



Westcave Preserve Strategic Plan February 2006 – January 2010

*“Healing the broken bond between our young and nature is in our own self interest, not only because aesthetics or justice demand it, but also because mental, physical and spiritual health depend on it” – Richard Louv, **Last Child in the Woods, Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder***



Who are we?

Westcave Preserve is nestled in the Texas Hill Country above the Pedernales River, only 40 miles from downtown Austin, and welcomes more than 7,000 people each year who value and enjoy its 30-acre nature preserve and award-winning education center.

Here on the Edwards Plateau, two distinct ecosystems meet on the Preserve, forming a unique opportunity for students of nature and an unexpected experience for visitors exploring the Hill Country. The Preserve's grasslands are scattered with wildflower meadows, ash junipers, oaks and cactus. The plateau gives way to a lush, cool, sheltered canyon with towering limestone walls, forming a natural terrarium filled with over 400 plants including maidenhair fern, wild orchids, Brazos mint and red Texas columbine. Ancient cypress trees line the banks of Heinz Branch Creek that flows along the canyon floor. Here you will find the highlight of the site — a 40-foot waterfall tumbling over fern-covered travertine columns into an emerald pool.

What do we do?

Westcave connects kids and their families to nature by providing experiences and programs that foster the discovery, exploration, and conservation of nature.

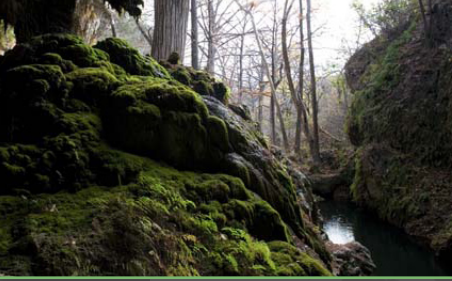
While our programs are primarily designed for kids, we encourage parents to discover nature with their child and believe we can serve as a model to inspire lifelong practices of valuing and enjoying nature.

Why does it matter?

Westcave provides a remedy for Nature Deficit Disorder.

Modern communities, families and especially children are spending more time indoors and less time in the natural world. As a result, our society is suffering from “Nature Deficit Disorder” which includes increased feelings of stress, trouble paying attention and feelings of not being rooted in our world. Researchers have found that engagement with nature buffers against life stresses and increases one's ability to be attentive.

Westcave Preserve inspires kids and their families to develop lifelong practices of valuing and enjoying nature.



Goals

Goal One

Protect the ecological integrity of Westcave Preserve and the surrounding land and water.

Goal Two

Develop an environmental education program worthy of a national reputation.

Goal Three

Ensure that Westcave Preserve has the needed resources (including financial, staff and volunteer leaders, physical facility and materials) to achieve its goals.

Goal Four

Position the Warren Skaaren Environmental Learning Center as a community resource for neighbors and regional conservation/environmental initiatives.

Goal Five

Launch a sustainable Children and Nature Campaign for Central Texas to better connect kids to the natural world.

STRATEGIES

Goal One

Protect the ecological integrity of Westcave Preserve and the surrounding land and water.

Strategies:

- Manage current preserve as needed for wildlife, visitor safety, and maximum experience of the Preserve's natural beauty
- Acquire the "rim around the canyon" (43 acres) to create a buffer around the canyon from water, land, light and sound pollution
- Develop and implement a management plan for the additional property
- Work with staff and the Preserve Council to develop appropriate programming for the newly acquired property
- Advocate for protecting regional river corridors and landscapes
- Create partnerships, and share work responsibility, with regional groups who have expertise and interest in protecting the land and water around Westcave Preserve
- Strengthen relationships with area landowners
- Promote the Warren Skaaren Environmental Learning Center as a community resource for neighbors and regional conservation / environmental initiatives
- Recruit and support a robust and active Conservation Committee

Goal Two

Develop an environmental education program worthy of a national reputation.

Strategies:

- Develop and integrate a set of "guiding principles" for our long-term environmental education programming

- Survey and evaluate regional and national programs and apply lessons learned
- Increase visitation to Westcave Preserve by 50% by December 2009
- Identify regional partners and actively pursue partnership opportunities
- Recruit, train and reward a robust group of docents and volunteer educators to support weekday and weekend programming
- Upgrade exhibits and teaching materials to support education goals and curriculum
- Recruit and support a robust and active Education Committee

Goal Three

Ensure that Westcave Preserve has the needed resources (including financial, staff and volunteer leaders, and physical facility and materials) to achieve its goals.

Strategies:

Financial

- Ensure Financial security and growth for Westcave Preserve annual operations
- Develop and execute a capital campaign to secure funds needed to expand the Preserve
- Implement a major donor program that generates at least 50% of operating income by December 2009
- Secure grants from at least 25 private foundations and corporations by December 2009
- Develop relationships with key government granting entities and master the necessary processes for timely application for relevant grants.
- Emphasize development needs in expanding the membership of the Board of Directors

Leadership

- Expand staffing as needed to support new goals
- **Develop a master plan of desired leadership characteristics and leaders and populate prospect list**
- Develop a compelling case for lending one's leadership to Westcave Preserve
- **Expand the Board of Directors to no more than 20 members**
- Expand the Preserve Council and create functioning committees, as needed, to support the operations of Westcave Preserve
- **Recruit senior leaders in the marketing/communications field to assist with outreach, branding, and media strategies**

Facilities

- Provide for needed upgrades in facility infrastructure, exhibits, and teaching materials
- **Secure needed equipment and furnishings to manage ELC, office and surrounding land**

By Laws

- Review by laws each December and, if needed, convene ad hoc committee to prepare recommended changes for Board consideration

Goal Four

Position the Warren Skaaren Environmental Learning Center as a community resource for neighbors and regional conservation/ environmental initiatives.

Strategies:

- Encourage the use of the ELC as the “hub” for regional planning and advocacy
- **Initiate regular gatherings of regional landowners to introduce and discuss local conservation and environmental opportunities and concerns**

Goal Five

Launch a sustainable Children and Nature Campaign for Central Texas to better connect kids to the natural world

Strategies:

- Organize a series of events to introduce Richard Louv and his book “Last Child in the Woods; Saving our Children from nature Deficit Disorder” to the Central Texas community
- **Identify and engage key partners to develop children and nature strategy for Central Texas**
- Collaborate on a local campaign plan for children and nature
- **Ensure development of a sustainable model for carrying out the goals of the Children and Nature campaign**
- Coordinate with the Child and Nature Network to support efforts of the regional campaign

