

**El Camino Real de los Tejas  
National Historic Trail Association  
Board of Directors Meeting  
September 27, 2025**

The meeting was called to order at 10:07 am by President William (Bill) Doolittle. In attendance were board members Judge Bob Perkins, Bob Ward, John Kusalus, Tom Byrd, and Joyce Conner. Also present were Executive Director Steven Gonzales and Brad Patterson (Texas Historical Commission). In addition, on zoom were Jesse Trevino (Board Member) and Patrick Malone (Superintendent, National Park Service). Absent were board members Ambassador Miguel Ángel Fernández de Mazarambroz, George Hernández, and Adam Adams. A quorum was met.

**Consideration of Minutes:** Joyce asked for consideration of May 16, 2025, minutes. John Kusalus made a motion for approval, Bob Ward seconded the motion, and the minutes were unanimously approved.

**Financial Report:** See submitted report. Steven explained that the proposed budget was helped by a bequest made by Eric Neuberger and his family. He also explained that the Texas Historic Commission funds were not reflected in this budget and would require an amended budget when those funds came in. Tom Byrd asked about the roadway signage funds that had not been spent and Steven explained the several projects still in the plans (Austin, Manor, Floresville, and Sabine and Natchitoches Parishes). After much discussion, Steven will ask the bookkeeper to show all funds that are being carried forward from Profit and Loss by Grant. Once done, the board can vote on the overall budget again electronically. Tom Byrd motioned to postpone the FY 26's proposed budget, Bob Ward seconded, and the motion was unanimously approved.

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

*Regarding Red Mountain:* Tom Byrd suggested that since they had not found a lot of artifacts in certain locations that this could mean that these locations might be appropriate for human impact, such as picnic areas, trails, parking, a Heritage Center, etc. Regarding the loss of Cianan McSpadden to do historic research on the tribe and Red Mountain, John Kusalus suggested that he check with the history department at the new Texas A&M in Victoria to see whether they might have an applicable student. Bob Ward suggested they also contact Dr. Ruby Oram who is the public history person at Texas State. Joyce also suggested that they open their activities listed on Benevity to all companies and not rely solely on employees from NVIDIA to volunteer.

*Regarding Fundraising:*

- *Sponsorship Initiative:* There was discussion about silver and gold levels, also the changing of level membership names that were meaningful without alienating people. Joyce suggested that we consider designing an El Camino tourism plaque for large donors. Family membership was also raised as a possible category again. Keeping the chapter dues separate from general membership dues was discussed.
- *Regional Meetings:* Tom Byrd had some reservations that four regional meetings would require a lot of time and effort that board members may not have. Tom likened it to the Spanish looking for gold that they did not find; however, the missionaries who were looking for souls, had better success. John Kusalus said that outreach was easy, as groups were always looking for speakers,

however, fundraising was a different story. Steven ended the discussion by stating that he would still go for the Texas Historical Foundation grant but that they would use it for the annual meeting and perhaps a couple of regional meetings.

*Regarding El Camino Real Day and PNTS Land Summit:* Joyce mentioned that the Walk the Ranchería Grande event was not on their ElCaT calendar. Elaine will correct that. Also, Brad Patterson suggested that we submit events to [Texastimetravel.com](http://Texastimetravel.com). Steven told Bill that the Land Summit was to be held at the Plaza Hotel and Spa in San Antonio.

*Regarding Our Voices Remain:* The second event's funding, likely to be in Milam County, has to be expended by May 2026.

*Regarding 2026 Annual Meeting:* Steven explained that we try to have our annual meeting in odd numbered years near Austin so as to visit with capitol supporters when the legislators are in session. Since we have not had our annual meeting in the Caddo region since around 2016 and we want to celebrate State Senator Robert Nichols help with the funding to the Texas Historic Commission in our support, we will again have our meeting in Cherokee County. Brad reminded us that Senator Nichols was not going to run for re-election. Jesse suggested that our board work on creating relationships for the continuation of the funding through THC.

After a 15-minute break, the meeting resumed with Patrick Malone.

**National Park Service:** Patrick confirmed funding that Steven had covered with the board. He added that their umbrella agreement, which is their master 5-yr cooperative agreement is still in place and valid through the end of the fiscal year 2029. However, it would have to be renewed.

In May he believed that there would be about a 35% reduction, as the President was asking for that. However, Congress has been discussing -1% and -5% reduction, so there is still uncertainty. On top of that the government shutdown would stop all discretionary funding.

They did lose seven positions through May. In October, if a hiring freeze goes into place, they would only be able to rehire one in every four people lost and that would be under the guidance of the Office of Personnel Management for the federal government. In the meantime, they are bringing in non-federal help (3 Fellows, one of which is an intern and the others working full time for a year.)

They are taking a very streamlined approach to federal permits and approvals, trying to limit their time to those that have the potential to have significant impact on the trail or its resources. He suggests that ElCaT members pay attention to infrastructure developments that are of our concern but that are not going to trigger their involvement, as we private nonprofits have the ability to weigh in on them.

Carol Clark is continuing to work on the exhibits for San Marcos. They are also continuing to work on digital updates like the website and NPS application to make them more user friendly for the public. For example, on the Places pages different sites and historic locations that are associated with the trail are featured. They are also improving the passport stamp by making it digital. Patrick will ask whether there is a virtual tour still on the agenda for the Ranchería Grande. Finally, to a question by Tom on the Chisholm and Western Cattle Trail, Patrick said that there were people putting together an appeal to get legislative support, as it has never been forwarded to Congress. It is not a historic trail at this time. Brad added that he thought the group getting together might be the one meeting at the outdoor Chisholm

Trail Museum in Cleburne on Friday and Saturday, October 24 and 25. Brad suggested that they hadn't gotten political support. Steven stated that he believed because Patrick had reduced funding, NPS would be focused on the Butterfield Trail and a lawsuit with the old Spanish Trail.

Steven mused that if the other trails were appropriated funding but with no staff time, they might look to us to help them out, thus bringing in some of those funds to EICaT.

**Texas Historical Commission:** Brad Patterson reported that they had expected to lose about \$2M but although it was held up for months, full funding did get released. The whole financial uncertainty could be repeated because the Supreme Court has ruled that even though Congress approves spending, the administration does not have to approve it (this has been related to foreign funding in the past but has implications for THC should the administration try to go that route).

Brad explained that there was some reorganization going on internally. They also got Vatican approval for purchasing La Bahia. Steven asked about the process in case EICaT would like to sell/donate Lobanillo Swales to the THC. This discussion needed further offline review.

*Regarding Brad's Scope of Work:* the State appropriated \$260,000 and therefore, they are working on a funding contract attached to the scope of work for four items. No staff time was given, but there are relatively few strings attached. Their proposed contract would require an independent audit during the years that we receive money from them. Brad is setting up the appropriations of the funds in a 2-year contract, which is their biennium, so it would need to be spent by August 31, 2027. There can be issues keeping the funds if we overrun that date. Brad is also working on administrative overhead travel. The language still needs to be worked out. Also, he thinks all of the physical results must occur in and for the State of Texas. Reports should probably be done every six months. Item 3 might have "fabrication" added to its goal. There will be some adjustments to any contract that hopefully covers some of Steven's administrative time.

**1:04pm** – John Kisalus was excused from the meeting. Before he left, he explained that Victoria County had just approved lidar for their entire county, mostly for drainage, but he expects they will also find swales.

**Chapter Reports:** Board members reviewed these privately in order to save time.

#### **Recurring and New Business:**

**Spain Report:** Jesse gave some background information regarding the trip and its purpose: he reported that since Covid in 2019 travel along La Plata was drastically reduced. They will be meeting with the public municipal government and a private business association. Apparently, the opposition party to the current government is the strongest in this area in western Spain. So, the current government is very supportive of the programs to help economic development in this area. In our minds, we are making a Sister City agreement, but for them it is much larger.

Steven's understanding is that they are going to learn more about the people and area, let them learn about us and how we might partner with each other. The Ambassador also believes that by partnering with them, Spanish companies operating in the U.S. might help us with sponsorships

**Archeology Committee Report:** See submitted report.

**Report on the Bullock Museum:** Bob Ward and Bill Doolittle noted their visit with Scott McReynolds. El Camino will be exhibited on three floors. On the first floor right after La Belle, there is a video screen that shows the missions. But there isn't anything that shows the Trail connecting everything. The second floor seems to be about the Revolution. The third floor is their transportation section, and they are talking about creating an exhibit there to highlight the El Camino and other trails. What is missing is why the La Belle is connected to the missions, and why the missions led to the forts, etc.

Bob envisions a screen that shows all of the trails of Texas over time, starting with the El Camino trade routes and then morphing into those out of the Chisholm and the Shawnee and working your way up to the interstates - showing the evolution of Texas roads.

Bob recommends that our board members who visit Spain go to the National Archaeology Museum. Every section has a video screen starting with a map of Spain. Then you see the Phoenicians coming in, followed by the Romans, etc. And with each group, you see where they came in, how far they went, and what they did, what they brought with them.

Onion Creek Park: Bob talked about meeting with Travis County Parks and the staff of the Austin History Center Parks. Kimmy Knights is now the history preservation officer for Austin. They are going to link McKinney Falls, Onion Creek, El Camino to create a comprehensive plan to put a hike and bike trail all the way down Onion Creek. There's the Fisher Park in Manor that was the site of the Clayton Institute, an African American high school.

Bob will be at the Bullock Museum on October 5<sup>th</sup> and will have an information table highlighting Travis County and El Camino.

At approximately 1:24 pm, Tom Byrd made a motion to adjourn, Judge Perkins seconded the motion, and it carried unanimously.

The next Board meeting is expected to be held on January 17, the third Saturday of that month, at 10 am.

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Conner, Board Member