

2020: VISIONS OF A NEW WAY FORWARD

Research from Thought Leaders Across the Big Bend Region



A research project featuring 47 thought leaders from around the Big Bend Region about conservation, the economy and new ways forward after the 2020 pandemic and oil-price crisis

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About Big Bend Conservation Alliance

Formed in 2015, Big Bend Conservation Alliance (BBCA) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization located in Alpine, Texas, working to conserve the living heritage and unique natural and cultural resources of the greater Big Bend region of Texas.

Originally formed as a group of citizens concerned about the impact of the Trans-Pecos Pipeline, today the organization has broadened its focus to include grassroots advocacy and community education supporting water, natural lands and ecosystems, dark skies, clean air, economic prosperity and property rights.

Through its programming and community engagement, BBCA hopes to achieve a number of long-term outcomes to preserve the Big Bend region for generations to come, including:

- Protect natural resources including land, air, water and dark skies.
- Maintain biodiversity of the region.
- Conserve watersheds, springs and rivers, and manage water for the long-term benefit of those who live in the region.
- Keep land and ecosystems intact and economically viable for landowners.
- Ensure that energy resources extracted from the region do not damage water, air, land or sky.

The Alliance represents more than 14,000 grassroots followers across the Big Bend region and beyond. The organization has a nine-member board of directors and an executive director, and is funded by foundation grants and private donations.

For more information visit: bigbendconservationalliance.org





Introduction to the Research

2020 will be remembered as a year that changed everything. Alongside Pearl Harbor Day, the Kennedy assassination, and 9-11, the Spring of 2020 will take its place among the most seismic and transformative times experienced in the United States.

What does this mean for the Big Bend and Far West Texas region?

It is way too soon to tell what the lasting impacts will be for this unique and mysterious desert landscape. BBBCA reached out to 45 insightful individuals across the region to get an early glimpse of what might be coming and what new ways of thinking might be helpful to move forward.

A series of one-on-one, in-depth phone interviews were conducted with a diverse mix of scientists, teachers, musicians, oil and gas executives, ranchers, mayors, water district managers, park superintendents, tourism promoters, journalists, river guides, store owners and philanthropic foundations.

Together, these interviewees make up a mosaic of people who are noted in their field of expertise, who know the region intimately, and who in their own ways are growing, protecting and fiercely loving the Big Bend region.

This research summarizes what these thought leaders have to share about the future at this pivotal moment in history.





RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

NAME	AFFILIATION
Jim Street	Alpine Radio
Liz Rogers	Alpine attorney
Gabe Collins	Baker Institute for Public Policy
Carolyn Rose	Balmorhea State Park
John Waters	Big Bend Gazette
Bob Krumenaker	Big Bend National Park
Rusty Moore	Big Bend Telephone
Dr. Louis Harveson	Borderlands Research Institute
Sen. Charles Perry	Chair, Senate Committee on Water & Rural Affairs
Erik Zimmer	City of Alpine
Patrick Payton	City of Midland
Summer Webb	City of Valentine; Culberson and Brewster County GCDs
Marilu Hastings	Cynthia & George Mitchell Foundation
Mary Bell Lockhart	Chair, Brewster County Democratic Party
Robert Potts	Dixon Water Foundation
Gilbert Trejo	El Paso Water
Dan Mueller	Environmental Defense Fund
Todd Jagger	Jeff Davis County Commissioners Court
Rainer Judd	Judd Foundation
James King	King Land & Water
Bill Wren	McDonald Observatory
Dr. Robert Mace	Meadows Center for Water and the Environment
Clay Miller	Miller Ranch
Rick Ruiz	Rick Ruiz Music



RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

NAME	AFFILIATION
Will Juett	Natural Resources Conservation Service
Daniel Hernandez	Office of State Senator José Rodríguez
Guy McCrary	Permian Basin Area Foundation
Ben Shepperd	Permian Basin Petroleum Association
Tracee Bentley	Permian Strategic Partnership
Greg Perrin	Reeves County Groundwater Conservation District
Aimee Roberson	Rio Grande Joint Venture
Austin Alvarado	River Guide and Film Documentarian
Ellen Weinacht	Sandia Springs Wetlands
Gage Mooring	Seawolf Water (now KLR Group LLC)
Dr. Kevin Urbanczyk	Sul Ross State University
Pete Gallego	Sul Ross State University
Dr. Bonnie Warnock	Sul Ross State University
Karr Ingham	Texas Alliance of Energy Producers
Marissa Patton	Texas Farm Bureau
Rep. Mary González	Texas House of Representatives – House District 75
Amy Hardberger	Texas Tech School of Law
Sharlene Leurig	Texas Water Trade
John Karges	The Nature Conservancy
Michael Hightower	University of New Mexico
Dr. Bridget Scanlon	UT Bureau of Economic Geology
Robert Alvarez	Visit Big Bend (Brewster County Tourism Council)
Zane Kiehne	Z&T Cattle Company



Research Goals and Methods

The goal of the research was to explore perceptions about land, water, the economy and other conservation issues specific to the Big Bend region. The results of the research will be used to help BBCA set its priorities and understand how its mission fits into the larger forces shaping the area, but also inform stakeholders and other concerned citizens about the perceived challenges the region faces.

The research was conducted from March through July 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and economic shutdown in Texas was underway. Almost overnight, the oil and gas economy in West Texas collapsed as the industry saw a historic drop in prices due to falling demand and the pressure on oil prices from international producers.

The research was conducted via telephone in a series of structured, confidential, in-depth interviews lasting from 20 to 60 minutes. The research used qualitative research methods—the science of deep listening—to understand the mindset of each participant. This research methodology is similar to conducting focus groups; it is not a quantitative poll of all residents.

The thought leaders were selected by the BBCA staff and board president on the basis of their diverse roles in the region and their ability to represent a unique perspective.

In exchange for their time, participants were promised an advance copy of this research and a donation in their names to the West Texas Food Bank.

The discussion guide used to interview the participants appears in Appendix A.

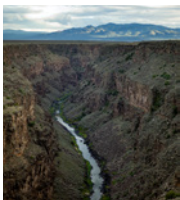
Secondary research was also conducted that included a scan of published literature and social media to inform the primary research summarized here. Contact the research team for further information on the secondary sources used.





Major Themes from Research

The research revealed five recurring themes from participant comments:



1. Conservation Priorities

The pandemic has deepened the collective appreciation of the bold majesty and the fragility of the Big Bend region and has triggered a sense of real urgency for a new vision of the future. Conservation priorities are more clear than ever, including an almost unanimous consensus that water challenges need a far more intense kind of collaboration to find solutions.



2. Rugged Individualism as an Obstacle

A historic lack of inclusivity and ability to plan together for the common good is seen as the single biggest obstacle.



3. Time for a New Economic Foundation

If limitations surrounding inclusivity and planning “could” be overcome, a regional economy that is less “boom and bust” and more stable and prosperous “could” be built that includes responsible tourism, education and healthcare alongside energy development and regenerative agriculture.



4. Collaboration Model

The McDonald Observatory’s Dark Skies Initiative is widely seen as a model for moving forward in a more effective way so that industrial development and the conservation of natural resources can co-exist for future generations. This initiative was a collaborative effort with McDonald Observatory and the oil and gas industry to educate and advocate for dark-sky-friendly lighting at production facilities.



5. Higher Education Opportunity

Sul Ross University is perceived as a key potential player in expanding the region’s ability to educate toward and nurture the kind of conservation ethic that will carry these ideas into the future.





Research Findings

KEY FINDINGS

- Finding 1** **2020 is a Pivotal Moment for a Bold Vision**
- Finding 2** **Definitions of the Geographic Region Vary**
- Finding 3** **Regional Planning, Coordination and Inclusivity Are Lacking**
- Finding 4** **Water is the Top Conservation Priority**
- Finding 5** **Land and Agriculture Need Incentives and Inheritance Tax Relief**
- Finding 6** **Tourism, Education and Public Health Are Key Economic Drivers**
- Finding 7** **Perceptions About the Oil and Gas Industry Are Up in the Air**
- Finding 8** **Dark Skies Model is a Way Forward**





PART ONE

Urgency for a New Vision is Held Back by a Historical Lack of Inclusivity and Planning

Finding 1: 2020 is a Pivotal Moment for a Bold Vision

Research respondents expressed almost a craving for a new vision—a new way forward coming out of the pandemic and the oil crisis. There is a sense that in this moment in time, the opportunity should not be wasted to chart a new path forward. We found many are grateful for what we have, worried about losing it, and want to take care of place and one another.

There is also a visceral acknowledgment that during the lockdown the air was clearer, traffic diminished, and the birds and animals were more visible. Perceptions were that this is how it could be, how the future could look, if things didn't just "go back to normal."

These views were tempered by fears of a protracted economic contraction and the devastating job losses that may ensue. At the same time, there is hope that there could be a way forward that offers economic security without continuing environmental degradation.

"In the two months we've been locked down, you can already see how much air quality has improved. I can see the mountains down at Presidio much more frequently. I can only hope that will change attitudes. It would be great if this shutdown gives us a chance to rethink our alternatives, to try again to get it right."

"We view this unprecedented time as an opportunity. To take a pause and to re-prioritize as a community and as an industry. This region is the most affected of any in the country with the double whammy of COVID and the oil price war."

"My biggest hope is we come out of this with an increased understanding of our natural resources—and with a better and different understanding of how to do business together with industry."

"I must warn you, I am very apocalyptic about this time in the Permian. There has been almost no public involvement in what happened here after fracking started. Will we get a redo? If we can't pull our creativity out at this time, I don't know when we will."



Finding 2: Definitions of the Geographic Region Vary

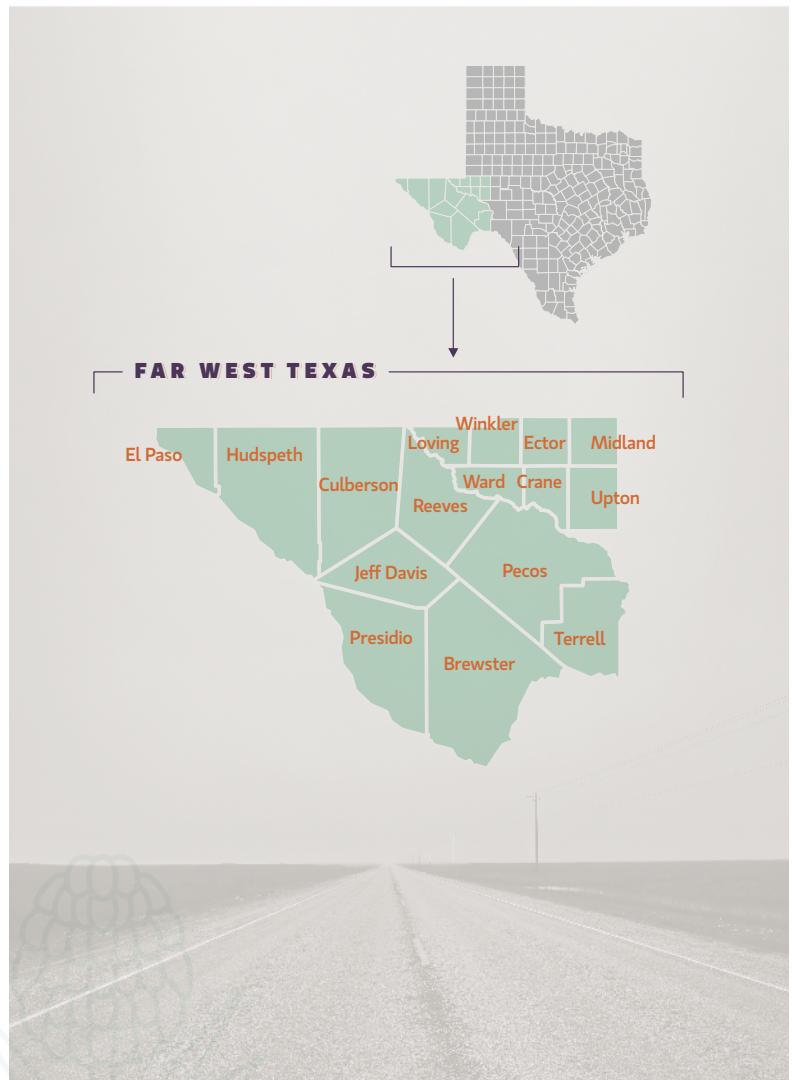
Defining the Big Bend region is literally all over the map. Tourists tend to think of the region as just Big Bend National Park. Locals in the region use the term “Tri-County” to refer to Jeff Davis, Presidio and Brewster counties. Some local participants indicated that Interstate 10 was a distinct geographic boundary between north and south.

National news media often refer to the area as the “Permian Basin” or the “Trans-Pecos region” when writing about the oil and gas industry.

The State of Texas and many expert scientists use the term “Far West Texas” to define a broad area of up to 16 counties from Midland heading west past El Paso and even into western New Mexico. The map below shows this version of what is considered West Texas.

Truth is, the area is less a cohesive region and more a collection of small towns, cities, ranches, energy development outposts and tourist attractions—each with its own identity and with miles and miles of Texas in between.

The question the research findings pose centers around whether the kind of broad regional solutions that conservation of land and water require are best served by a highly “localized” definition of the region, a broader “big picture” definition—or the best of both?





Finding 3: Regional Planning, Coordination and Inclusivity Are Lacking

Thought leaders feel strongly the region's intrinsic geographic isolation and distance have led to a culture of non-coordination that is inhibiting progress.

Along with a historical lack of inclusion based on racial intolerance, many of the younger respondents pointed out strongly the need for the region to come together to learn more about intersectionality (the complex overlaps of race, gender and class on systems) and to focus on multi-generational impacts in order to create a more equitable future.

Lack of a unified vision is perhaps THE problem to solve. Thought leaders often feel disconnected, but don't want to be. Some participants hope that digital tools fueled by broadband such as video conferencing may be one of the biggest gifts of the pandemic, enabling people and communities to bridge the vast distances that have historically separated them.

High-performance partnerships are going to be essential if the hopes expressed in this research have a chance of coming to fruition. An indication of how ingrained the disconnection is, partnerships are often viewed with suspicion. Particularly if funding for partnerships is coming from outside the region or if too many of the players are "not from here," then credibility is often discounted.

"Coordination is not one of our best assets in this region."

"Everyone here does their own thing, instead of our having a vision."

"People of color in this region haven't been as included, haven't been taken seriously in environmental advocacy. The vision of being a white-dominant movement. Build a diverse table. Build that agenda in an intersectional way—water and wastewater in the colonias and rural communities."

"Culturally, most people who live here know it is not an easy place to live, physically or economically. There are many obstacles and people here are very self-reliant. You either adapt or you leave. People are critical of assistance, of guidance or direction. Any kind of planning is running counter to that ethic."

"A region like ours needs a more intersectional approach. How does it impact communities of color or the rural ag community?"

"How vast and powerful we are as a region. But we don't play our game that way."

"Transformation of the region doesn't happen without intersectionality."





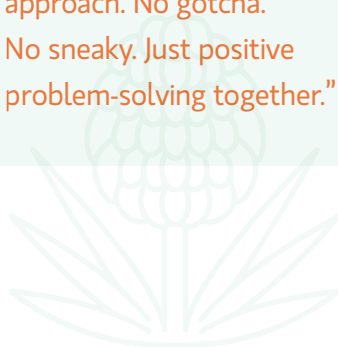
“We need to talk about conservation—water, land, dark skies, new economic opportunities—as part of the community. Connect to the local school districts. With the students, with the parents, going to the games. These regional issues can’t just be discussed at meetings. We have to be IN the community, shoulder-to-shoulder, talking as we go. There is a role for social media. There is a role for local media. But in the community is where the real change happens. Especially if you can include those diverse families who have been here for generations. Not just the wealthy landowners and oil company reps. We are the ones who must live with the decisions made.”

“Our problem is not coming up with ideas. We have great ideas. Our problem is working together to actually implement them. To actually move forward. People get burned out, they get cynical. We need to step up the pace and implement what we know we need to take care of. And we need to do it together and connect with each other doing it. Not politics. Not, I win, you lose. We need to do it for all of us.”

“Understanding and intersectionality are critical to success. Having an intersectional coalition, embracing all of us. Our institutions and culture are created by the dominant forces and there has been a lot of siloing.”

“We need to incentivize conservation. And the key to that is partnerships. Extremist groups get all the attention, but what actually works are voluntary programs that make common sense. We need a more proactive approach. No gotcha. No sneaky. Just positive problem-solving together.”

“Out here, we need to start turning a corner. We need to look at solutions based on science and on data, and work together to find new ways forward.”





PART TWO

Conservation Priorities are Intensifying

Finding 4: Water is the Top Conservation Priority

Groundwater depletion is the unanimous top concern among the thought leaders interviewed. Long-term residents of the region have observed first-hand how once-abundant springs and creeks have dried up before their very eyes. Generally, participants (excluding scientists) do not understand exactly why the water is disappearing, feel they do not know enough about potential solutions, and have a sense of powerlessness about what can be done about it.

Groundwater Conservation Districts (GCDs) are seen as vitally important institutions but in many cases deeply underfunded and lacking in resources to fully monitor wells and water levels. Confusion exists about key sections of Texas Water Code, Chapter 36, and that is noted as highly problematic. Furthermore, differences in water law between New Mexico and Texas are also cited as preventing a more holistic regional view of interconnected and shared water sources.

Extensive use (and depletion) of fresh and brackish water for hydraulic fracturing, disposal of “flowback water,” and the potential future role of “produced water” are all significant issues for the region and are inhibited by two factors. First, scientists studying these issues feel that industry is getting “out ahead of them” and that the science isn’t there yet. There is a sense among scientists that the cart is being put before the horse in terms of unintended public health consequences, damage to the natural environment, and liability issues that could follow.

Several of the scientists interviewed for this project expressed frustration that the oil and gas industry has not disclosed the chemical formulas mixed within fracking fluid and produced water, and thus it is difficult for them to understand whether or not such water can be treated to safe levels for reuse.

There is optimism that eventually water reuse technologies will be developed in a cost-effective manner for wide-spread adoption, but also fear that adequate time to research the safety of the technologies will not transpire. At the moment, there is a perception that “we don’t know what we don’t know” and a deep need to buy more time.

Second, there is a strong perception among elected officials and industry executives that research efforts are taking place in “silos” and that data and innovative solutions are not being shared quickly enough.

One of the thought leaders interviewed felt strongly that the region should consider creating a water innovation “hub” or shared communication network that exists for academia, the public sector and private industry to accelerate the work of understanding key water solutions and bring them to the West Texas market more effectively.

“All of us realize oil and gas are vital to this region. But water is more vital.”

“We need to conserve, manage new technologies, and think about water differently.”

“We can’t look at water for the next 100 years like we did the last 100 years...”



“Our region could be THE leader in desert water and land management practices. If we would just bear down and focus, we could lead the world, not just in fossil fuels, but in water and land as well. They are not mutually exclusive, but we have to bear down.”

“We can’t rebuild the economy—and the economy in this region has been broken for a long time—we can’t rebuild without water.”

“The number one issue in West Texas is water supply development. It is the economic engine for the private sector, but nobody east of I-35 has any sense of urgency. We need to know we have enough water for the next 100 years. It is going to take every solution—water conservation, brackish water desalination, produced water, ways to store water after flooding—all of it.”

“There is no one solution to water issues in the Big Bend Region. It is a mosaic of strategies. All of them are realistic, but they require cooperation, creativity, incentives and encouragement. And they need to be proactive.”

“This region is so unique. But we are dependent on water to grow. We need a coordinated research effort, a hub or a center to focus us all on innovation in water.”

Finding 5: Land and Agriculture Need Incentives and Inheritance Tax Relief

By far, the majority of land in the Big Bend region is privately owned. Conservation and land management practices have been in play in the Big Bend region for decades. However, land fragmentation continues at a rapid pace and continues to be a major concern for many of the experts interviewed for this research.

Landowners, scientists and policy makers underscore the need for much greater incentives for conservation easements and a significant reform of inheritance tax laws in order to stem land fragmentation.

The issue of eminent domain also came up, with intensity among landowners who feel regulations unfairly favor private, for-profit pipeline companies. Many landowners feel it’s their responsibility to push for eminent domain reform in order to balance the scales and protect both the value and the integrity of their land.



“We need to manage ranch lands differently so there is not so much runoff, where the water doesn't soak in, and moves too much sediment and causes erosion, and that affects the base flow in the creeks and rivers. This is going to get worse with climate change. We need to change these land management practices to handle the future. It can be more cost effective and profitable.”

“Ranching makes a living. But it doesn't make wealth. Oil makes wealth. And in the future, water will make wealth, too.”

“The laws are stacked against landowners. These pipeline companies are really against landowner property rights. We need to get laws changed. I have made money on my leases, and I'm pro-industry. It can be a really good revenue stream. But don't condemn my property and not give fair market value.”

“I love the land. My land is scenic, and I take care of it and improve it. But the inheritance taxes are killing the ranch business. We need to change that or there will no longer be big ranches in the West.”

“Personally, I would love this region to be a huge desert garden. Untouched, the whole area. There is responsible growth and development. I'd like us to leave something for tomorrow somewhere. We are going to have to change our expectations. And change how we think about working together. How many resets will it take?”

“There are 40 landowners who matter in this region. And we all know each other.”

“Ag can be more regenerative than it is. But it has to make a profit. And out here, that is getting harder and harder.”





PART THREE

Time to Move Beyond Boom and Bust?

Finding 6: Tourism, Education and Public Health Are Key Economic Drivers

Conservation values in the Big Bend region include a healthy and balanced economy. When thinking about the boom-and-bust cycles of oil and gas, as well as agriculture, our thought leaders turn to alternative economic visions and the need for a more resilient economy.

Tourism, healthcare and education are perceived as the three big drivers of an economy that is more stable moving forward.

Tourism is already seen as a booming industry in the region, but many believe it could be taken much farther. Birding, in particular, is mentioned as an area for growth. Tourism is not universally beloved, as some thought leaders recognize the negative impact on affordability and on the intergenerational culture that is native to the area.

Both health care and education are seen as abysmal in the region and in need of dramatic investment and systemic improvement.

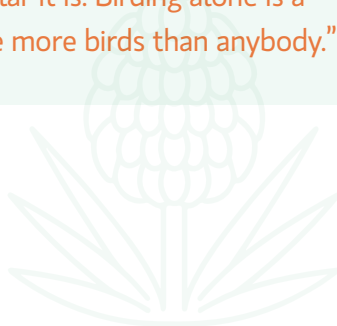
Sul Ross State University is perceived as critically important to all the themes in this report. While enrollment is down, a new university president has been selected. Many thought leaders have high hopes the university can start to fulfill its potential as a conservation powerhouse of research, training and economic leverage.

“We just destroyed the strongest economy we ever had. How do we build it back even better?”

“We have a skilled workforce. But what is it they can do now that is not minimum wage?”

“Tourism out here is far, far more stable than either ag or oil and gas. It is one of the top drivers of our economy, a clean driver, but we need to train for it, plan for it, leverage it more.”

“Ecotourism could be a huge business. A lot of ranchers and oil-field people don’t know how popular it is. Birding alone is a \$41 billion market in the U.S. We have more birds than anybody.”





“We need a more unified plan for tourism. Each area does its own thing, and no one is connecting the dots from El Paso to the Pecos River. We could be one of the great tourism regions of the world if we just coordinated more creatively.”

“Our region has the Hueco Tanks and the oldest missions in Texas—equally as old as the Alamo. There is so much here. The histories across the region haven’t been molded together. Who creates a fully integrated regional tourism plan—and who implements it?”

“The national park is the core. But the ecosystem is much wider than the park. The watershed is much bigger than the park. If we could engage regionally and focus on shared values and our economic lifeblood—we could do something much bigger and more sustainable in the long term.”

“We are deplorable in education. The bottom of the barrel in a state that is already at the bottom. That HAS to change.”

“We should partner with MD Anderson and make this region a health-care mecca. We are dangerously lacking. We should do everything in our power to increase excellence in health care.”

“With more broadband, we can do more telemedicine. Broadband here in the Big Bend should not be second best to anyone. We can do more in tourism, in ag and in energy, too.”



“I’m worried about the gentrification that comes with tourism. And the erosion of intergenerational bonds with the region. Local families who have lived here are getting pushed out and displaced. Right away, it is us versus them. Newcomers versus locals. And it is hard to establish a real dialogue about this. There is segregation and discrimination in our history. We need to approach this honestly and strategically.”

“This region is so powerful and majestic. But it is important not to overlook the people who live here. We need more education and training resources. More health-care resources. We need to be able to keep the doctors and nurses and teachers who come here if we want the economy to grow and to be able to protect what we love.”



Finding 7: Perceptions About the Oil and Gas Industry Are Up in the Air

The oil “price war” and precipitous drop in oil demand occurred during the start of this research project. Almost all the thought leaders believed that oil and gas would not be “going away anytime soon” and most hoped the industry and its well-paying jobs would come back, albeit in new and perhaps more ecologically sensitive ways. The perception was that both the recent boom and the emerging bust were more intense than the typical boom and bust cycles of the past.

Many expressed a hope that job losses would not be too steep, but at the same time were glad to have something of a reprieve, a chance to rethink and start again to find ways to develop energy that are compatible with the majestic beauty of the region.

A key point was made by several respondents about how far the oil and gas industry has come in terms of research and development, how much more of a high-tech sector it has become, and how that offers more potential for shared data analytics and innovation.

Mixed opinions extended toward renewable energy. While many expressed hope that renewables might overtake fossil fuels in the future, there was also a strong degree of “push back” on the environmental impacts from solar and wind on the fragile desert landscape.

The most consistent conviction expressed was the need for a new kind of dialogue to emerge that could lead to better regional protections for land and water, and better balance between energy security and environmental protections.

There exists a belief that the oil and gas industry can partner more deeply with the community and with conservation experts to avoid bitter “winner-take-all” confrontations and find a way forward that works for industry and the ecologically fragile land and watersheds.

“The energy industry is such a feeding frenzy. They don’t take the time to plan, to coordinate, to communicate with each other—let alone anyone in the community or those who protect the environment. It’s a flaw in their business model. That’s where our natural resources get hurt. There is pure chaos. I think we can do better. I KNOW we can do better.”

“Oil-and-gas used to be a mining industry. Now it is an R&D industry. It is all about innovation and technology. We can leverage that. We are way past wildcatting.”

“It didn’t work to confront the oil and gas industry as devils. They are not as conservation-minded as we wish, but they have done a much better job in the past decade investing time and money finding better ways. They can improve much more, but as long as we are moving forward together, we will get there.”





“This is not the same bust. This is different. It has a different look and feel. We need to be a global player, but not to this extent. We need to look more internally than internationally. We need to take care of our own here—our own people and our own natural resources.”

“If we want the energy industry to do something different, we need to partner with them and incentivize them. Look at the science and the data and find a way forward. That is the only way to go.”

Finding 8: Dark Skies Model is a Way Forward

McDonald Observatory initiated perhaps the most compelling and successful case study in Texas in terms of partnering with the oil and gas industry to achieve impressive conservation goals. The question to explore is whether this model can be replicated to achieve other goals, including clean water, land conservation and ending flaring.

Breaking down the model, it seems three key factors led to innovative breakthroughs that both the Observatory and oil and gas industry folks tout as significant.

- Focus on relationship cultivation and trust-building, not shame or confrontation.
- Use cutting-edge science and data, and look at them together using joint analytics.
- Look for the business and environment win-win.

Thought leaders involved in this project all claim it is one of the highlights of their careers and are intrigued with the idea of at least trying to apply the lessons learned to other regional issues.

(For more information about the Dark Skies Model see: <https://www.darksky.org/texas-collaboration-protects-dark-skies/>)

“How to replicate dark skies, how to apply it to other situations, how to find the sweet spot, how to innovate together—those are the questions”

“It was based on mutual respect and mutual relations. It was never confrontational. We used science, not shame.”

“A dialogue and improved dialogue is important. Otherwise, we just talk across each other a lot.”



“Our partnership on dark skies has been a good one, and there have been significant, high-impact results in our region that have been taken up nationally and even internationally. This has worked out so well. It is one of the highlights of my career.”

“I am a big fan of the dark skies model. That is an excellent model that should be used in any situation that we can. That said, the money always wins. Dark skies would not be successful if it weren't more economical. It is safer and cheaper. That is why the oil and gas industry is adopting it. Unless there is a win-win like that, it won't work.”





Research Conclusions

2020 represents an unprecedented, once-in-a-lifetime chance for the region to forge a new vision and the new relationships necessary to solve its longstanding conservation challenges—economic stability and energy security without environmental degradation or disrespecting private property rights.

To move forward, the research suggests the following series of achievable steps:

- Celebrate the Dark Skies Model as a stunningly effective case study. Learn how to replicate this success in other areas and educate the region on its key principles. Explore how water security and conservation can fit this model.
- Focus on a unified vision of a new, more stable economic paradigm that includes investing in solutions for protecting water, expanding tourism, and investing in significant upgrades in health care and education, along with responsible energy production.
- Strengthen cross-discipline partnerships across the region, including industry, advocacy and educational/public health infrastructure.
- Focus time and community energy toward understanding and dismantling historical racial intolerance and rebuilding highly inclusive relationships and communication networks that can ensure a far more equitable and shared regional vision.
- Rapidly accelerate ways for the next generation to work together on the kind of future they deserve.

BBCA and its research partners would like to express our deepest appreciation to the 45 regional thought leaders who agreed to be interviewed for this project and expressed a desire to continue dialogue and meaningful engagement.

We dedicate this research to the next generation who will inherit the fruits of our efforts.

For further information, please contact research@bigbendconservationalliance.org





APPENDIX A

Research Discussion Guide

Note: Not all respondents were asked all questions.

Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed for this research project for Big Bend Conservation Alliance. Just to review, this interview will be confidential, meaning we will put your name on the list of those interviewed but not put your name near your answers. Your opinions will only be covered in summary. And before we get started, tell me how things are going for you during this unprecedented time in our country. Are you and your family all OK? Are you all together or in different places?

Ok, I'm going to start with the interview questions now if you're ready:

- 1. What county do you live in? And when you think of the Big Bend region, what is the first thing that comes to mind?*
- 2. When you talk about the region do you use the word Big Bend? Or something else like West Texas? Trans-Pecos? Pecos Basin? Is there one name that seems to cover this part of Texas best?*

For the rest of this interview, we'd like to use a very broad definition of Big Bend / West Texas that covers the area starting in Midland and headed all the way west to include El Paso.

- 3. What is your highest hope and your biggest fear for this region, coming out of the coronavirus and the oil price war that have both had such profound effects here lately?*
- 4. Do you believe the region will have enough water for your kids and grandkids? Yes/No/Maybe; Why/Why not?*
- 5. Do you believe the water here will be clean enough for your kids and grandkids? Yes/No/Maybe; Why/Why not?*
- 6. On a scale of one to ten how concerned are you about:*
 - Overall about water in the Big Bend region?*
 - Groundwater reserves being depleted?*
 - Loss of public water resources and springs like the Post, Balmorhea, Agua Fria (Alamo de Cesario Creek)*
 - Lack of rainfall?*
 - Severe weather and flooding?*
 - Amount of water used by oil and gas industry?*



- *Pollution in water used by the oil and gas industry? (also known as flowback or produced water)?*
 - *Impact of population growth and housing development?*
7. *Are you aware of any interesting solutions to water issues in this region? If yes, what are they?*
 8. *Tourism has been a dominant economic driver in the Big Bend for a generation. Do you think this industry should be more protected, less protected or about the same level of protected by your community leaders?*
 9. *The oil and gas industry has been a big part of the Texas and West Texas economy since the 1950s. Do you see that continuing indefinitely or do you think we will see the end of oil and gas as a major player anytime soon?*
 10. *Some people are comfortable with oil and gas being the cornerstone of the regional economy. Other people are comfortable with an alternative vision that focuses less on oil and gas and more on tourism, health care and agriculture. Which is closest to your view?*
 11. *If you could wish one thing for the Big Bend economy, what would it be?*
 12. *Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about the region, the water here or the economy that you haven't had a chance to discuss?*
 13. *When you think about Big Bend Conservation Alliance, is there anything you'd like to see them do to help the future of our region in order to help heal up from this unprecedented time and give our region the best chance going forward?*
 14. *Do you have any other questions we should have asked you but didn't?*

We'll send you a copy of the research results in about six weeks and we'll be making a donation in your name to the West Texas Food Bank as part of this effort. Thank you so very much.





APPENDIX B

Selected Quotes from BBCA 2020 Thought Leader Research

Where We Go From Here

"We view this unprecedented time as an opportunity to take a pause and to re-prioritize as a community and as an industry. This region is the most affected of any in the country with the double whammy of COVID and the oil price war."

"Here in the Permian, we knew we had problems, but now they are really brought to light. If we don't step up to the challenges, if we don't figure out the solutions, then this is not going to be the world class place to live that it could be. We are going to lose good people, lose expertise, lose our chance."

"From a conservation standpoint, we were praying for a break. We've now been given that break and got our chance to get our act together. We have a chance to figure out what we really want for this region and to actually do something about it."

"This lockdown is helping us take a look at what we have taken for granted. Reminds us we are not bulletproof. That we need each other."

"My biggest hope is we come out of this with an increased understanding of our natural resources, and with a better and different understanding of how to do business together with industry."

"We have to show that it can be done differently. We have to actively fight the kind of divisive politics, and prove people wrong. We have to show we can solve problems together."

"I must warn you, I am very apocalyptic about this time in the Permian. There has been almost no public involvement in what happened here after fracking started. Will we get a redo? If we can't pull our creativity out of this time, I don't know when we will."

"In the two months we've been locked down you can already see how much air quality has improved. I can see the mountains down at Presidio much more frequently. I can only hope that will change attitudes. It would be great if this shutdown gives us a chance to rethink our alternatives—to try again to get it right."

"I don't wish bad times on anybody, but we are losing the last frontier. We need to regroup. We need to make our name something to be proud of."

"We need to learn to trust each other better. We shouldn't pick winners and losers. We need to come out of this with lessons learned and best practices."

"The lockdown has shown us what the future can be—clean air, clear water, animals and birds thriving. It has given us a peek at what our natural beauty could be. We need to not settle for what has been—and actually think about what could be."



Water

“All of us realize oil and gas are vital to this region. But water is more vital.”

“I come from a very poor community. We have been dealing for so long just with issues of survival. The fundamental water and wastewater issues and flooding issues are those that we need to deal with first. We can't rebuild the economy—and the economy here in this region has been broken for a long time—we can't rebuild without water. The rural ag communities that are not affluent have been left out of the conservation dialog.”

“We have an urban/rural water conflict. The cities and towns, especially El Paso, can catch the others by surprise if we aren't careful and if we don't think about the whole region.”

“This region is so unique, but we are dependent on water to grow. We need a coordinated research effort—a hub or a center to focus us all on innovation in water.”

“Water issues are the most important. We don't have an economy if we don't have water. We don't have anything if we don't have water. But we are still clueless. The GCDs are woefully underfunded, under-resourced, and they need more data, more help from industry, more help from landowners.”

“I am encouraged by the GCD managers, but they need our help. We are getting momentum. We really can move the needle.”

“The County GCD has very little enforcement capability and almost no money to support litigation. People know it, and they flout it. We need to help the GCDs or our water is going to run all the way dry for all the wrong reasons.”

“We have to balance human health and the economy. You can't shortchange the ecosystem. Water conservation is the key.”

“I am a newcomer. My family did not pioneer here, and we've only been here 30 years. It is obvious what is going on with climate change. The creeks don't run. The water tables have fallen. We need a giant CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) project to try and restore the water back in the ground.”

“Science is a long, long way from completely understanding what we need to know about the mysteries of water in the Permian. The unintended consequences of industry must be studied in more detail ahead of time, not after the fact. We must be more disciplined in letting the science of water catch up with new drilling technologies. Let the scientists and engineers do their work first.”

“Our region could be THE leader in desert water and land management practices. If we would just bear down and focus, we could lead the world, not just in fossil fuels, but in water and land as well. They are not mutually exclusive, but we have to bear down.”

“I would definitely focus on the springs. The springs are disappearing before our very eyes.”

“If I could do anything for our economy, I would focus on the water and the springs. We can't survive without them. I don't know what to do about them, but I know we need to focus.”



“We need to meter and monitor every single well, and not have any that are exempt. Right now, oil and gas wells are exempt. Ag is exempt. It is very confusing in Texas law. We need to fix this.”

“This pandemic is a silver lining. The way it was going, it would be just a matter of years before wells would be running dry. We need to think this through.”

“On ranches that are still producing, we’ve made lots of small steps to conserve water, not on a grand scale, but a lot of small steps and they go a long way. We have to quit using open-top rock tanks. We use poly tanks. Here in the Trans-Pecos we see a lot more rainwater collections. People know they need to conserve every drop they can.”

“Give people good information and solid science on managing both surface water and groundwater. Provide facts to people about the smart use of water resources and how they are connected. Texas regulates them separately, but they are one system.”

“Not sure we understand the impact we’re having on water. We do not fully grasp all the implications. We believe we understand it, but we don’t, and we are making decisions that Far West Texas hasn’t looked at closely enough. There is a really important research element to this that needs more time.”

“The issue is the science. We don’t know what we don’t know.”

“You don’t want to inadvertently do harm to health, and you don’t want to set up a huge liability issue. We can’t get into the produced water market unless we know more about the potential impacts on health and liabilities.”

“The number one issue in West Texas is water supply development. It is the economic engine for the private sector. But nobody east of I-35 has any sense of urgency. We need to know we have enough water for the next 100 years. It is going to take every solution—water conservation, brackish water desalination, produced water, ways to store water after flooding. All of it.”

“There is no one solution to water issues in the Big Bend region. It is a mosaic of strategies. All of them are realistic, but they require cooperation, creativity, incentives and encouragement. And they need to be proactive.”

“The problem with water is, there is too much of a silo in research. No one is coordinating.”

“What would help is if oil and gas players would share their produced water with scientists and researchers—even if we agree to keep their confidentiality. We don’t know what is in it, and we need to urgently address this.”

“I’m not sure we can operate for the next 100 years like we have for the past 100. That’s what worries me. Texas water law is not set up for sustainability. It is set up to use all the water you want as quickly as you can. If Texas can’t get its act together, then all the fresh water will be used up and gone. We don’t have a good plan. All the areas that have a lack of water are poor countries, like parts of Africa. We are headed in that direction. The biggest problem is if we don’t realize that water IS the economy.”

“The first thing I would do is put a groundwater withdrawal limitation based on a 200-year life of the aquifer. That would force people to conserve and manage the fresh water we have differently. Right now, we undervalue water, and people use it because it’s cheap. We are not factoring in the replacement value.”



"If 100 percent of the Far West Texas GCDs started this today, they would get shot at by ranchers and energy guys—but there will still be water 150 years from now."

"We need to conserve, manage new technologies, and think about water differently."

"We are at the very epicenter of climate change—and water, and if we can get our arms around it, is a battle worth fighting for."

"There are a lot of water decisions that are a penny wise and pound foolish. Water is the prime example where we're not being frugal—we are just BEHIND."

"Everyone is pumping the hell out of the water out here. We need to get in front of this. We need a cat's-out-of-the-bag strategy now, and we need to reverse this recklessness."

"The GCDs need to think differently about water. We need to help them educate people and help them care. The area is going to get more arid over the next 20 years. We need to look forward and prepare for that instead of looking backward and hoping things stay the same. They won't."

"Riparian areas decide what lives and dies in the Big Bend region. What we have are beautiful, scenic waterways. Our water is so special, but we don't view it that way. Ultimately, we need a cultural change—a grassroots, local change. Policy and laws alone won't get it done."

Land

"There are 40 landowners who matter in this region—and we all know each other."

"We need to keep the ecosystems intact. We need to keep the wildness that is so unique. We need more land conservation and more water conservation. We all know it, but what are we doing?"

"The laws are stacked against landowners. These pipeline companies are really against the landowners' property rights. We need to get the laws changed. I have made money on my leases, and I'm pro-industry. It can be a really good revenue stream, but don't condemn my property and not give fair market value."

"The oil companies have the politicians in their pocket so deep. They have financed their campaigns and taken them hunting. And every single one of them, all the way up the ladder, comes in to government poor and walks out rich from this."

I love the land. My land is scenic, and I take care of it and improve it. But the inheritance taxes are killing the ranch business. We need to change that or there will no longer be big ranches in the West."

"Land fragmentation is a serious, serious problem. What we need is a strong ag market that helps people stay on their ranches. We need more progressive land management practices. We need to really take care of the grasslands."

"Personally, I would love this region to be a huge desert garden. Untouched, the whole area. There is responsible growth and development. I'd like us to leave something for tomorrow somewhere. We are going to have to change our expectations and change how we think about working together. How many resets will it take?"



“The more I meet the local landowners and the people who live here, the more impressed I am. They understand their piece of it, and they are open to learning more from each other.”

“I hope we gain more respect for our farmers and ranchers. They have never quit.”

“In the ag business we always brace for impact. We’ve always got one foot on the brake. It has affected us, but we are accustomed to that. Most of the people who are still in ranching or farming know how it hurts, but we are always ready for it.”

“The older generations didn’t work for all this so the second gen could split it out. We want our chance to run the family ranch. An easement almost guarantees that you get a chance. If you start breaking up these large tracks of land, you lose the one thing we do have. There are still big ranches out here. Lose those and you lose your grip on dark skies, pollution control, and water solutions.”

“To keep ag land working as ag, I see a lot of benefit regarding conservation easements. We need more funding for those and more incentives for landowners to do them. More ways to keep land intact and not get fragmented and sold off because of taxes.”

“We are still learning about conservation easements. I’d like to see a fund for land buyers who could pool their investments, aggregate their capital and together buy large tracks of land to keep them intact. That way we could get scale. You can’t get it with individual buyers who have \$2–5 million to spend.”

“Conservation easements aren’t for everyone. If people have enough wealth and there is no threat, they can do as good a job as stewards or better.”

“Moving land from one generation to the next is a big, big challenge. We need incentives and new ways of preventing land sell-off and land fragmentation in order to keep the ecosystem functioning out here.”

“Private property rights are extreme out here. Current politics wouldn’t work, but if they did, you could have a public/private strategy for the idea of keeping our great large ranchland corridors intact and pristine—that’s what we need to keep our ecosystem from being fragmented all to hell. It won’t just be families who can make it happen themselves. It needs to be a marriage of public/private effort, and if you assemble and conserve those lands, there has to be a way to make it fair for local schools and local tax implications. This is a solvable problem, but we have to work on it together.”

“We need to manage ranchlands differently so there is not so much runoff, where the water doesn’t soak in, and moves too much sediment and causes erosion, and that affects the base flow in the creeks and rivers. This is going to get worse with climate change. We need to change these land management practices to handle the future. It can be more cost-effective and profitable, but we need to prove it, quickly.”

“Some of the most innovative people I have met are farmers. They are constantly trying new ways to conserve water. They are really good stewards.”

“We need to be respectful of how delicate our ecosystem is.”

“I am inspired by the younger generation. They are more open-minded. They love to weigh in. They stay up-to-date on new technologies. The next generation can really help this region, but needs a way to unify around our region and to be taken seriously.”



“Ranching makes a living, but it doesn’t make wealth. Oil makes wealth. And in the future, water will make wealth, too.”

Energy Industry

“The energy industry is such a feeding frenzy. They don’t take the time to plan, to coordinate, to communicate with each other—let alone anyone in the community or those who protect the environment. It’s a flaw in their business model. That’s where our natural resources get hurt. There is pure chaos. I think we can do better. I KNOW we can do better.”

“Oil and gas used to be a mining industry. Now it is an R&D industry. It is all about innovation and technology. We can leverage that. We are way past wildcatting.”

“We are LONG overdue dealing with flaring. It’s a huge black eye for the industry. It is economic waste, and it is pollution. It is emblematic of where we need to go.”

“I know there are strong views about water and air and climate, but no more hydrocarbon mining? That is not realistic.”

“It used to be the oil rigs were dirty and gritty, and the driller was doing all the work manually. Now, you walk in the control room and it looks like something out of NASA.”

“My fear is about the economy. You can’t live out here and not have a majority of your friends and family get an oil paycheck.”

“I don’t see oil and gas going away. But I hope energy development will be greater in solar and wind. And I hope the economy gets more stable out here because of that.”

“It didn’t work to confront the oil and gas industry as devils. They are not as conservation-minded as we wish, but they have done a much better job in the past decade investing time and money and finding better ways. They can improve much more, but as long as we are moving forward together, we will get there.”

“This is not the same bust. This is different. It has a different look and feel. We need to be a global player but not to this extent. We need to look more internally than internationally. We need to take care of our own here—our own people and our own natural resources.”

“The reality is that ANY future that concentrates on renewables will still include petroleum products. It is a blend, not all or nothing. We need a shared future of multiple energy sources.”

“Ideally, we will use this time to improve. I’m happy we will get a slowdown, but I don’t wish harm on anyone. Rapid unhinged with few regulations and non-oversight needs to get culled back. This is such a harsh situation. We also do not need the pendulum to swing back so hard that it tramples natural resources and property rights even further.”

“Many of us who live out here are worried about what we are leaving. You know what the oil and gas industry looks like. It used to be that no one cared. Now, everyone cares.”

“Oil and gas have done some great things for America, but they have come at a cost.”



"Injection wells are a nightmare. Produced water is a nightmare. I grew up northwest of Alpine. One-half of the people I grew up with worked in the oil fields. I used to respect the oil industry, but no more. It just doesn't care about what or who it destroys for the almighty dollar. I'm afraid the industry will come back tenfold and make it even worse than it did before."

"I'm concerned that the crash will make the oil and gas industry retrench on flaring and water. It was starting to make some small strides. We need to not be overly optimistic. We need to step back and let the scientists do their work. We need to acknowledge what we don't know yet."

"I am woefully water ignorant, but I do worry. This is a desert and you can see it is getting drier and drier. We don't even know what our water capacity is."

"Solar energy is not green energy. It has significant land impacts in the desert. The onslaught of solar will have significant ecological impact on our desert, and we should be proactive about understanding that—and heading it off at the pass."

"We are not opposed to the energy industry, but it should not trample property rights and our natural resources in the process."

"You don't want an absolutist attitude on either side. There are times when you have to confront wrongs that are done. But you can't get on a "war" footing. Don't jam anything down each other's throat. Look at the science and the data and find a way forward."

"If we want the energy industry to do something different, we need to partner with them and incentivize them. That is the only way to go."

"This is such a drastic oil price crash. Will we ever get them back to the table?"

"The same old model isn't working for oil and gas. How do we lead them to new and cleaner ways of making a profit?"

Economy / Tourism / Public Health / Education

"We just destroyed the strongest economy we ever had. How do we build it back even better?"

"We have a skilled workforce. But what is it they can do now that is not minimum wage?"

"Tourism out here is far, far more stable than either ag or oil and gas. It is one of the top drivers of our economy—a clean driver—but we need to train for it, plan for it, leverage it more."

"Tourism has plenty of room to grow. Our infrastructure needs to get ready for it."

"I do encourage tourism. It is very important—there are so few people here, nearly everybody benefits from heavy tourism. Realizing that there is still a pristine place in Texas—very little air pollution, little traffic, little light pollution—but still coming every year for tourism dollars."



"We need to be open to going more towards eco-tourism, because the alternative is to be eaten for breakfast, lunch and dinner by oil and gas and renewables. Marfa has been promoted aggressively for 20 years and the region could do more to take advantage of our international renown."

"Tourism is more sustainable, but it isn't a zero-sum game. Tourism is greener than oil and gas, but it is not without its own costs. The Big Bend has seen an explosion in Airbnbs, all of which need water, and the tourists need water, too. Tourism is more eco-friendly, but we have to plan to conserve."

"Ecotourism could be a huge business. A lot of ranchers and oil-field people don't know how popular it is. Birding alone is a \$41 billion market in the U.S. We have more birds than anybody. We need more guides, more wayfinding, more respect for how huge it could be for this region. We get 500,000 visitors to the national park. If just 10 percent of them stayed around to do birding in other parts of the region, you might be shocked what a boost to people's wallets it could be."

"We need a more unified plan for tourism. Each area does its own thing, and no one is connecting the dots from El Paso to the Pecos River. We could be one of the great tourism regions of the world if we just coordinated more creatively."

"I'm worried about the gentrification that comes with tourism—and the erosion of intergenerational bonds with the region. Local families who have lived here are getting pushed out and displaced. Right away, it is us versus them. Newcomers versus locals. And it is hard to establish a real dialogue about this. There is segregation and discrimination in our history. We need to approach this honestly and strategically."

"We have to remember we will always have heat and a lack of water. We have a shorter season than most regions we compete with. Our peak is in March."

"The national park is the core, but the ecosystem is much wider than the park. The watershed is much bigger than the park. If we could engage regionally and focus on shared values and our economic lifeblood, we could do something much bigger and more sustainable in the long term."

"The pandemic has really brought into focus how limited our medical infrastructure is for tourism. The park is closed, because if someone gets sick the closest hospital is 100 miles away."

"Tourism is not a magic bullet. Just ask about the Marfa housing prices, traffic and disenfranchised people. There needs to be a focus. Are we doing this for the existing population or for future growth or for outsiders? Are we assuming this area has to be developed or can we just do what is good for those who already live here and leave them alone?"

"Social media is trying to kill this area. 'I have to go there to put it on my Instagram.' It turns into this social media Disneyland, and no one is paying attention to native Marfans. This is a town! This is not an amusement park for you!"

"I would welcome more growth in ag and health care and tourism, but the money may come from the oil boom. It is a slippery slope. The bust reaches lots of people. If you are truly a person who believes in keeping energy clean, you want a more viable solution than what we have now. But we are a long way away from surpassing what we get from oil and gas. In a boom there is SO MUCH money being made. It is a hard race to run. I would love it if there were a different source of money. Fifty-fifty renewables would be great."

"We should partner with MD Anderson and make this region a health-care mecca. We are dangerously lacking. We should do everything in our power to increase excellence in health care."



“We don’t have a quality healthcare system, and it is urgent now. I am being told by experts that what comes after COVID-19 and the oil crash is a mental health crisis. Mental health issues get swept under the rug out here. We need to help people now more than ever.”

“Public health is so important out here. We need to appreciate it more. Health is a strategy that undergirds the whole area. Right now, it is a limiting factor for people even being here. It is all interconnected.”

“With more broadband, we can do more telemedicine. Broadband here in the Big Bend should not be second best to anyone. We can do more in tourism, in ag, and in energy, too.”

“We are deplorable in education. The bottom of the barrel in a state that is already at the bottom. That HAS to change.”

“This region has hands-down the worst education system. There is no reason for that. The notion that we hope it will get better one day—that is completely unacceptable. People don’t want to move here because of it.”

“This region is so powerful and majestic, but it is important not to overlook the people who live here. We need more education and training resources, more health-care resources. We need to be able to keep the doctors and nurses and teachers who come here, if we want the economy to grow, and to be able to protect what we love.”

“We need a nursing program, a culinary program, a hospitality program, something for carpenters, electricians, and all the trades. We need to be focused on education at every point along the scale—lifelong learning and re-education, too. Vocational trades are as important as college.”

Regional Vision and Working Together

“Coordination is not one of our best assets in this region.”

“People from here can smell people who aren’t from here. It is just what happens here. It takes 20 years to be accepted in Big Bend. It takes about eight years in New York City. Places like Austin take about 20 minutes.”

“Everyone here does their own thing instead of our having a vision.”

“How vast and powerful we are as a region—but we don’t play our game that way.”

“In the past, the anti-planning, anti-regulation, anti-government mentality was really just people being sick of compromising—meaning everyone loses.”

“We need to look at synergy instead of compromise. It takes a willingness to get past the radical polarization of both Austin and DC. Out here, we need to start turning the corner. We need to look at solutions based on science and on data, and work together to find new ways forward.”

“Culturally, most people who live here know it is not an easy place to live, physically or economically. There are many obstacles and people here are very self-reliant. You either adapt or you leave. People are critical of assistance, of guidance or direction. Any kind of planning is running counter to that ethic.”



"I would be remiss if I didn't mention—we like to do it ourselves. We've been doing it for 130 years. We aren't going to resist. You have to be progressive in this industry. We are not old-timey. No one is using an outhouse—but we know how this country works. We wouldn't go to South Texas and tell them how to do it."

"If advocacy groups would not have preconceived notions and work on building trust instead of confrontations and find the win-win, we would be far better off."

"It feels like an all-out assault on this region—water depletion, fracking, massive solar, all the new pipelines, the flaring, the wall, TxDOT putting a road through the mountains—the wall! How do we take the big picture of all these threats and make sure we do the best we can for the next generation?"

"We aren't making progress, because we aren't looking at solutions. It is all about either/or and not 'what if.'"

"We need to incentivize conservation, and the key to that is partnerships. Extremist groups get all the attention, but what actually works is voluntary programs that make common sense. We need a more proactive approach. No gotcha. No sneaky. Just positive problem-solving together."

"We can't count on the Legislature to instill a conservation ethic out here. We have to do it ourselves. We can be a world leader, but we have to do it ourselves and not wait for someone else to solve it."

"How do we—the people who actually live in this area and are most affected by them—how do we have a dialogue with the oil and gas executives and influence them more towards green energy?"

"Look for the win-win. Be relationship-oriented. Focus on cutting-edge science. That's how we can work together."

"We need to talk about conservation—water, land, dark skies, new economic opportunities—as part of the community. Connect to the local school districts—with the students, with the parents, going to the games. These regional issues can't just be discussed at meetings. We have to be IN the community, shoulder to shoulder, talking as we go. There is a role for social media. There is a role for local media. But in the community is where the real change happens. Especially if you can include those diverse families who have been here for generations. Not just the wealthy landowners and oil company reps. We are the ones who must live with the decisions made."

"We have to protect this place. We have to. We can do that responsibly and provide the economic foundation that will allow us to continue to protect it. Once it is gone, there will be no coming back. There is nothing like this in the whole world. We need to find the path forward and make the decisions that are right for us—no winners or losers."

"The pandemic has created divisions that have damaged the spirit of the community. We need to understand that we've been tested before and we've come out of it with our spirit intact. I hope we can find a renewed sense of pulling together when it matters. We need to not define ourselves through our differences. This region is so important and so special to us."

"Our problem is not coming up with ideas. We have great ideas. Our problem is working together to actually implement them—to actually move forward. People get burned out, they get cynical. We need to step up the pace and implement what we know we need to take care of—and we need to do it together and connect with each other doing it. Not politics. Not, I win, you lose. We need to do it for all of us."