

The Lady Bird Scenic Loop

Proposal for Highway and Natural Sites Scenic Conservation

Concept

The Texas Hill Country has many wonderful, scenic drives that attract thousands of visitors and tourists to this unique area of Texas each year. This is a considerable economic boon to Hill Country merchants, service providers and residents. Fredericksburg, Texas, alone has over One Million visitors who shop, eat and use area lodging, with the majority visiting during the spring wildflower season. Recreational activities which thrive because of the natural and scenic qualities of this area include boating, fishing, hunting, camping, climbing, birdwatching, photography, bicycling, hiking, wildflower viewing and more. There are many estimates of the income this creates, both from in state visitors and out of state tourists, but there is no exact figure available at this time. In 1999, the Houston Chronicle estimated over 100 million dollars in tourism revenue per day statewide, with over 36 billion dollars per year, and a 53% increase expected in seven years. Tourism and recreation supported over 470,000 jobs in related businesses. A large percentage of this is spent in the Texas Hill Country. In 1998 LBJ State Historic Site and Park took in 11.3 million dollars, Enchanted Rock received 3.5 million dollars and Garner State Park took in fees of 1.6 million. This is only a fraction of what is spent yearly in this region, but is an indication of the economic value of scenery and related activities.

This proposal would dedicate a portion of the highway system in this region as a scenic loop because of the uniqueness of the route and the scenery that it encompasses. This route, starting in Oak Hill, Texas, on the edge of Austin, and at the junction of State Highway 71 and Highway 290. would go west on 71 to Llano, Texas, thence south on Highway 16, past Enchanted Rock State Park, to Fredericksburg, and thence east on Highway 290 through Johnson City back to Oak Hill and Austin. This junction of 71 and 290 is also only a short distance to the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center. Along this Route, there are numerous adjacent natural and scenic areas for visitors and tourists.

Lady Bird Johnson has spent a large portion of her life involved in projects intended to expand, enhance and preserve this region of Texas, Texas as a whole, and the United States. Because of this dedication to preserving our natural beauty and thereby elevating the quality of all citizen's lives and welfare, it is only fitting that this scenic highway route be named in her honor.

In addition to honoring Lady Bird Johnson, this proposal will serve as an example for other unique areas of Texas to beautify and preserve scenic areas and drives, thereby preserving scenic areas, property values in those areas, and economic development from tourism and recreation.

Implementation

The intention of this proposal is to act as the basis for a legislative Bill or rider to an existing bill. Included in this bill would be reasonable and economically feasible incentives to highway frontage property owners and developers to protect and preserve scenic property on this proposed highway route.

An example would be tax exemptions or incentives on property within a specified distance of the highway, which is left in a natural state, and complies with state and federal endangered habitat rules, where appropriate.

Another example would be ample highway pull outs, and parking for cars at scenic spots and overlooks, with appropriate signage for points of historical or other interest.

An education program designed to inform travelers, tourists, property owners, developers, realtors and the public in general about the value of natural scenic areas and property, unique native flora and fauna, and its economic impact. Included in this education program would be information and emphasis on valuing property appropriately which has high scenic, historical or recreational value.

Other incentives could come from County Commissioners in each of the five counties which this route passes through. These counties are Travis, Burnet, Llano, Gillespie, and Blanco. An example could be business and property tax exemptions or rebates for removing billboards and signs from property which has scenic or historical value. Also, existing or new construction along the route could be encouraged to build, remodel and design in a manner compatible with the heritage and style of the region, with recognition and awards each year for the best projects which reflect the spirit of the Hill Country.

Another example could be help in removing unsightly dumps or trash, fencing or shielding industrial sites, wrecking yards, etc. and help in locating businesses that are unsightly by their nature, in less visible areas of the county.

Conclusion

There are many valuable scenic routes and areas in The Texas Hill Country, and in the State of Texas as a whole. This proposal is for the purpose of emphasizing this value, by the creation of the Lady Bird Scenic Loop, to honor this great Lady, and thereby possibly providing some motivation, momentum and incentive for other areas of both the hill country and the state, to recognize scenic beauty as a true economic and vital value to our citizens, improving the quality of life for all, and preserving this quality for future generations.

Lee Carrell, President
Concerned Citizens of Spicewood/The Hill Country
www.spicewoodtexas.org
PO Box 196
Spicewood, Texas 7866
LeeC@zeecon.com