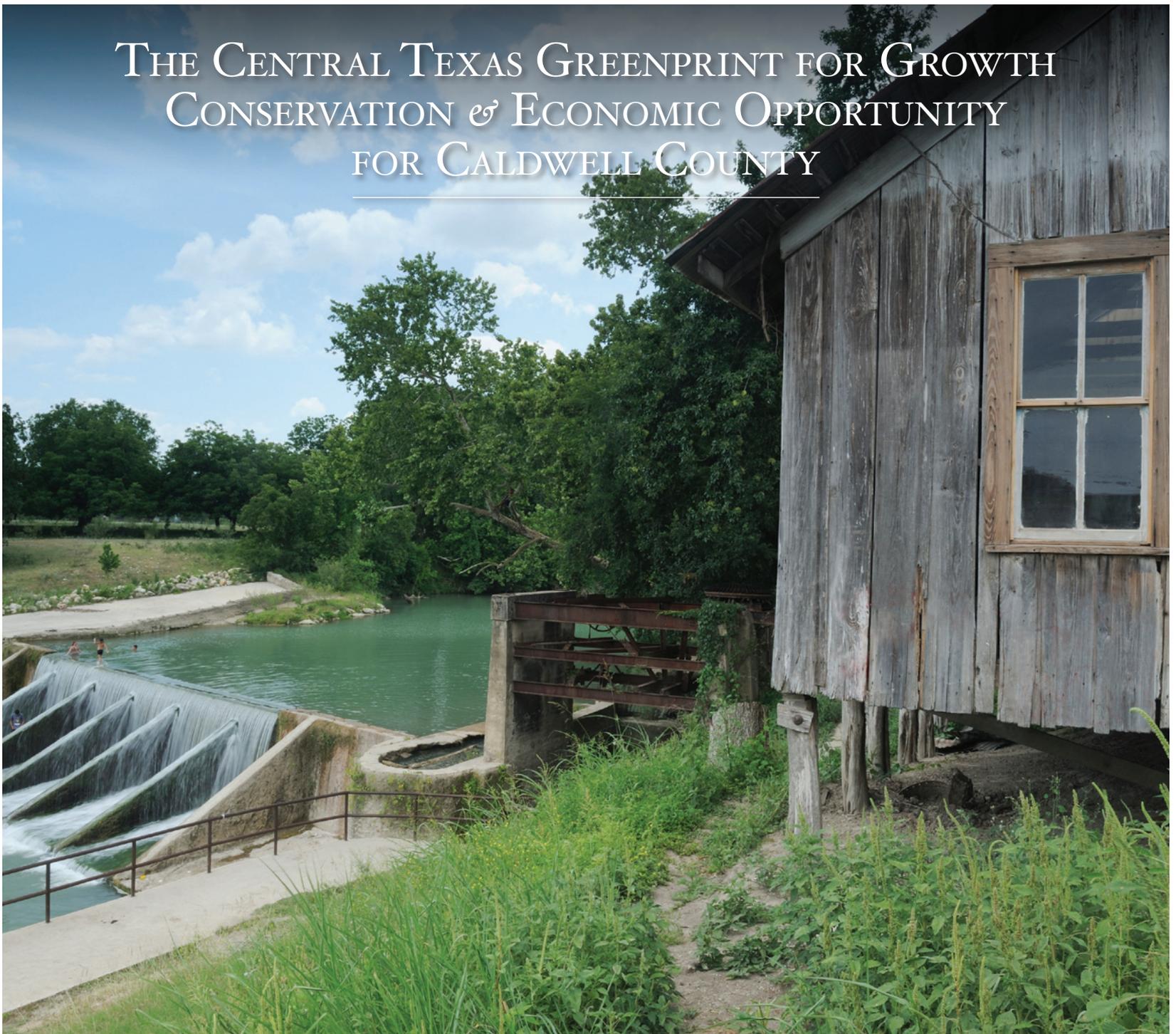


THE CENTRAL TEXAS GREENPRINT FOR GROWTH CONSERVATION & ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR CALDWELL COUNTY



THE TRUST *for* PUBLIC LAND
CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE



CALDWELL COUNTY



Caldwell County has every reason to prize its quiet, small-town, rural atmosphere where the courthouse in historic downtown Lockhart overlooks a landscape rich with an agricultural heritage that remains in place today. In a world that is rushing to celebrate the art of getting back to the basics, Caldwell County wrote the how-to manual. It has maintained that authentic and iconic Texas image of the wider-than-wide sky and cattle moving across the gently rolling plain. The blackland prairies of the northwest yield to the hardwood-peppered sandhills ecosystem in the southeast. However, growth is coming from both the north and the south. Caldwell County sits in the unique position of being able to address how these potential changes will occur before they happen and change this picture forever.

“PEOPLE DON’T WANT THEIR COMMUNITY TO LOOK LIKE EVERY OTHER COMMUNITY WITH THE SAME BIG BOX STORES EVERYWHERE. WE WANT TO MAINTAIN OUR UNIQUE IDENTITIES.”

—TREY BAILEY, DIRECTOR,
LULING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
CORPORATION

“RURAL LAND AND OPEN SPACE IS SACRED TO RURAL FOLKS AND SHOULD BE PRESERVED WHENEVER POSSIBLE. [THE] GREENPRINT FOR GROWTH SHARES THAT GOAL.”

—H.T. WRIGHT, CALDWELL
COUNTY JUDGE

Caldwell County’s rich mineral resources enable the agribusiness, petroleum, and manufacturing that support the county’s economy. One of the more rural counties in the Central Texas region, Caldwell County has experienced significant growth (39 percent) since the early 1990s. The population is expected to grow another 55 percent to just under 50,000 people by 2020. Much of this growth is attributable to commuters who work in the educational, health, and social service-related fields in Austin and San Marcos.

Growth in Caldwell and surrounding counties and persistent drought are raising concerns among county residents about the availability and quality of drinking water. Lack of rainfall, an increase in paved surfaces due to development, and the seeming unquenchable thirst of the bigger cities outside Caldwell threaten the levels of the Carrizo-Wilcox aquifer, a groundwater source to a portion of the county. Lockhart has begun to investigate additional surface supplies, such as creating a lake on Plum Creek or drawing water from the San Marcos River.

Caldwell County, like much of the Central Texas region, grapples with the question, “How do we grow responsibly while protecting our drinking water, creating safe spaces for our children to play, and conserving that rural quality of life that is found here?”

An effort to address regional land use, transportation, and environmental issues began in 2002 with Envision Central Texas (ECT). Many thousands of Central Texans participated in the ECT visioning process and expressed their desire to shape future growth in ways that will preserve their unique character and natural resources. Recognizing that strategies to encourage growth away from precious drinking water supplies and other important

resources require cross-jurisdictional cooperation, The Trust for Public Land (TPL), ECT, and the Capitol Area Council of Governments (CAPCOG) launched a regional Greenprint in Bastrop, Caldwell, and Hays, where new growth and development are occurring but also where opportunity still exists to respond proactively. By taking a holistic view of the region's "green infrastructure," the Central Texas Greenprint for Growth identifies high-priority opportunities for land conservation to meet local parks and open space needs and ecosystem protection goals, and to highlight areas for directing responsible growth away from sensitive resources.

As part of the Central Texas Greenprint for Growth, TPL and a technical team of local experts developed individual opportunity maps for each of the six community goals identified by Caldwell County citizens and one composite map showing where multiple goals overlapped:

- Protect Water Quality and Quantity
- Conserve Farm and Ranch Lands
- Protect Sensitive Ecological Areas
- Enhance Park and Recreation Opportunities
- Protect Scenic Corridors
- Protect Cultural/Historic Resources

The most intense colors indicate the best opportunities for conservation, with dark red ranking the highest.

The role of these maps, however, is much broader than highlighting conservation opportunities. Developed with broad consensus, these maps are useful as guides for decision makers to make future infrastructure investments, such as schools, road, bridges, and housing away from sensitive areas such as aquifer recharge zones and endangered species habitat. While development is essential to a thriving economy, it also can fragment and destroy healthy, functioning ecosystems, as well as alter the unique character of communities that is essential to support tourism. Therefore, these maps also reveal opportunities for:

- New parks and facilities to meet growing population needs;
- Areas that provide recreational and habitat connectivity that enhance eco- and agri-tourism;
- Target areas for environmental enhancement or restoration to improve business retention and recruitment;
- Concentrations of farm and ranch lands to maintain their economic viability and buffer them from encroaching development;
- Encouraging sustainable growth that preserves Caldwell County's unique identity.

WHAT IS A GREENPRINT?

You need a blueprint to build a house. You need a Greenprint to build a sustainable community. A Greenprint represents The Trust for Public Land's unique application of Geographic Information System (GIS) modeling and mapping technology that identifies the best places for conservation, resource management, and growth to occur. While seeking to protect natural, historical, cultural, and recreational resources, a Greenprint also provides a "best path" approach for development.

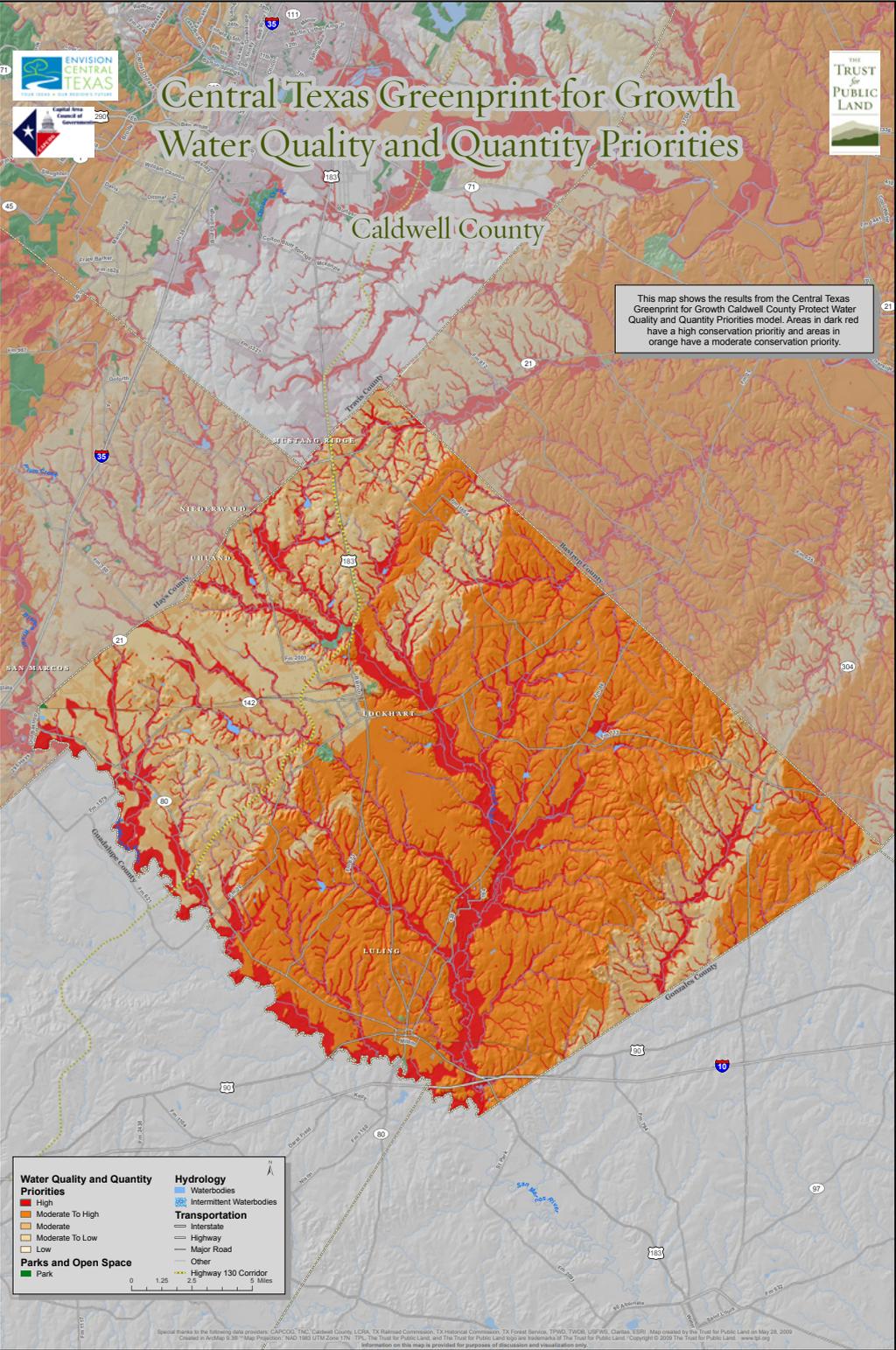
The Greenprint process involves several steps:

- (1) constituency building;
- (2) goal setting;
- (3) data gathering and analysis;
- (4) GIS modeling and mapping; and
- (5) identifying practical strategies for goal implementation.

The result can include a dynamic, interactive web-based tool that helps leaders make informed land-use decisions based on community values, which, in turn, promote economically vibrant, healthy, and attractive communities.

PROTECTING WATER QUALITY

The number one conservation issue on the mind of Caldwell citizens is protecting water quality and quantity. The continuing drought only heightens attention to this issue. The Greenprint identified 245,315 acres—almost 70 percent of the county's total land area—as critical to achieving that goal; however, Caldwell has protected only 0.3 percent of these high-priority areas through federal, state, local, and/or private means. While it is unrealistic to assume that all of these lands will be conserved, the map clearly illustrates how land use changes could affect the health of ground and surface waters. Lying within the Guadalupe River Basin, the Plum Creek watershed and the San Marcos River are important areas targeted for preservation, not just to provide clean drinking water but also to support agriculture, to sustain wildlife, and to promote outdoor recreation, such as fishing and hunting. As the saying goes, "If it's good for the fish, it's good for us."

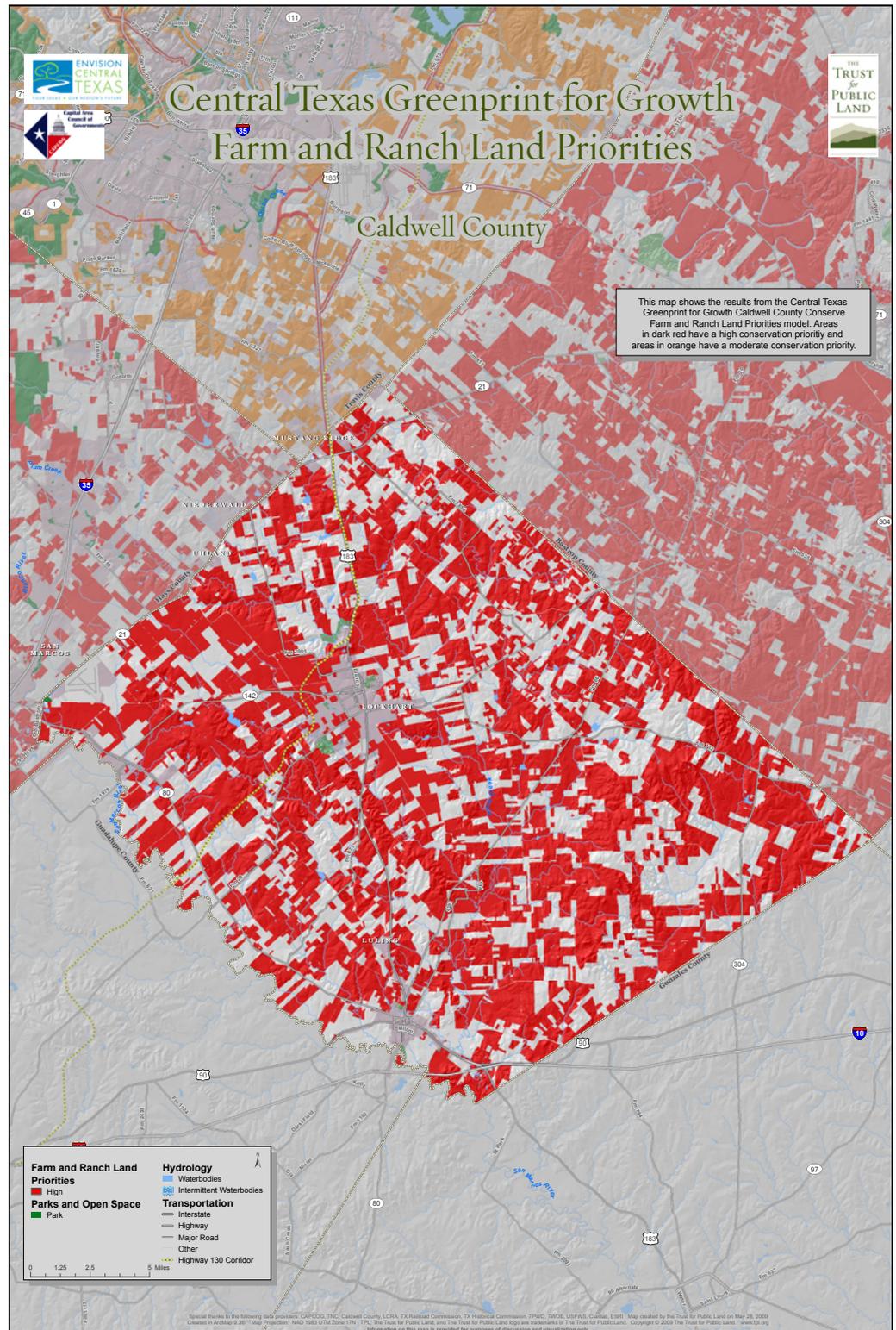


CONSERVING FARM AND RANCH LANDS

Because of its soil conditions, subtropical climate, and long growing season, Caldwell County offers growers and ranchers ample space to raise crops and cattle. According to the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service for Caldwell County, agriculture contributed more than \$56 million to the local economy in 2008, even with reduced rainfall. The year before, when water levels were normal, the amount contributed exceeded \$65 million. This industry has nurtured a way of life that is cherished by county residents. More than 200,000 acres of high-priority agricultural lands were identified in the Greenprint, of which only 63 have been protected through working lands easements, a legal instrument that allows agricultural lands to stay that way, while simultaneously providing some economic relief to farmers and ranchers.

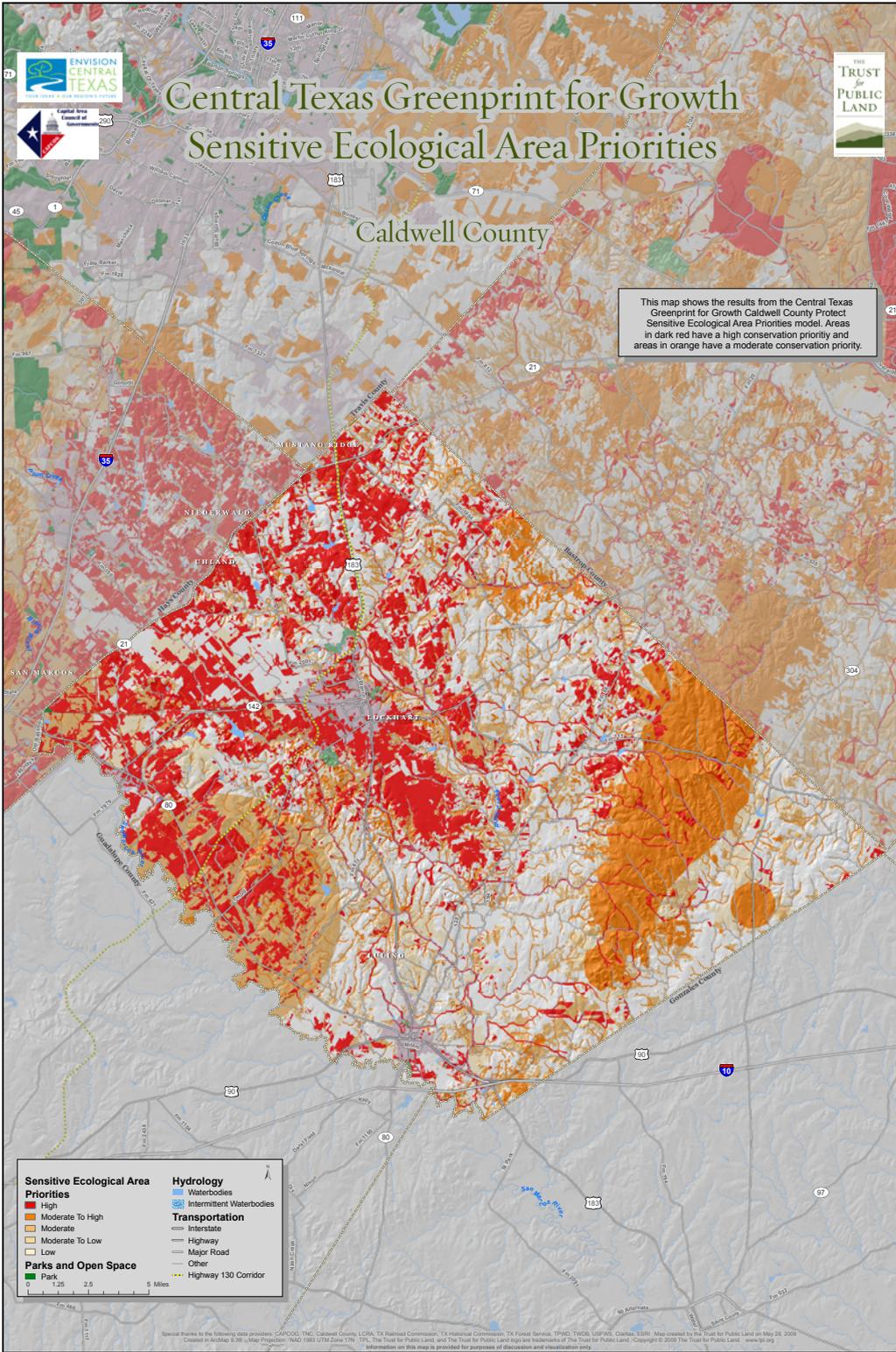


ABOVE: Caldwell County has a wealth of rich, productive farmland. PHOTO BY ROLF NUSSBAUMER.



PROTECTING SENSITIVE ECOLOGICAL AREAS

The Luling-Darst Creek fault zone bisects Caldwell County from the southwest to the northeast, creating two distinct landscapes. The dark soils, tall grasses, and mesquite trees of the blackland prairie characterize the north. The south offers the rolling sandhills covered with oaks, elms, and other hardwoods that support a diversity of wildlife. Plum Creek, Clear Fork Creek, and the San Marcos River are home to a multitude of wildlife and recreational opportunity. The Greenprint highlights almost 150,000 acres of high priority lands. Only 384 acres have been protected.

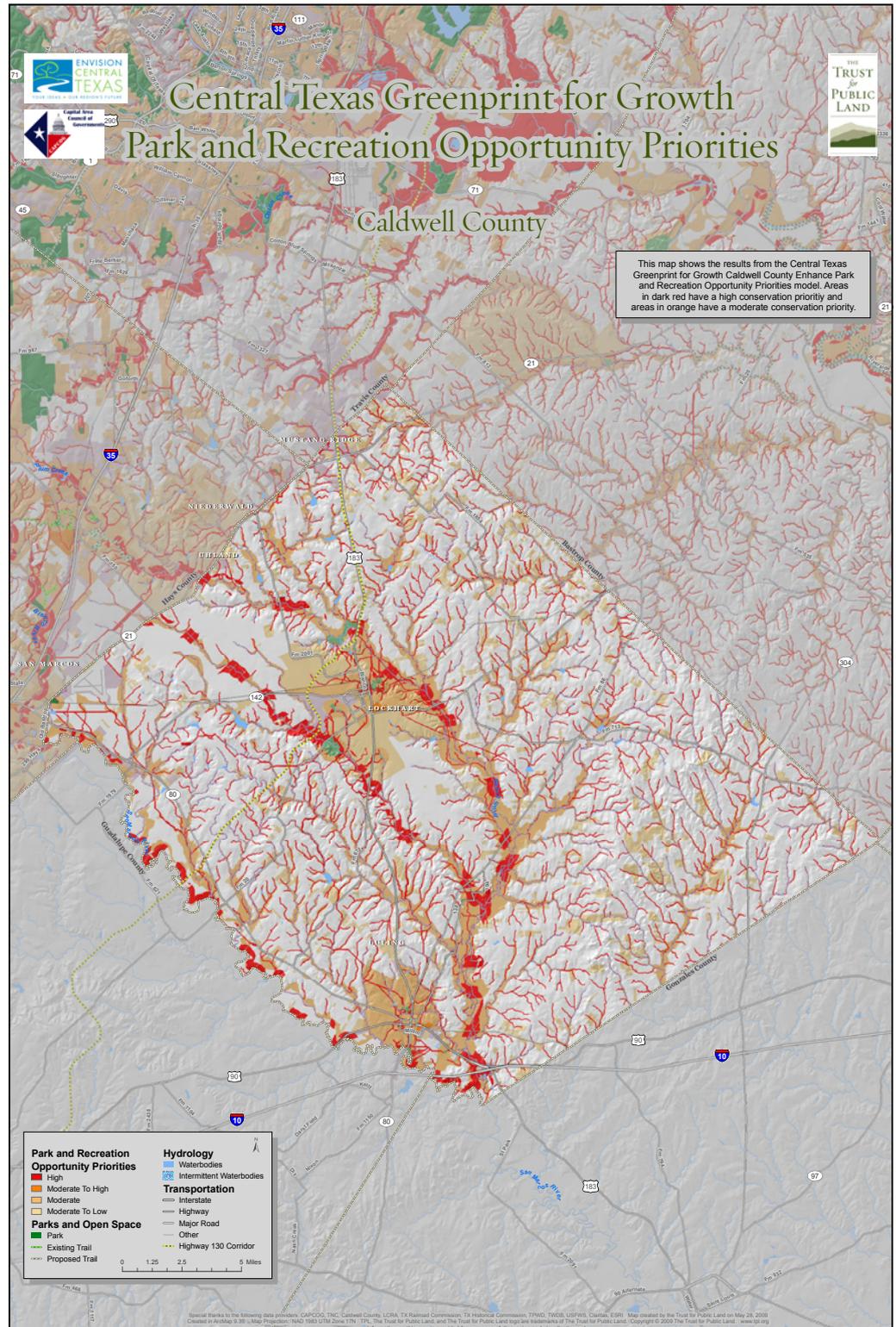


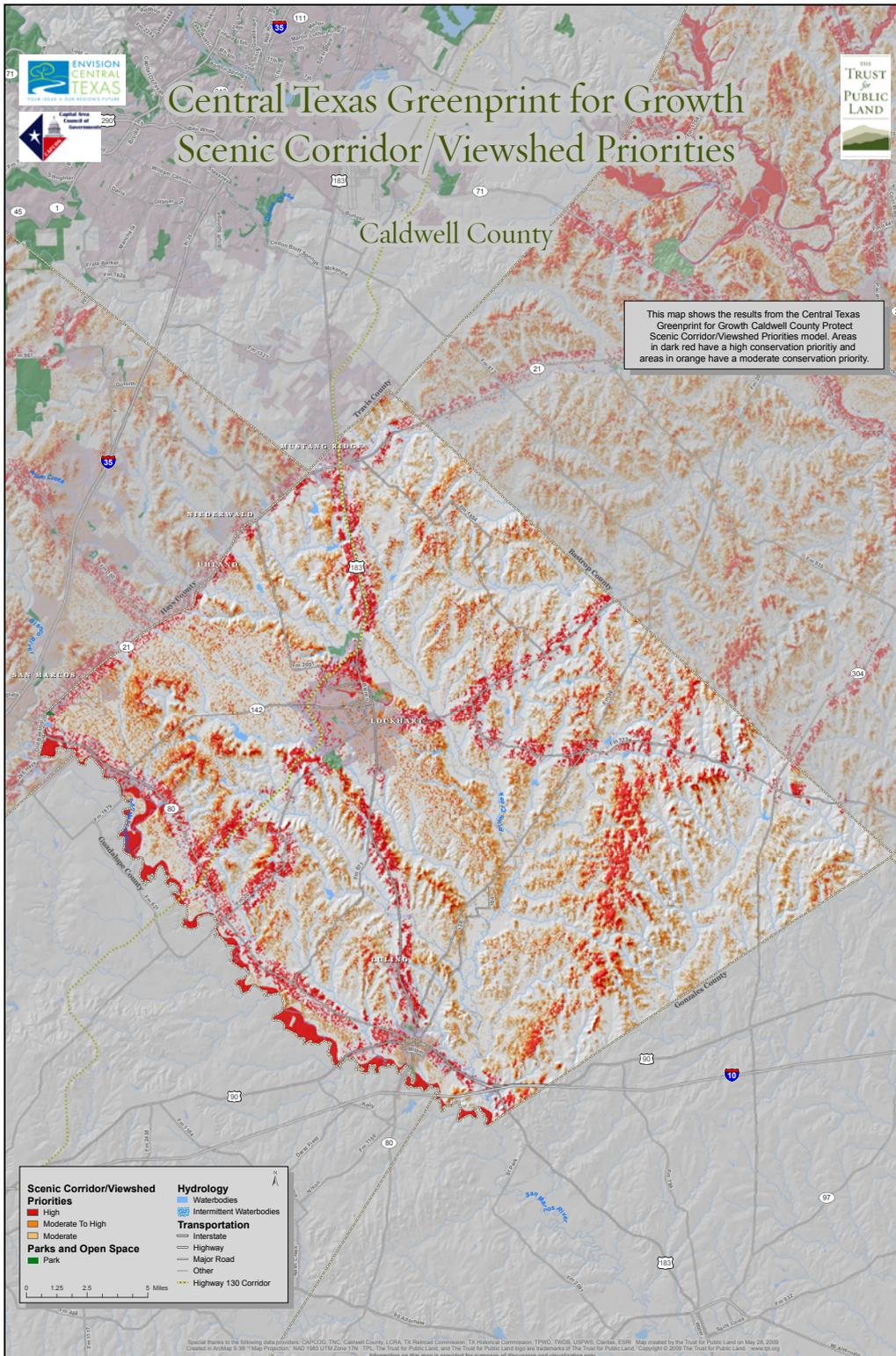
ABOVE: Clear Fork Creek, Lockhart State Park. PHOTO BY ROLF NUSSBAUMER.

ENHANCING PARKS AND RECREATIONAL AREAS

When compared with counties of similar size, population, and land uses, Caldwell County was found to offer approximately 19 acres of land per 1,000 residents, most of which is provided within the cities of Lockhart and Luling. County and city residents have expressed an interest through comprehensive and master planning efforts in enhanced and expanded parks systems to create more livable communities, ensure the integrity of the area's natural landscape, and increase the economic and social role that public parks provide.

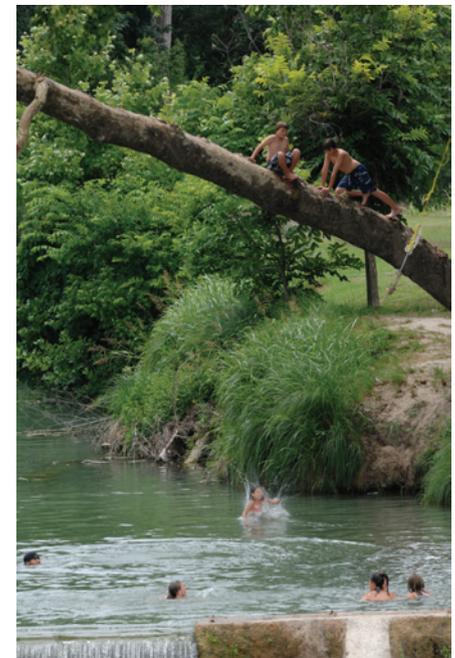
The Greenprint mirrors this interest in identifying almost 45,000 acres of land for enhanced park and recreation opportunities. A number of these acres lie along rivers and streams to create access for fishing, swimming, and hiking. Only 1 percent of Caldwell's high-priority areas—most of which lie outside city boundaries—have been conserved, which raises the need for countywide parks and open space planning. If an aggressive parkland acquisition strategy is not implemented soon, Caldwell will not keep pace with its growing population, providing even fewer parks and recreational opportunities in the future than it does today.





PROTECTING SCENIC CORRIDORS

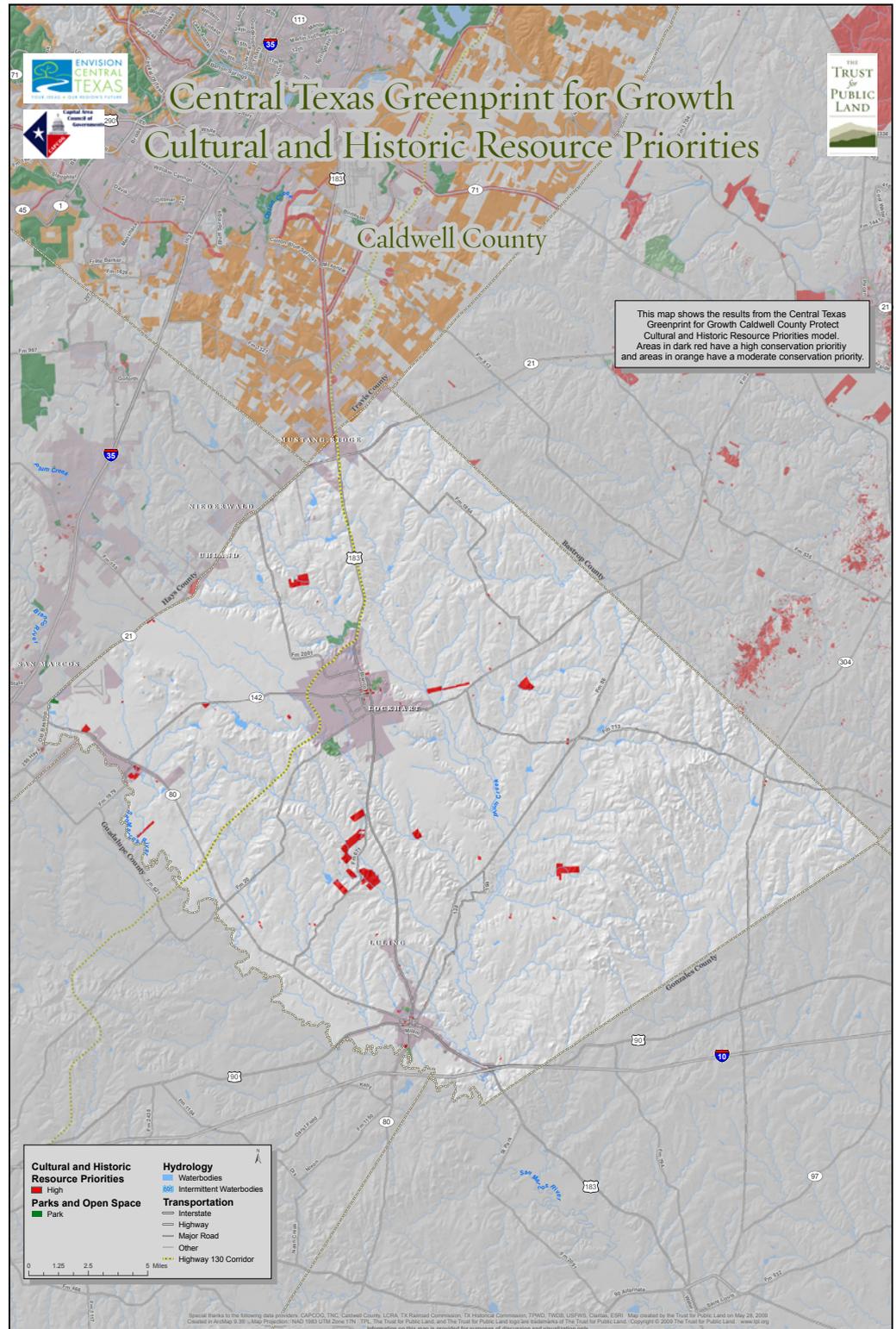
The areas highlighted on this map indicate scenic roadways and viewsheds within Caldwell County that provide beautiful gateways to local communities, serene agricultural settings, and iconic rural drives. Caldwell citizens also identified the San Marcos River and Town Branch as important scenic corridors for preservation. Of the 56,086 acres targeted, 138 acres already have been protected.



ABOVE: Swimmers enjoy a cool dip into the San Marcos River. PHOTO BY ROLF NUSSBAUMER.

PROTECT CULTURAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES

Cemeteries, courthouses and other landmarks, military facilities, historic sites, and historic districts all tell the stories of where a place came from and where it is headed. They define community character and give a place context and meaning. The Greenprint identified more than 2,300 acres as important to preserve in order to protect the cultural and historic resources of Caldwell County. Only one acre has been conserved to date. The Zedler Mill project in Luling will increase historic preservation efforts, while also providing access to the banks of the San Marcos River and the surrounding natural areas. The Zedler Mill will illuminate the history and life of early Caldwell County settlers, while creating hiking, picnicking, and other recreational opportunities for visitors.



OVERALL CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITIES



The Overall Conservation Opportunities map highlights in dark red and orange the areas of the county where multiple Greenprint goals overlap, based on the weights established by Caldwell County citizens:

Protect Water Quality and Quantity	33%
Preserve Farm and Ranchlands	19%
Protect Sensitive Ecological Areas	18%
Enhance Recreation Opportunities	14%
Protect Scenic Corridors and Viewsheds	12%
Protect Cultural Resources and Historic Sites	4%

For Caldwell, the Greenprint goals intersect along sensitive ecological or agricultural areas with rivers, streams, and aquifer recharge zones. The highlighted areas represent just more than 94,000 acres. With less than

0.4 percent of these lands protected, Caldwell County has ample conservation opportunities. However, Greenprint goals will not be achieved through land conservation alone. A willing-seller conservation program is only one step toward Greenprint implementation; the rest requires regional cooperation, an engaged public, and private-public partnerships. To this end, Caldwell County citizens recommended a number of strategic actions:

Action 1. Create developer incentives by:

- Adopting conservation subdivision ordinances at both the county and municipal levels;
- Establishing a transfer of development rights program for Lockhart and Luling;
- Updating city planning/zoning and master plans to recognize and incorporate the Greenprint;
- Investigating land swaps with developers that would encourage development away from sensitive resources;
- Establishing a fee abatement program, similar to the one for infill development, to reduce impact fees and to encourage park/open space development;
- Adopting a parkland dedication ordinance to require more parks or greenspaces within new subdivisions and improved maintenance.

Action 2. Form public-private partnerships with churches, land trusts, state and local government agencies, and other nongovernmental organizations to:

- Investigate opportunities for historic designations;
- Pursue conservation easements and other strategies in priority areas;
- Obtaining support from city and county officials for grant applications for conservation projects through all levels of governmental, private, and nonprofit entities;

Action 3. Identify and secure funding for parks and open spaces by:

- Exploring potential nonprofit, state, and local government partners for conservation easements for working lands;
- Acquire grant funds for acquisition, operations, and maintenance of parks and open spaces.
- Seeking endowments to fund park projects, community centers, and other recreational facilities.

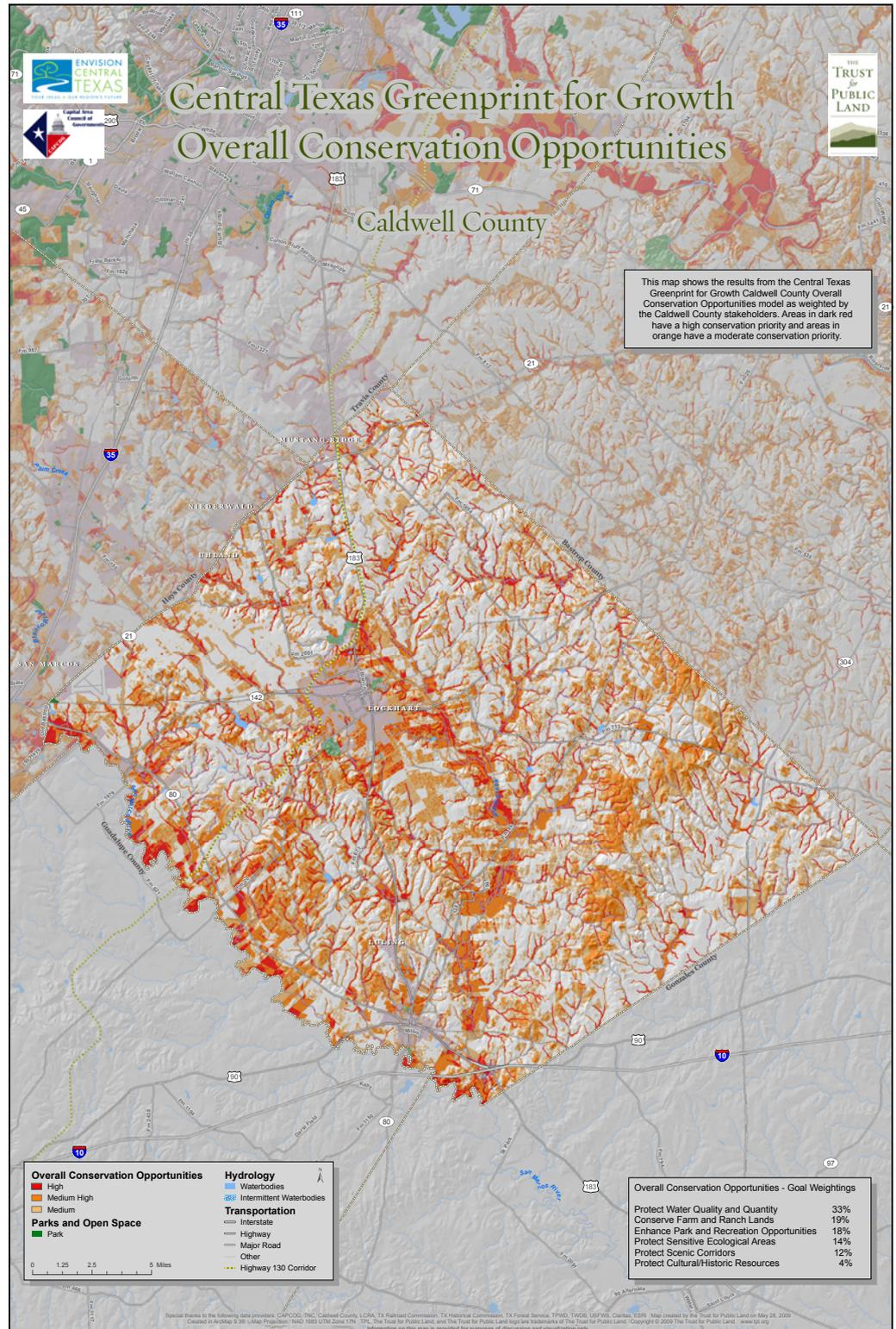
Action 4. Increase the number of parks and improve the maintenance and quality of recreational experiences by:

- Exploring an expanded role for the county in the provision of parks and recreation services;
- Hiring a park planner/coordinator at the county level;
- Increasing partnerships with youth and church groups, 4-H clubs, and little leagues to increase volunteer involvement as well as recreational activities;
- Collaborating with civic organizations, such as Kiwanis and Lions Club, to help with park acquisition, operations, and maintenance.

Action 5. Increase public outreach related to the economic, environmental, social, and health benefits of parks, recreation, and conservation by:

- Utilizing the Greenprint as an informational tool to local governments and other nonprofit organizations;
- Educating landowners on estate planning, including options to donate land through their wills, life estates, and other mechanisms;
- Incorporating recreation and conservation lessons into the school district curriculum.

The Central Texas Greenprint for Growth offers a vision for the future of Caldwell County and the surrounding areas. Its ultimate success depends upon the sustained commitment and follow-through by citizens and their representatives.



The *Central Texas Greenprint for Growth* represents a partnership of The Trust for Public Land, the Capital Area Council of Governments, Envision Central Texas, and the constituent communities of Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, and Travis counties. The project partners gratefully acknowledge the following supporters for their generous contributions to this project:

Federal Highway Administration • Lower Colorado River Authority • Shield-Ayres Foundation
Bastrop County • Caldwell County • Hays County

The project partners also wish to thank the members of the Central Texas Greenprint Regional Steering Committee, the Technical Advisory Team, and the Caldwell County Stakeholders Group. A full list of names for those who provided their time, energy, and enthusiasm is available in the *Central Texas Greenprint for Growth Report*, which is available for download at www.tpl.org/centraltxgreenprint.

For more information about the *Central Texas Greenprint for Growth*, contact Envision Central Texas, 6800 Burleson Road, Bldg. 310, Suite 165, Austin, TX 78744 (512) 916-6037, www.envisioncentraltexas.org, or The Trust for Public Land, Texas State Office, 816 Congress Avenue, Suite 1680, Austin, TX 78701 (512) 478-4644. The full versions of the *Central Texas Greenprint for Growth* and the *Travis County Greenprint for Growth* reports are available for download at www.tpl.org/centraltxgreenprint. Central Texas Greenprint maps will be maintained by the Capitol Area Council of Governments, www.capcog.org.

The Trust for Public Land conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come.



ABOVE: Agricultural land is emblematic of Caldwell County. PHOTO BY ROLF NUSSBAUMER.