas Watershed Steward (TWS) program aims to do that by hosting events and workshops that provide communities with the knowledge necessary for active engagement in the protection and restoration of their watershed.

The program was developed through a partnership between AgriLife Extension and TSSWCB, and TWS has conducted 71 workshops throughout the state since its first workshop in December 2007. The critical need for proper education on watershed issues was the primary reason for TWS’s genesis, says Michael Kuitu, program coordinator for TWS. Members of the community are sometimes unaware of what is needed to protect their watershed, or even why that watershed is impaired.

TWS targets areas that have either ongoing or upcoming watershed projects, according to Kuitu. Workshops coincide with efforts such as TMDLs or WPPs. The events are open to anyone interested, from agricultural producers to homeowners, and offers continuing education credit, Kuitu says.

Workshops can run a full day or half a day, and address both general water resource issues and those specific to the local watershed. The course begins by covering watershed basics and then discusses point and nonpoint sources of pollution, water quality testing and management strategies, among other topics. Members of the community who are involved in local watershed protection and management speak about watershed protection efforts.

The success of TWS is apparent. The program conducts pre- and post-assessments during the workshop, which have shown a 30 to 33 percent increase in knowledge related to watershed issues.

Follow-up evaluations conducted 6 months after the workshop indicate that participants begin to implement some of the practices they learn, including soil testing. Kuitu says that this illustrates the practical significance of TWS and the impact it has had on those watersheds where the program has been delivered.

“Often times just a simple change in behavior can have a positive impact on water quality, so education is a crucial component of any water quality improvement or management strategy,” Kuitu says.

For more information on Texas Water Steward, visit tws.tamu.edu.

Center for Private Land Stewardship

The Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources, in partnership with the East Foundation and the Samuel Roberts Nobles Foundation, established a Center for Private Land Stewardship in February 2015. The center is designed as the hub of education for private landowners and the public. It delivers experiential field learning, extension and outreach programs on the critical role of private lands and land stewardship. For information on the center, visit landstewardship-center.org.

For more information on other education opportunities, visit the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service website at http://agrilifeextension.tamu.edu/.