

National Wildlife Refuge Expansion Conserves Habitat for Endangered Golden-Cheeked Warbler

Critical support provided by WoodNext Foundation and the Land and Water Conservation Fund

AUSTIN, Texas (June 8, 2026) — In the oak-juniper woodlands of the Texas Hill Country, a key conservation milestone is underway for the endangered golden-cheeked warbler. The Conservation Fund, in partnership with Friends of Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, has completed a multi-year project to add 610 acres to the refuge.

For a species that nests nowhere else in the world but Central Texas, every acre matters. The golden-cheeked warbler depends on mature Ashe-juniper and oak woodlands to breed before migrating to southern Mexico and Central America for the winter — habitat that is rapidly disappearing under the pressure of development. By securing this land, conservation partners are ensuring that these ecosystems remain intact and connected for generations to come.

“This project benefits both Texans and our beloved songbirds,” said Ellen Gass, Texas field representative at The Conservation Fund. “By protecting this land, we’re not only safeguarding a species on the brink — we’re strengthening an entire ecosystem that supports wildlife and people alike.”

Established in 1992, the Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge was created to protect two endangered songbirds: the golden-cheeked warbler and the black-capped vireo. This project plays a strategic role in that mission by integrating unincorporated land within the existing refuge boundary to enhance habitat connectivity for wildlife across the landscape. The area draws birdwatchers from around the world, underscoring the global significance of conserving the territory.

"Friends of Balcones is proud to have partnered with The Conservation Fund to make this protection possible. This land doesn't just provide critical habitat for golden-cheeked warblers—it also protects the watersheds that flow into our lakes and rivers, safeguarding Central Texas's drinking water supply. When we protect habitat for endangered species, we protect the resources our entire community depends on," said Nicole Sarkar, executive director at Friends of Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge.

Beyond its importance for birds, the land also provides natural benefits to nearby communities. Its rugged terrain and native vegetation act as a buffer against flooding, helping absorb rainfall and reduce downstream risk.

The project includes two refuge expansions — 317 acres acquired in 2025 and 293 acres in April 2026. Once fully integrated into Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge, the protected lands will also expand opportunities for public access, offering Texans new ways to experience the region through responsible recreation.

“One of the WoodNext Foundation’s focus areas is nature conservation, especially for lands with public access, which is a key factor that drew us to this project. We are pleased that we could help protect these lands,” said Nancy Chan, executive director of the WoodNext Foundation. WoodNext manages the philanthropy of tech innovator and Roku CEO/Founder Anthony Wood and his wife Susan.

The additions will be incorporated under the current U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service management of the refuge. The project was also supported by Jacob & Tereses Hershey, Shield-Ayres, and Malcolm C. Damuth Foundations, as well as the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), which was permanently funded with the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act and signed into law by President Trump in 2020. LWCF, established in 1965, reinvests a small percentage of offshore energy revenues — not taxpayer dollars — in conservation and recreation access projects that support critical natural resources, wild habitats, historic sites, and working lands. This project was made possible thanks to swift action by The Conservation Fund and LWCF funding secured by U.S. Senator John Cornyn, U.S. Senator Ted Cruz and U.S. Representative John Carter.

Rep. John Carter offered the following statement on the project:

“The Balcones Canyonlands National Wildlife Refuge is an important part of Central Texas’ natural heritage and plays a critical role in protecting habitat that is unique to our region. I’m proud to support funding that helps to preserve these lands and ensure future generations can continue enjoying the natural beauty that makes Texas so special.”

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About The Conservation Fund

The Conservation Fund protects the land that sustains us all. We are in the business of conservation, creating innovative solutions that drive nature-based action in all 50 states for climate protection, vibrant communities and sustainable economies. We apply effective strategies, efficient financing approaches, and enduring government, community and private partnerships to protect millions of acres of America’s natural land, cultural sites, recreation areas and working forests and farms. To learn more, visit www.conservationfund.org.