

By: Price

H.R. No. 2818

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, The legendary JA Ranch in the Panhandle received the
2 Lone Star Land Steward Award from the Texas Parks and Wildlife
3 Department at a ceremony in Austin on May 21, 2013; and

4 WHEREAS, Now in its 18th year, this prestigious award
5 recognizes private landowners in Texas for excellence in habitat
6 management and wildlife conservation and for promoting the health
7 of their local ecosystems; and

8 WHEREAS, Situated along the breathtaking cliffs, canyons,
9 and bottomlands of the Caprock Escarpment, the JA Ranch is the
10 oldest continuously operated family cattle ranch in the Panhandle;
11 it was founded in 1877 as a partnership between famed cattleman
12 Charles Goodnight, who provided the cattle and the expertise, and
13 Irish investor J. A. Adair, who provided the capital; at Mr.
14 Goodnight's suggestion, Mr. Adair's initials were adopted as the
15 ranch's brand; and

16 WHEREAS, The ranch grew as the owners bought land in and
17 around Palo Duro Canyon, and in 1878, Mr. Goodnight drove the JA's
18 first herd to the nearest railhead in Dodge City, Kansas; in 1879,
19 he began construction of a ranch house of cedar logs, along with a
20 bunkhouse, a bookkeeper's house, a wagon boss house, and a
21 blacksmith shop; by 1883, the ranch had grown to 1,335,000 acres and
22 100,000 head of cattle, and when Mr. Adair died in 1885, his widow,
23 Cornelia Wadsworth Ritchie Adair, continued the partnership; and

24 WHEREAS, In 1887, Mr. Goodnight sold his share of the ranch

1 and kept 140,000 acres of it, while Mrs. Adair lived in considerable
2 style in Ireland and England off the property's proceeds; her son
3 from a previous marriage, Jack Ritchie, worked on the ranch for a
4 time as a young man, and when Mrs. Ritchie's aristocratic friends
5 inquired after him, she told them, with all the hauteur of the
6 dowager on *Downton Abbey*, that "My son is punching cows in Texas";
7 and

8 WHEREAS, The ranch was managed until 1910 by Richard Walsh,
9 an Irish immigrant, who improved the stock through crossbreeding
10 and created one of the highest quality herds in the nation; as more
11 settlers moved into the Panhandle, large parts of the JA were sold
12 off to longtime employees, who started their own ranches; when Mrs.
13 Adair died in 1921, she left the JA to Jack Ritchie and his heirs;
14 and

15 WHEREAS, In 1935, Jack's son, Montgomery H. W. Ritchie, took
16 over the management of the ranch at a time when it was suffering the
17 effects of debt, drought, and the Great Depression; over the next
18 decade or so, "Montie" Ritchie paid off the debts, bought out the
19 other heirs, and put the ranch on a solid foundation; he ran the
20 ranch until he retired in 1993, paying particular attention to
21 repairing the rangeland and restoring the native grasses; and

22 WHEREAS, Today, this historic 158,000-acre ranch is run by
23 Montie Ritchie's daughter, Cornelia "Ninia" Wadsworth Ritchie, and
24 her son, Andrew Montgomery Bivins; Ms. Ritchie still lives in the
25 main house, which includes the original cedar cabin from 1879, and
26 she and her son have preserved the ranch's sustainability through
27 rotational grazing, conservative stocking rates, prescribed

1 burning, and brush management, thus increasing the diversity of
2 plant species while maintaining a profitable cattle operation;
3 their success has been celebrated in *Texas Monthly*; and

4 WHEREAS, Owned and operated by the same family for five
5 generations, the JA Ranch is a living piece of Lone Star history,
6 and Ms. Ritchie and Mr. Bivins may indeed take pride in their
7 skilled and loving stewardship of this Texas treasure; now,
8 therefore, be it

9 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 83rd Texas
10 Legislature hereby congratulate the JA Ranch for receiving the Lone
11 Star Land Steward Award and extend to Ninia Ritchie and Andrew
12 Bivins and their staff sincere best wishes for continued success;
13 and, be it further

14 RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be
15 prepared for the JA Ranch as an expression of high regard by the
16 Texas House of Representatives.