



WHERE I WORK

Where I Work: Green Spaces Alliance of South Texas



by **Clay Thompson**
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Clay Thompson, director of conservation and stewardship at Green Spaces Alliance, checks recent rainfall measurements at Bulverde Oaks Nature Preserve, a property owned and maintained by the nonprofit.
Credit: Scott Ball / San Antonio Report

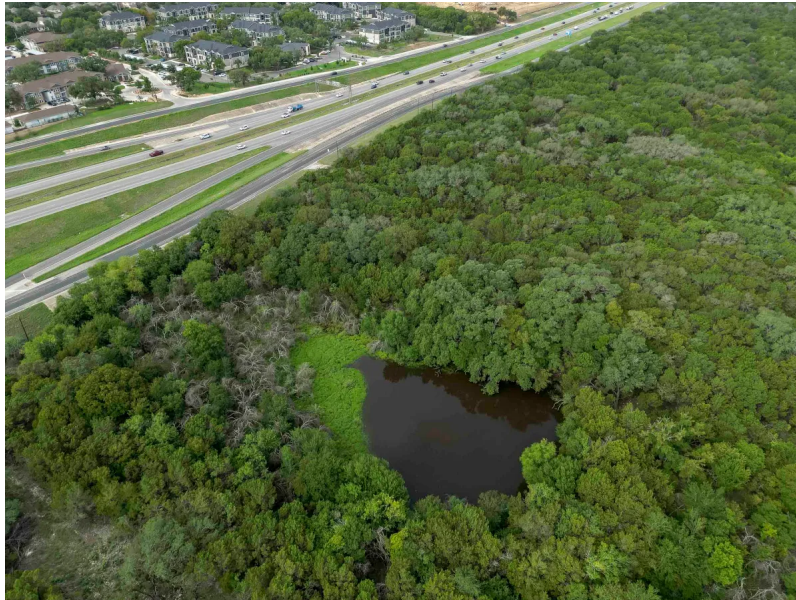
The Where I Work series explores San Antonio's evolving workplaces. It takes readers behind the scenes to learn from the people who work at companies large and small, nonprofits, family-owned enterprises, and in other nontraditional workplaces. [Get in touch](#) to share your story.

Growing up, I spent a lot of my childhood outdoors, either walking and learning from my dad on our family's forest land in Mississippi or hiking and camping with friends around Fort Worth. So when I was finishing my

While other students dissected animals in biology, our labs were participating in prescribed burns with the [Texas A&M Forest Service](#) and climbing trees in harnesses and hard hats alongside Davey Tree Experts. After my first semester, I knew I was right where I was supposed to be.

After college, I worked for the [Texas A&M Natural Resources Institute](#), where I was introduced to large landscape projects and tools to help landowners protect their working lands from rising tax value. Working through several projects, I saw the benefit conservation easements had on landowners throughout the country and the importance of land trusts in that process.

So when the director of conservation and stewardship role at [Green Spaces Alliance of South Texas](#) opened up, I jumped at the chance to help private landowners protect their properties for future generations and the natural resources that support our urban communities.



The Bulverde Oaks Nature Preserve features 31 acres of former ranch land along N Loop 1604 and Judson Road. Credit: Scott Ball / San Antonio Report

In my role, I manage our four owned properties, including Bulverde Oaks Nature Preserve, and support the conservation goals of the private landowners for whom we hold conservation easements. My most active responsibility is supporting our partnerships with the [Edwards Aquifer Protection Program](#) (EAPP) and Joint Base San Antonio's [Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration](#) (JBSA-REPI) program. In supporting the EAPP and JBSA, we work with farmers, ranchers, conservationists and other large landowners to protect their open lands from development pressures.

The most rewarding work we have recently been taking on is working with land developers to protect open spaces as part of their development plans. In all these cases, I help landowners meet their personal goals while also



Clay Thompson, director of conservation and stewardship at Green Spaces Alliance, walks over karst rock that forms the Edwards Aquifer. The Bulverde Oaks Nature Preserve is a part of the sensitive recharge zone to the aquifer. Credit: Scott Ball / San Antonio Report

My typical day is not very typical at all, although I always keep my chainsaw and pruning shears in my truck, just in case I need to prune something or clear a trail. Like most people, I work in an office, reviewing paperwork and scheduling meetings. The big difference is that I work with Texas Parks and Wildlife biologists to create wildlife management plans for some of our landowners while hiking 200-plus acres.

On other days I tag along with Edwards Aquifer Authority geologists to go on site visits for potential EAPP properties looking at amazing caves. Probably my favorite site visits are working with Texas A&M foresters to create forest management plans for our landowners and figure out management goals like reintroducing prescribed fire to our area to return our oak juniper savannas and prairies to their natural state.

Like every good nonprofit employee, I also apply for grants to support our mission. Many times those grants are to help our landowners through selective tree removals, improving habitat for wildlife on their properties by introducing native grasses and forbs to their properties, or restoring native landscapes across our region. In every case, I know I am helping the landowners conserve their properties and also helping our rapidly growing community protect the natural areas that make San Antonio, the Hill Country, and South Texas the place we love to live in.

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