

2021
ANNUAL REPORT

**UVALDE
COUNTY
TEXAS**

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TEXAS HILL COUNTRY RIVER REGION, INC.



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ABOUT THCRR



Texas Hill Country River Region is a not-for-profit 501(c)6 corporation that was created solely for the purpose of promoting tourism in Uvalde County. Formed in 1998, THCRR is experienced in the promotion of the River Region as a tourism destination. In the past 5 years, THCRR has implemented new leadership and a reenergized focus on its mission to promote the Texas Hill Country River Region as an overnight year-round tourism destination and to increase off-season occupancy in the regions' accommodations.

In addition to tourism promotion, THCRR manages the Uvalde County River Cleanup Program, "Don't Trash Where You Splash." This program includes volunteer efforts, a litter education campaign, management of waste maintenance contracts and supplemental cleanup contracts, and providing complimentary UP2U bags to businesses and individuals, all of which help keep litter out of the rivers, and our destination a beautiful place to live and visit.

FUNDING SOURCE & CONTRACT

THCRR is funded by a contract with Uvalde County to manage a portion of the hotel occupancy tax revenue collected by the Uvalde County Tax Assessor. In previous years, the contract has designated 74% of total HOT revenue to be managed by THCRR for tourism promotion.

In response to a change in the way the HOT funds would be administered by the County in 2018, THCRR proposed an amended agreement that would direct 99% of total gross hotel occupancy taxes collected by the County to be allocated to THCRR, to manage using 74% for tourism promotion and 25% for river cleanup efforts. On Nov. 13, 2018 Uvalde County Commissioners Court voted unanimously to adopt the proposed amended agreement.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Jamie Holmes, President
- Tim Hester, Vice President
- Chase Roosa, Secretary
- Wendi Hightower, Treasurer
- Rob Fayle, Member
- Melissa Bates, Member
- Vacant, Member

2021 Highlights

Although the world continued to face continuing waves of COVID-19 outbreaks, the Tourism Industry in Uvalde County balanced strong occupancy rates with rising inflation and a difficult employment market.

THCRR hosted a community roundtable with Uvalde County leadership in January, allowing leaders to present their plans for our area. Participants were able to also voice their concerns and ask questions. The roundtable was well attended by both area residents and business owners.

THCRR Executive Director Annabell McNew became increasingly active in legislative efforts related to the Pristine Waters legislation. HB4146 and SB 1747 seek to prohibit treated wastewater discharge into "Pristine Water" as defined by the legislation. The Executive Director testified in legislative committee in support of the proposed legislation. McNew also engaged related organizations and advocacy groups to not only support this important legislation but also to educate and encourage their membership to actively support this legislation. THCRR ultimately passed a resolution in support of that legislation and expects to continue to be heavily involved with future legislative efforts to protect our rivers.

In April, THCRR hired Cassie Siegel as River Cleanup Coordinator. Cassie graduated from Iowa State University with a Biology and Animal Ecology Degree. Cassie is tasked to coordinate contract and volunteer river cleanup efforts, as well as manage the river cleanup waste management vendor. River Cleanup efforts through the distribution and use of the yellow mesh UP2U bags continue to expand with over 100,000 bags distributed in 2021.

THCRR updated the by-laws to accommodate for post-COVID operating environment and to allow for continued operations when in-person meetings are not feasible.

Efforts to increase the value the Uvalde County Visitor Center provides to the Tourism Industry continue. These efforts include:

- New signage installed
- Hosted Concan Local “Pop Up” Markets on Saturdays during June and July
- “Summer Sweets & Stars” – a guided look at the night sky (in partnership with Texas Ranchland Nightsky Tours)
- Began laying the groundwork for the upcoming 2024 solar eclipse to ensure that local infrastructure and businesses are prepared to support the unprecedented number of visitors to our area.
UvaldeCountySolarEclipse.com
- Development of plans for a Native Garden which will provide our visitors with an opportunity to learn about the unique natural features of our area.

Area events and initiatives were supported by THCRR grants and sponsorships which included:

- Uvalde Honey Festival
- Frio River Music Fest
- Cactus Jack PBR Bull Riding
- 19th Annual Eugene Slade Memorial Tournament
- Opera House Texas Country at the Crossroads Concert

LOOKING AHEAD

With the recent resignation of the THCRR Executive Director, our focus shifts temporarily to filling this position with a well-qualified candidate that can continue the pre-pandemic momentum of the River Region. The Board is working with the Texas Hotel and Lodging Association to develop and post the job description, as well as update job descriptions for the balance of the THCRR team.

We will 'slow roll' any new marketing initiatives and contracts, awaiting the arrival of the new Executive Director. Once this position is filled, we will resume working on the THCRR Strategic Plan with the new Executive Director. While the search is underway, the THCRR Staff and current Board of Directors continue work to address concerns brought forth by the Lodging Partners, which include:

- Increased communication and updates from THCRR
- Resumed courses for Lodging Partners related to marketing
- Resumed 'in-person' opportunities for the exchange of ideas and information
- Centralized planning and guidance for 2023 and 2024 eclipses
- Information on THLRA benefits and how to access them
- Financial transparency
- Expanded river cleanup activities during non-peak season
- Clarification of the grant and sponsorship processes

The THCRR Staff and Board have submitted voter eligibility information to a 3rd party election administrator. Our General Meeting and Election scheduled for May. This election will be professionally administered and will allow for on-line voting.

We expect our area to continue to be a popular destination for travelers, especially considering rising inflation and fuel costs. However, we recognize that travelers are looking for additional activities outside the banks of the river, making plans for the Nature Garden and other eco-tourism initiatives increasingly important.

The River Clean Up program will be significantly expanded to include contracted clean-ups during the off-season, as well as an expanded Volunteer Clean Up program to offset the difficult labor market. THCRR will invest in additional equipment in order service the Nueces and sections of the Sabinal and Frio rivers that have typically been more logistically challenging to support with volunteer efforts.

We are reviewing the pre-pandemic priorities and initiatives, many of which are in-progress or nearing completion and are prioritizing those which still make sense in post-pandemic times. THCRR desires to work with Uvalde County leadership to examine where we can maximize the reach of Hotel Occupancy Tax dollars, while assuring that our area remains a family-friendly destination where our guests return for generations and a year-round destination for larger interest groups. THCRR expects that planning for both the 2023 and 2024 eclipses will be a significant effort for our area, to assure that we maximize the experience for our guests while maintaining infrastructure and public safety system.

THCRR plans to work closely with the Uvalde Chamber of Commerce and CVB to identify and explore additional opportunities to support overnight tourism in Uvalde County, while continuing to support those events as we have done in the past. Expanding the collaboration between the various tourism groups will only increase the marketability of our area as a year-round tourism destination.