

**El Camino Real de los Tejas
National Historic Trail Association
Board of Directors and Annual Members Meeting
May 16, 2025**

The meeting was called to order at 9:16 am by President William (Bill) Doolittle. In attendance were board members Ambassador Miguel Ángel Fernández de Mazarambroz, Bob Ward, Jesse Trevino, John Kusalus, Tom Byrd, Joyce Conner, and George Hernandez. Also present were Patrick Malone (Superintendent, National Park Service), Brad Patterson (Texas Historical Commission), Paula Sisco (Chair, Ranchería Grande Chapter), Claudia Garza (Chair, Trail de Flores), and Executive Director Steven Gonzales. Absent were board members Judge Bob Perkins and Adam Adams. A quorum was met.

Consideration of Minutes: Joyce asked for consideration of the January 18, 2025, minutes. With two spelling corrections, Tom Byrd made a motion for approval, John Kusalus seconded the motion, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Governance Committee Report: Since Judge Perkins was absent, John Kusalus asked for approval of the new slate of officers for this coming year: President, Bill Doolittle; Vice-President, Jesse Trevino; Secretary, Joyce Conner; Treasurer, John Kusalus; and Dave Regan, Past President. Bob Ward made a motion for approval, George Hernandez seconded the motion, and the motion was unanimously approved.

Financial Report: See submitted report. Bill suggested that any questions having to do with NPS support would be covered later in the meeting. Joyce made a motion to approve, Jesse seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved. George Hernandez recommended that in the future the report show where we are compared to what was forecasted.

Archeology Committee Report: See submitted report. Joyce reported her work to help with Texas Archeological Society 2025 Summer Field School in Milam/Robertson counties by preparing an information table on the Trail and another on community areas of interest, as well as notifying news media in Rockdale, Cameron, and Hearne.

Steven added that one evening he hopes to speak and he hopes Brian Beattie and Valerie Fowler will perform the Camino Crankie. Several Board members said that they would likely be attending the school, either as volunteers or as attendees. Tom explained that there were two kinds of registrations: a 3-day weekend and the remaining week. The main activities are survey work, excavation, and lab work done indoors. Finally, Tom said that it was great for training people in archaeological conservation and great for networking.

Tamra Walter is the principal investigator, thereby giving it an academic discipline approach. There will be a report that will appear in the bulletin of TAS. Steven added that in our memorandum of understanding with TAS, both logos will appear on reports and reports will be jointly owned.

Steven plans to invite the Tonkawa Tribe. Joyce offered to send him the TAS flyer and press release. Bill, Tom, and John said they intended to attend the field school.

Bob Ward motioned to approve the report, John Kusalus seconded it, and the report was unanimously approved.

Director's Report: See submitted report. Additional notes follow.

Federal Funding and Other Budget Considerations: Patrick Malone, Superintendent for the National Trails Office in Santa Fe, N.M., spoke briefly about the situation in staffing, the federal budget at large, and specifically about the association agreement. Prior to this assignment he was running the natural resources program for the park service in Denver for 15 years. He is a natural resource manager and ecologist.

Typically, his staff has 20 permanent residents, but he is down to around 11. They have not been able to hire even temporary people recently and still must go through the RIF (reduction in force), which could occur within a few weeks' time. In addition, they are in a hiring freeze that only allows them to hire one person back for every four lost. That means they will no longer be able to help us as much with project technical assistance and interpretive media development, as they would have previously done as the trail administrator fulfilling the National Trail System Act.

The new budget that begins in October 2025 is about a 35% reduction for the Department of the Interior and the Park Service. As of this meeting, some agreements have been denied (but no existing Association agreements as of this meeting, but he also doesn't think any have been reviewed). Regardless, he does not believe we will be supported at our current level, and it could be quite a bit lower. Brad and Patrick explained that on May 4, Finance and Grants offices were consolidated directly into the Department of the Interior and are no longer under the Park Service.

Steven explained that he and George Hernandez have been talking with Congressman Gonzalez with hopes that he will work with other legislators whose districts are along the Trail to push through funding in a House Appropriations Bill.

Tom pondered whether emphasizing that we were an organization of volunteers would be of benefit to get funding, while on the flip side, he recognized that because we tell the whole story of *all* people who lived along the Trail (this is reflected in our name) that there could be a downside.

There was a question about the future of the Floresville Trail and the agreement with the Union Pacific Railroad. Steven said their Trails' specific agreement with the railroad had nothing to do with what was happening in the federal government.

Bob suggested that we use the number of our volunteer hours to illustrate how much we are doing for free.

Steven suggested that we schedule a special meeting to discuss other ways of getting support.

State of Texas Funding: Brad Patterson said that in his staffing requests for the Texas Historical Commission, he has added a trail liaison to help all of the national Trails. However, he is not optimistic about that request at this time. Jesse suggested that we not lose sight of the next biennium budget.

Grant Opportunities: When asked, Steven said that our annual budget is around \$120,000 and we only have enough for six months. It's possible that we may have to charge Local Partner organizations a fee if they want us to help with a project. For example, we might charge to help develop trails, like the Butterfield. This would be an expansion of our scope, but it would help support our own trail. John suggested another possibility - that Steven could become part of THC, or an outside contractor, covering

all historic trails in the State. George Hernandez suggested that Steven come up with a worst case scenario budget and then “steps along the way” of what to cover if more money comes in.

Regarding Red Mountain: John Kisalus asked whether mulching was approved by TAS. Steven said that they actually want it done. Joyce confirmed that they hired the same contractor to mulch 140 acres and afterwards hired archeologists Sergio and Melinda Iruegas to check it out and give their opinion. The Iruegas confirmed that it was the right thing to do, as it did not damage artifacts and actually exposed swales and other significant locations that had previously been hidden.

Chapter Reports

Trail de Flores: Names and information may not be accurate, as there was not a written report. Claudia Garza is acting as president. They have six - eight members and they are taking turns being officers. Dave was their vice-president. They are planning a National Trails Day on June 7 from 9 am – 1 pm. About 1-½ miles of trail have been paved 10’ wide. They recently received four interpretive panels from NPS. One is near the Beer Warehouse that the City is trying to get declared as a historical site with marker. TxDOT gave them a grant in 2022 and they are going to use it to get more lighting, some doggy poo dispensers, and signage to help slow traffic. They are connecting with the County Judge’s office to get help with the train depot renovation. Also, the City of Floresville has been helping them with events along the Trail and Master Gardeners are helping to do some landscaping. They are going to do the virtual run again for El Camino Real Day, perhaps keeping it online from Oct. 18 to Dec 1.

Ranchería Grande: See submitted report.

Joyce suggested that Paula’s and other members’ talks with citizen groups should always include an appeal for membership.

Recurring and New Business:

Collaboration with Municipal and Regional Public Entities and Local and Regional Businesses and Trade Associations on the Via de la Plata, Spain.

Miguel presented a plan in which we have the opportunity to make a link between El Camino in Texas to the Via de la Plata in Spain. “A potential partnership could be developed along the lines of the Sister City/Sister Trail models that pair cities and municipalities ... to promote travel, education, business, commerce, and international familiarity and understanding.” After a Memorandum of Understanding, he suggests that we would pilot a trip to Spain and then a return visit to Texas by our Spanish partners, perhaps between 10-20 people. One Spanish gentleman is interested in having part of the trail ridden on horseback.

Bob Ward believes this project ties in with the Texas America 250 project that he is working on at the Bob Bullock Museum. Specifically, it emphasizes the Spanish contribution to the American Revolution. He will be in Spain in July and can meet with people.

At 11:11 am, Bob Ward made a motion to conclude the Board meeting, John Kisalus seconded, and the motion passed.

Annual Members Meeting: Speakers and Award (see agenda) 12 noon – 5:00 p.m.

The following are notes in addition to what was published in the agenda.

Gina Alba-Rogers and Anita Collins representing the Council on Indigenous and Tejano Communities – shared historical stories of Hays County, one of which was the finding and installation of 15 El Camino Real signs. This evening in the Hays County Courthouse, San Marcos, there will be a ribbon cutting ceremony to officially open the Indigenous/Tejano History Room.

Brad Patterson, Deputy Directive Director for the THC, oversees preservation programs, and is the Chief Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer. They try to connect citizens with historical places. They make designations, markers, business awards, covenants, easements, grants; deal with an Antiquities code at the state level and National Historic Preservation Act on the federal level; give tax credits; deal with museum services, Main Street Programs, the Certified Local Government Program within County Historical Commissions, Marine Archeology, resources for preservation, and printed and computer information for traveling to historic sites. They operate 42 State Historic Sites.

At the moment, THC does not know what funding they will have for the next two years, as Senate Bill 1 is in conference. Part of the requested budget would go to the maintenance and acquisition of historic sites, such as the National Museum of the Pacific War. Unfortunately, a proposed staff position to be a National Trails liaison did not go into conference so will not be funded. If HB 500 passes, it will provide funds for Courthouse restoration and modernization of THC IT systems.

Congress has not released funds that would have fulfilled their federal obligations under federal law. In spite of this, THC is going to try and maintain their staff, services, and programs. They have awarded grants but haven't signed contracts because they are waiting to receive the funding.

Brad reminded everyone that they also own the official state Longhorn herd and are looking for a home for it. He also spoke about several other sites that they are currently working on.

Patrick Malone, Superintendent for the NPS - National Trails Service, is responsible for 10 National Historic Trails and the Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program. Patrick mentioned one of the contracts that they have lost was with the housing of millions of items and they don't know if or how they will get these items from that storage facility. They also lost the contract with a company that was cataloging and digitally making available to the public thousands of photos. All of their agreements they have with Trail associations have not been approved for next year. They have lost about 33% of their staff. We have about \$40K left for funding through the end of September. The projected budget is about a 35% reduction. He expects it will remain at this reduction or lower, limiting their ability to help associations. They are still producing landscape signs. Steven noted an update - that all 40 counties and two parishes have El Camino signs.

Faith and Carol Clark still have the Ranchería Grande wayside panel, as well as Fort Boggy waysides (they will visit there in July), on their list of projects. Angelica is still working on the bilingual, bi-national travel itinerary, with 52 expanded site descriptions with images, Spanish language translations; and digital content for websites. Their objectives had been to promote, interpret, and protect sites, but now with fewer staff, less funding, waiving of environmental laws, expediting processes cutting review times down to 7 days, they must prioritize projects and let some go. If we know of something, let them know, as they are not always included in the notices of intent.

Ballots were passed out on the following:

Vote on Directors: John Kisalus called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

Vote on Bylaws Amendments: John Kisalus called for a voice vote. The motion passed unanimously.

Frank Briscoe was the final speaker of the day, as he was late coming to the meeting.

Afterwards, at 5 p.m., Steven said that it was the conclusion of our presentations to the membership.

The next Board meeting is expected to be held on September 20, the third Saturday of that month, at 10 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Conner, Board Member