



# LAND AND WATER

Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan

2024



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**OUR MISSION**

To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.



# Letter to the People of Texas

From the bird-friendly state parks of South Texas to the rugged landscape of Black Gap and across our rivers and bays, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department strives to carry out its mission of conserving land, water, and wildlife resources and providing outdoor recreation opportunities for Texans.

The Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan (known as the Land and Water Plan) guides the department in identifying and meeting current and future relevant needs for conservation and recreation in Texas. The plan was originally developed in 2002 and has been updated periodically in the years since. It distills our mission into focused goals and objectives, such as adding 82,000 acres to the state park system by 2033 and certifying 60,000 students annually in hunter education. This document will guide the operational plans that TPWD develops to ensure the long-term health of our wildlife, waterways, parks and open spaces.

Together, we face many challenges in the years ahead. Our state's population, currently over 30 million, is projected to grow by an additional 20 million people by 2050, with that population expected to be increasingly urbanized. More people will mean more strain on our land and water in terms of land fragmentation, habitat degradation, loss of open space, and increased demand on water supplies. The proliferation of invasive species, both plants and animals, threatens to compromise our native species along with natural disasters, which puts stress on our natural resources. The implementation of this plan is critical for the department to effectively deliver on its mission.

Even with our many challenges, we see reasons for hope. The recovery of endangered brown pelicans, restoration of bighorn sheep, and the return of black bears show us that, yes, conservation success stories are still possible. Texans have consistently shown their support for land and water conservation and outdoor recreation in our grand state with its rich natural and cultural heritage.

In 2019, voters overwhelmingly approved the sporting goods sales tax measure to support state parks, and then again in 2023, voters supported the establishment of the Centennial Parks Conservation Fund for new park acquisition and improvements. These funds will go a long way toward addressing deferred maintenance at parks and ushering in an era of new state parks development, respectively. In coming years, Texans can look forward to state parks serving our growing population while providing places to escape from the pine forests of East Texas to the deserts and mountains of West Texas and places in between. Conserving these lands not only benefits our wildlife and native habitats but also provides benefits to all Texans.

We have other aspirations as well. Conserving water for fish and wildlife is as important as conserving land. Ensuring adequate water for healthy communities, economies, and our environment will be of paramount importance in the years to come for Texas. In addition, we intend to elevate our science enterprise at TPWD, demonstrate our relevance to those who enjoy the outdoors, and accelerate the modernization of our department to make us more efficient and more responsive to our constituents.

Conserving our rich heritage will require concerted effort in the face of increasing challenges. We must adapt and innovate to protect our natural and cultural resources and provide outlets for recreation. When we work together, the results can be powerful and long-lasting. The Land and Water Plan provides a blueprint, but it is up to us to make it a success. In addition to putting the plan into action at work, consider volunteering at a state park, planting a native plant garden, buying a hunting and fishing license or becoming a Master Naturalist. Get informed, get involved, and let's conserve the best of Texas.

Sincerely,



**JEFFERY D. HILDEBRAND**  
Chairman



**DAVID YOSKOWITZ, PH.D.**  
Executive Director

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**Practice, encourage, and enable science-based conservation and stewardship of natural and cultural resources.**



## **GOAL 2**

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**Increase access to and participation in the outdoors.**



## **GOAL 3**

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**Educate, inform, and engage Texans in support of conservation and recreation.**

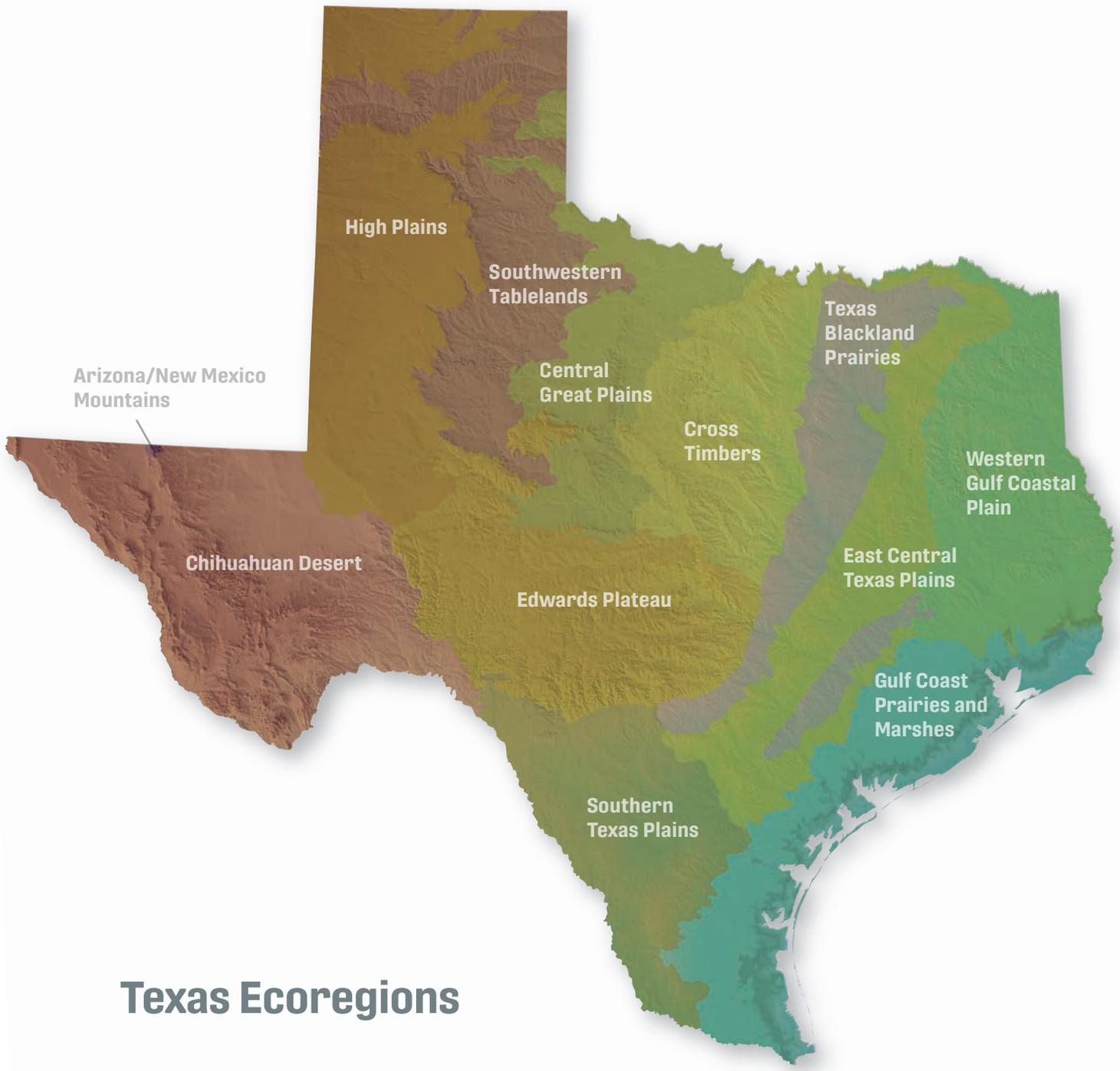
# The Rich Resources of Texas

**Texas holds a special place in the hearts and minds of those who call it home. Its sheer size, distinctive geography, rich history, and multi-cultural heritage are among the reasons that Texans share a remarkable sense of place and connection to our state.**

Texas has always been home to a unique blend of individuals who are inherently bonded by a deep appreciation of the land, water, fish, and wildlife. The vast natural and cultural resources of the state, set against the varied backdrop of iconic landscapes and watersheds, not only sustain life but provide endless opportunities to experience the outdoors and connect with nature through recreation and stewardship.

Texas is blessed with amazing biodiversity — supporting nearly 800 species of fish, 443 species of butterflies, 655 species of birds, 142 species of mammals, 230 species of reptiles and amphibians, and over 5,000 species of native plants. The state spreads across 12 distinct ecoregions, each with unique topography, hydrology, soil, vegetation, and climate. High plains, wetlands, mountains, deserts, forests, and coastal marshes provide habitat for the fish and wildlife resources that help define the landscape. This biodiversity is essential for a balanced and healthy ecosystem that provides clean water and air, protects soil from erosion, stores carbon, assimilates and cycles nutrients, and provides numerous other products and ecosystem services important to the well-being of both humans and the environment.

Today, Texas is facing unprecedented conservation challenges. Several species of birds and mammals have already vanished from Texas, and many more are imperiled. Fortunately, Texans have long recognized the need for stewardship of their land, water, fish, and wildlife and generations ago began protecting the state's natural heritage. The first game and fish laws in Texas were passed in the late 19th century and the first game wardens began protecting the state's resources in 1895. Fish and wildlife biologists were soon hired to bring scientific expertise to the management of these resources. In 1923, the State Parks Board was created by the Texas Legislature, commencing the modern state parks era. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) was formed in 1963 when the Texas Game and Fish Commission and the Texas State Parks Board were united into a single agency. For over a hundred years, this agency has worked to ensure that present and future generations continue to enjoy the great natural and cultural heritage of Texas.



# Texas Ecoregions

# The People of Texas

**Not only does Texas support some of the greatest biodiversity of animal and plant life in the nation, but it also supports a rich tapestry of people and cultures. The iconic aquatic and terrestrial landscapes coupled with the abundance of natural resources and recreational opportunities makes Texas an attractive place to live.**

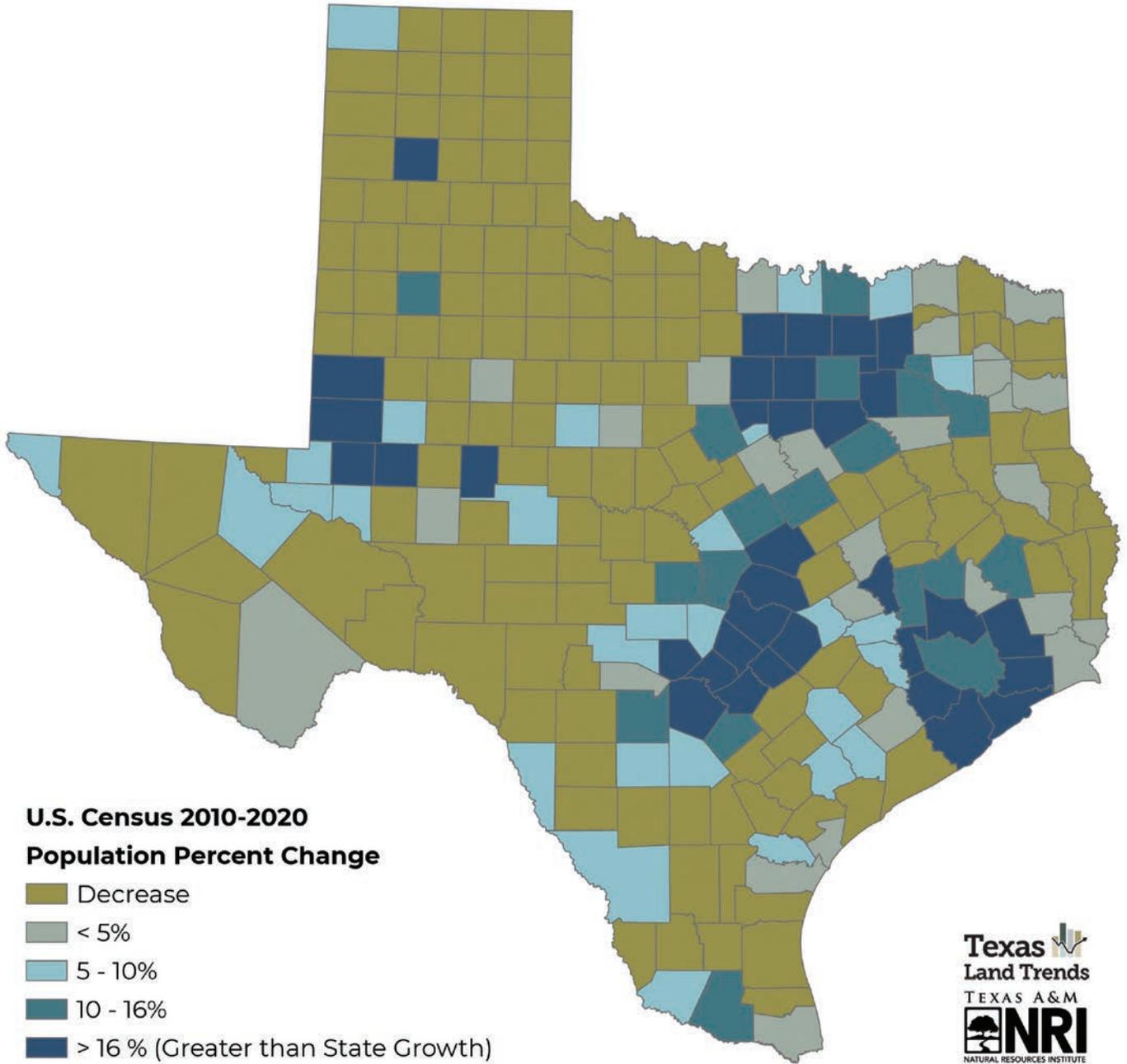
According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Texas has become the fastest-growing state in the nation, with a population of over 30 million residents. Considering the latest trends, Texas is projected to continue its substantial population growth, reaching approximately 50 million by 2050. Members of the Hispanic and Latino communities constitute a substantial portion of this expansion. In 2020, this group alone accounted for nearly half of the total population increase, and is on the verge of becoming the majority ethnic group.

The spatial distribution of this population growth is not uniform, with much of the increase — approximately 88% — concentrated around the Texas Triangle, a mega-region formed by the large urban centers of Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio, and Austin. Over the next three decades, the counties surrounding these major cities are expected to grow at a faster rate than the rest of the state. Interestingly, while Texas has the largest rural population in the U.S., nearly 84% of Texans live in urban areas.

As the population of Texas grows, significant shifts are occurring not only in its ethnic and racial makeup but also in its age demographics. Texas is characterized by its youthful population, boasting a current median age of about 35.5 years, which is approximately three years lower than the national median age. However, Texas is expected to experience an aging population as the number of individuals aged 65 and above continues to rise as the baby boomer generation ages.

As the socio-demographic landscape of Texas continues to change, so does the demand for a variety of outdoor recreation experiences. Recognizing these forthcoming demographic shifts is essential for aligning the natural heritage and recreational opportunities of Texas with the changing needs of its evolving population. It is also important to recognize that as we move forward in providing outdoor recreation, we must minimize barriers and improve access for all people so that every individual has equal opportunities to enjoy the great outdoors.

# Population Changes in Texas





# The Outdoor Heritage of Texas

**Accessible parks and greenspaces are instrumental for the mental and emotional health of community residents.**

Studies have shown that psychological benefits of contact with nature increase as the distance from residents' homes to greenspaces decreases. This evidence highlights that providing accessible nature-based experiences supported by parkland and greenspaces is a relatively inexpensive way to improve psychological well-being of residents across Texas communities. Recreation and conservation over the past 100 years have allowed Texans to preserve, protect, and enjoy some of the most amazing places that the state has to offer.

Yet, as the population becomes more urbanized and once-vast expanses of open space continue to be fragmented and developed, more people today are growing up without these experiences. The rapid population growth concentrated around urban areas has created the ever-pressing need to educate Texans about the natural world. Environmental stewardship facilitates learning about nature through hands-on experiences in performing stewardship activities.

Outdoor recreation including hunting, fishing, hiking, and wildlife viewing is important to conservation but is also critical to the economy of Texas. It brings day and overnight visitors to Texas and local communities reap the economic benefits when visitors buy meals and snacks, stay overnight in hotels, buy specialized equipment, lease land, and pay for travel costs. Consequently, when a community protects its natural resources, it protects the reason outdoor tourists come to the community.

TPWD currently operates 88 state parks, state natural areas, and state historic sites, 50 wildlife management areas, and eight fish hatcheries, comprising 1.4 million acres that are managed in the public trust for recreation and conservation. State parks and wildlife management areas offer a remarkable variety of opportunities to experience the outdoors. From the desert mountain skies of Big Bend Ranch State Park to the cypress swamps of Caddo Lake Wildlife Management Area, TPWD provides outdoor experiences ranging from peaceful to exhilarating, and from suburban oases to backcountry wildernesses.

## Cultural Resources

Cultural resources include any physical evidence of past human activity or natural features significant to a group of people traditionally associated with it. Texas has a deep and rich cultural history extending back over 13,000 years. These resources are found in archeological sites, historic-aged structures, cemeteries, cultural landscapes, shipwrecks, artifacts, documents, and objects. These are the valued and often threatened non-renewable resources that give modern Texans a tangible connection with our past.

TPWD conserves some of the most significant cultural resources of our state, including ancient Native American rock art at Seminole Canyon State Park and Historic Site, historic Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) infrastructure at Bastrop State Park and sites that speak to our identity as Texans, such as the origin of Texas ranching at Goliad State Park and Historic Site. TPWD is the steward of most of the recorded archeological sites on public lands in Texas, and the TPWD-managed archeological and interpretive collections are among the largest in the state. With millions of acres still to investigate, countless resources remain undocumented. These valued and threatened cultural resources are crucial for understanding and preserving the state's heritage.

Every component of TPWD operations has a connection to cultural resources. Whether hunting, fishing, hiking, or relaxing, everyone can imagine what life was like for those who lived here before us. Protecting, enhancing, and increasing opportunities for outdoor recreation are closely linked with learning about our cultural heritage.





## Hunting and Fishing

Hunting and fishing have been part of the fabric of Texas for as long as humans have lived here. Thousands of years ago, native hunters and gatherers settled in Texas to take advantage of its abundant fish and game. Today, people still flock to Texas to enjoy the rich traditions of hunting and fishing in the state's bountiful forests, prairies, and waters. These activities speak deeply to those who seek connection with the wild places and heritage of our state. Generations of parents have passed on to their children a passion and respect for nature, an understanding of where food and water really come from, and the lessons of patience and perseverance. Few activities teach as much about the daily rhythms of nature as effectively as hunting and fishing.

Historically hunters and anglers were at the forefront of the conservation movement, providing the catalyst for sustainable use of our natural resources and the concept of wildlife preserves and parks. Even today, their support is still evident. More than 6 million people participate in hunting and fishing in Texas every year, spending an estimated \$16.4 billion in pursuit of these traditions (*2022 Final Report Texas | National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, 2022*, pp 8-18). This substantial expenditure not only supports their passion but also channels tens of millions of dollars into conservation efforts, including acquisitions, research, habitat restoration, conservation law enforcement, and site operations. Millions more are spent locally on other hunting- and fishing-related purchases, thereby providing a boost to rural economies and local communities around the state. These numbers leave no doubt that Texans, and our visitors, love the outdoors and appreciate the wide range of wildlife-related experiences they find here.

## State Parks Recreation

The state park system of Texas preserves our state's most treasured natural and cultural resources. Connections with native landscapes and wildlife are part of our identity as Texans. On average, over 9.2 million visitors from all over the world experience Texas state parks annually, contributing more than \$62 million in revenue. These visitors participate in outdoor recreation activities like hiking, camping, and fishing, but also enjoy renting boats from and shopping in the state park stores on site and online. In fact, of the revenue earned annually in state parks, \$5.8 million is from these park store purchases.

In 2023, Texas state parks celebrated 100 years of service of preserving, protecting, and providing recreational opportunities for Texans to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of our great state. The state park system comprises over 640,000 acres and offers a multitude of recreational opportunities across the various ecoregions of the state. Since 1923, the park system's mission has been to help connect visitors with the outdoors. As state parks look forward to the next 100 years, staff continue to pursue operational excellence in providing services that become a beloved part of Texas family traditions.

The state parks in Texas continue to be major attractions for both residents and out-of-state visitors. Whether as primary destinations or value-added experiences, our parks contribute to the overall market appeal and promotion of the state's tourism economy. High-quality destinations that are well maintained and provide superb visitor experiences are the foundation of sustainable tourism in Texas, and state parks are a major part of that success. TPWD is dedicated to enhancing recreational opportunities, increasing accessibility, and fostering sustainability, all while adapting to the evolving needs of a changing and growing population.





## Wildlife Viewing

Wildlife viewing has become increasingly popular as an outdoor recreation activity in recent years. This is attributed to its accessibility, ease for novices, and its broader appeal compared to more specialized forms of eco-tourism. Observing animals in their natural habitats not only provides a source of enjoyment and relaxation but also instills a sense of awe and appreciation for the natural world, enhancing the likelihood of developing a vested interest in protecting and conserving these resources.

As people immerse themselves in the beauty and wonder of wildlife, they form personal connections with the environment, creating emotional bonds that often translate into a heightened sense of responsibility and a willingness to actively contribute to conservation efforts. By fostering a deeper appreciation for the intricacies of ecosystems, wildlife viewing serves as a powerful catalyst for individuals to advocate for and support initiatives aimed at preserving and safeguarding these invaluable natural resources.

Wildlife viewing is economically important to the state as evident by the growing numbers of participants and financial contributions made each year. In 2022, 13.7 million Texas residents and nonresidents enjoyed wildlife viewing, accounting for a total of 43.5 million trips and 700 million days spent engaging in this recreational activity. These participants spent \$23.4 billion on expenses related to wildlife viewing, including food, lodging, transportation, equipment, fees, and land. This form of outdoor recreation appeals to urban and rural residents alike, as 50% of Texas residents living in urban areas and 56% of those living in rural areas enjoy wildlife viewing. In essence, wildlife viewing not only enriches personal lives through its accessibility and wide appeal but also contributes significantly to the economic and ecological fabric of the state, making it a vital and sustainable outdoor recreational activity for individuals from all backgrounds and communities.



# Law Enforcement

**Protecting the people and the natural and cultural heritage of Texas is a core value for Texas game wardens and state park police officers.**

As sworn peace officers, game wardens lead the way in conservation enforcement, patrolling the lands and waterways of their communities and enforcing fishing, hunting, and water safety laws. State park police officers protect the resources in the parks and ensure our parks are safe for visiting families and outdoor enthusiasts.

Texas game wardens and state park police officers also support other law enforcement agencies with catching criminals; patrolling the Texas-Mexico border as part of the state's homeland security initiative; investigating environmental crimes; and conducting search-and-rescue operations in the state's bays, lakes, and rivers. When disasters strike, such as hurricanes and floods, game wardens and state park police officers are at the forefront of rendering aid. These highly trained officers, who have expertise in search-and-rescue, play a vital role in emergency response in surrounding areas.

TPWD's law enforcement works with the public through the well-established philosophy of Community Oriented Policing. This philosophy promotes and supports organizational strategies to address the root causes of unlawful activity through problem-solving tactics and officer-community collaboration. This helps foster greater support for the protection of the state's fish and wildlife resources and parks and promotes public safety on our Texas waterways. Both game wardens and state park police officers take pride in serving on the front lines to represent the agency across our communities.



# The Land

**Texas is the second largest state in the nation. Spanning 268,500 square miles, 95% of the land is privately owned, leaving only a very small portion dedicated to public use.**

As the Texas population grows, so does the demand for its recreational lands. Yet, open spaces in Texas are declining at an alarming rate due to land development and fragmentation, resulting in the loss of approximately one square mile of open space every day. The net result over the past 25 years is the transformation of more than 2.2 million acres of rural lands into different purposes. Population growth, urban sprawl, high land market values, and generational changes in land ownership are among the factors that contribute to these trends. These land change dynamics pose a serious threat to the economic, environmental, and recreational resources of Texas.

Additionally, with the majority of the population living in urban centers, most Texans do not have adequate access to continuous wild public places and the nature-based experiences that they provide. To help Texans stay connected with the natural and cultural heritage of their state, it is essential to increase their exposure to the native landscapes of Texas through the provision of accessible wild public places where people can reenergize, experience nature, and spend time enjoying their favorite outdoor recreational activities. Public recreational lands, while scarce in Texas, are often the only available open space for people to explore the outdoors and connect with nature. By providing accessible and well-maintained public recreational lands, Texas enhances the overall well-being of its people, and invests in the long-term sustainability of its natural resources.

The lack of public land in the state underscores the paramount importance of private lands in shaping Texas' ecological and economic fabric. These privately owned lands, ranging from expansive ranches to thriving agricultural lands, form the backbone of the state's biodiversity conservation and sustainable resource management efforts. Beyond their environmental significance, privately owned lands serve as crucial hubs for agricultural production, ensuring a stable food supply for the state and beyond. Furthermore, they act as essential corridors for wildlife, enabling the seamless movement of species and the preservation of natural habitats. Many private landowners actively engage in conservation initiatives, implementing practices that protect native species and enhance the overall environmental well-being of the region. In addition, by providing recreational opportunities to the public, such as hunting and river access, private landowners facilitate a deep and enduring connection between people and the natural world.



# The Water

**Flowing through the 12 ecoregions of Texas are 15 major river basins that comprise an array of aquatic ecosystems. From East Texas bayous, Great Plains prairie streams, Central Texas spring run ecosystems, and the grand rivers feeding our rich and productive estuarine ecosystems along the Gulf Coast, Texas waters are a source of beauty and wonder, and an essential life-supporting resource for animals, plants, and humans alike.**

Texas boasts 5.7 million acres of public waterways, including 191,228 miles of streams, creeks, and rivers, over 1,100 reservoirs and small impoundments, and 4 million acres of coastal resources including Texas bays, estuaries, and 9 nautical miles into the Gulf of Mexico. The abundance and high quality of fishing opportunities within these waters is a major reason why Texas ranks second in the nation in the amount of money and number of days spent fishing. These waters support recreational opportunities for 4.1 million anglers and 3.2 million boaters, with anglers alone spending \$11.1 billion annually on fishing-related expenditures. Additionally, the waters provide ample opportunities for paddling, boating, wildlife viewing, and other forms of outdoor recreation.

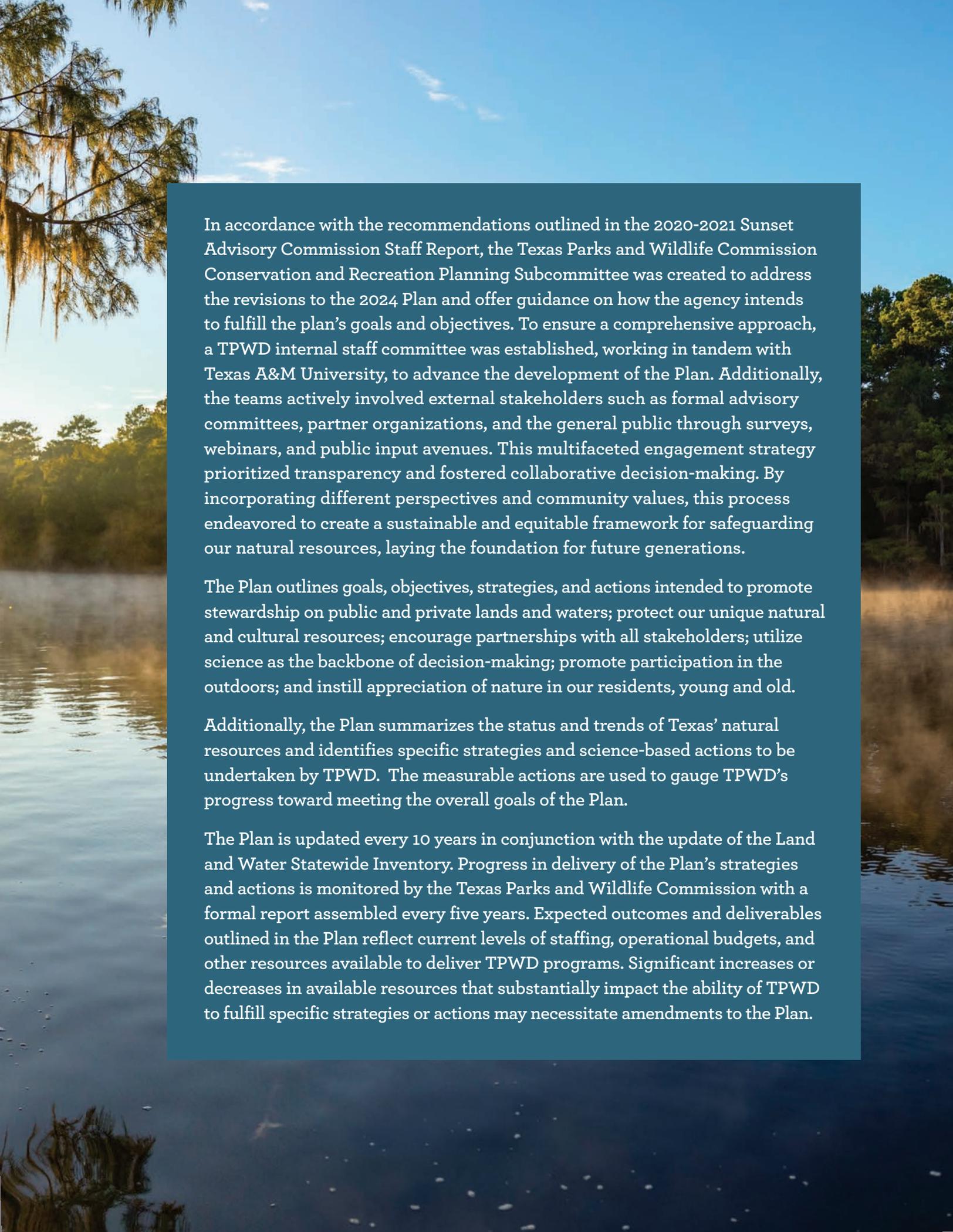
Healthy ecosystems depend on careful and effective water management. The population of Texas is expanding rapidly, bringing incredible pressure to bear on all the state's natural resources, especially water. Increased extraction of surface and groundwater can reduce flows from springs, alter natural flows in rivers, and contribute to water level fluctuations in reservoirs. This reduction degrades fish and wildlife habitats, may make boat ramps unusable, and reduces freshwater inflows that are critically important. Watershed development and urbanization also reduce the ability of watersheds and riverscapes to support natural processes, such as water filtration, aquifer recharge, and flood abatement.

While conflicts and competition over freshwater resources may be unavoidable, TPWD is devoted to integrated watershed-based planning and conservation strategies that sustain nature-oriented recreation on public waters. With a focus on identifying and implementing innovative approaches, we seek solutions that address the impacts of population growth and unify varied interests, while also balancing the needs between people and fish and wildlife resources. TPWD is committed to working with stakeholders to develop environmental flow and water-quality management strategies, increasing knowledge about spring habitats, helping recover threatened and endangered species, controlling the spread of invasive species, and addressing other challenges confronting the future of Texas' aquatic habitats.

The Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan (Plan), which is governed by Texas Parks & Wildlife Code §11.101–11.106, serves as the framework guiding TPWD in meeting the conservation and recreation needs of Texas in the years ahead.

# THE PLAN





In accordance with the recommendations outlined in the 2020-2021 Sunset Advisory Commission Staff Report, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission Conservation and Recreation Planning Subcommittee was created to address the revisions to the 2024 Plan and offer guidance on how the agency intends to fulfill the plan's goals and objectives. To ensure a comprehensive approach, a TPWD internal staff committee was established, working in tandem with Texas A&M University, to advance the development of the Plan. Additionally, the teams actively involved external stakeholders such as formal advisory committees, partner organizations, and the general public through surveys, webinars, and public input avenues. This multifaceted engagement strategy prioritized transparency and fostered collaborative decision-making. By incorporating different perspectives and community values, this process endeavored to create a sustainable and equitable framework for safeguarding our natural resources, laying the foundation for future generations.

The Plan outlines goals, objectives, strategies, and actions intended to promote stewardship on public and private lands and waters; protect our unique natural and cultural resources; encourage partnerships with all stakeholders; utilize science as the backbone of decision-making; promote participation in the outdoors; and instill appreciation of nature in our residents, young and old.

Additionally, the Plan summarizes the status and trends of Texas' natural resources and identifies specific strategies and science-based actions to be undertaken by TPWD. The measurable actions are used to gauge TPWD's progress toward meeting the overall goals of the Plan.

The Plan is updated every 10 years in conjunction with the update of the Land and Water Statewide Inventory. Progress in delivery of the Plan's strategies and actions is monitored by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission with a formal report assembled every five years. Expected outcomes and deliverables outlined in the Plan reflect current levels of staffing, operational budgets, and other resources available to deliver TPWD programs. Significant increases or decreases in available resources that substantially impact the ability of TPWD to fulfill specific strategies or actions may necessitate amendments to the Plan.



# GOAL 1

**Practice, encourage, and enable science-based conservation and stewardship of natural and cultural resources.**



# 1

Science-based stewardship of natural and cultural resources involves managing and conserving these assets using scientific knowledge and evidence-based approaches. This method includes understanding the ecological, biological, and cultural dynamics of resources, enabling informed decisions for enduring sustainability. Science and experience contribute to comprehending natural systems, anticipating changes, and addressing emerging issues that impact plants, fish, wildlife, and cultural resources. Relevant science informs the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission and focuses the actions of staff, constituents, and partners. TPWD, in collaboration with its network of partners, integrates scientific knowledge, research, and evidence-based methods into resource management, ensuring the preservation, resilience, and benefits of those resources for present and future generations.

Key elements of TPWD's science-based stewardship include research and monitoring, conservation planning, adaptive management, public engagement and education, partnerships, sustainable use and restoration, and an ecosystem-based approach.

GOAL 1  
OBJECTIVE **1**

Be an exemplary steward of the public's lands and waters by using the best available science for ecosystem-based management.

## STRATEGIES

- 1.1** Conserve and sustainably manage important recreational and commercial fish and wildlife resources using the best available science.
- 1.2** Manage landscapes and watersheds holistically, in cooperation with public and private landowners, to restore and preserve fish and wildlife species, habitats, and ecosystems.
- 1.3** Partner with regional conservation organizations, including bird joint ventures and fish habitat partnerships, to collectively pursue regional objectives in restoring, enhancing, and preserving habitats for fish and wildlife.
- 1.4** Develop and implement strategies to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, wildlife diseases, and other threats to native species and ecosystems.

## ACTIONS

- 1.1** Conduct 12,000 surveys annually to assess population trends of recreationally and commercially important species and their habitats.
- 1.2** Perform 1,500 project-based consultations annually, through state and federal regulatory processes, to inform the conservation of fish and wildlife resources.
- 1.3** Create and publish maps of subtidal habitats in one bay every three years.
- 1.4** Restore 10 acres of degraded and lost oyster habitats annually to contribute to the sustainability of the oyster fishery and resilience of Texas estuaries.
- 1.5** Design, plan, and implement 25 aquatic habitat restoration or enhancement projects annually in Texas creeks, rivers, and lakes.
- 1.6** Manage 15,000 acres of aquatic invasive or nuisance vegetation annually on Texas lakes to enhance fish habitat and fishing access.
- 1.7** Stock 41 million fish fingerlings annually in Texas public waters.
- 1.8** Support 30 public leased fishing access areas annually on Texas creeks and rivers.
- 1.9** Provide 1,425,000 acres of Texas land annually for public hunting.
- 1.10** Dedicate 17,000 hours of staff time annually to the management of aquatic invasive species.
- 1.11** Fulfill statewide sampling goals for surveillance of Chronic Wasting Disease.
- 1.12** Perform 100 fish kill or fish health investigations annually.

GOAL 1  
OBJECTIVE **2**

Provide technical assistance, scientific tools, and strategies to restore and protect healthy aquatic ecosystems.

## STRATEGIES

- 2.1** Provide technical expertise and data to federal, state, and local agencies to assist in improving water quality and quantity for fish and wildlife resources.
- 2.2** Collaborate with public and private entities to integrate planning and management of groundwater, spring, stream, wetland, estuarine, and marine ecosystems.
- 2.3** Perform studies and contribute to the development of hydraulic models and other scientific tools that increase understanding of groundwater and surface water connections.
- 2.4** Provide technical guidance, planning assistance, and financial incentives to restore and maintain appropriate watershed and hydrologic conditions.
- 2.5** Participate in statewide and regional water planning, flood planning, water management, and water permitting processes to help address the needs of fish and wildlife resources.
- 2.6** Provide input, including through stakeholder processes, to ensure Texas Surface Water Quality Standards increasingly incorporate biological data to protect the health and productivity of Texas waters.
- 2.7** Foster the restoration and protection of healthy aquatic ecosystems by promoting and facilitating the voluntary transfer of water rights to the Texas Water Trust or a suitable non-profit water trust.
- 2.8** Provide trainings for internal and external users on application of the TPWD Environmental Flow Information Toolkit as a decision support tool to inform voluntary water transactions.
- 2.9** Provide technical expertise and data to inform adaptive management decisions made by expert science teams, stakeholder committees, and state agencies in the development or revision of environmental flow standards and strategies to meet standards.

## ACTIONS

- 2.1** Contribute to the 2027 and 2032 State Water Plans and associated regional water plans by providing technical input on instream flow, water level, freshwater inflow, and water quality needs of fish and wildlife resources.
- 2.2** Update the statewide assessment of ecologically significant stream segments by 2028.
- 2.3** Facilitate eight voluntary environmental water transactions, flow agreements, or water level agreements by 2033 that focus on conserving fish and wildlife resources and enhancing outdoor recreation opportunities.
- 2.4** Provide technical input into the 2024 and 2029 State Flood Plans and associated regional flood plans, focusing on nature-based solutions, floodplain maintenance, and riparian and riverine floodplain ecosystem health.
- 2.5** Provide technical input into the triennial reviews of the Texas Surface Water Quality Standards to enhance protection of fish and wildlife resources.

GOAL 1  
OBJECTIVE **3**

Maintain, restore, and protect  
healthy ecosystems on public lands.

## STRATEGIES

- 3.1** Seek opportunities to create new state parks of high biological and recreational value near urban and suburban centers.
- 3.2** Inventory conservation, recreation, and historic properties to identify gaps in representation and protection.
- 3.3** Expand existing or acquire additional wildlife management areas in underrepresented ecological regions for habitat management, conservation demonstration, public hunting, and other public outdoor recreation opportunities.
- 3.4** Coordinate with federal, state, and local land and water management agencies to sustainably manage public lands and waters for the benefit of fish and wildlife resources.
- 3.5** Focus conservation efforts towards ecologically significant landscapes, including priority watersheds, aquifer recharge zones, wildlife corridors, and migratory bird flyways, to maximize on-the-ground impact.
- 3.6** Publish, disseminate, and promote guidelines and protocols for habitat restoration and management.
- 3.7** Manage invasive, non-native, and feral species populations on TPWD lands to minimize impacts.

## ACTIONS

- 3.1** Develop a State Park Land Acquisition Strategy by 2025 that prioritizes land acquisition decisions based on biological value and recreational need.
- 3.2** Implement 14 cooperative agreements with federal and state agencies to manage wildlife habitats and provide hunting opportunities on public lands.

GOAL 1  
OBJECTIVE **4**

## Foster conservation of healthy ecosystems on private lands.

### STRATEGIES

- 4.1 Increase the number of wildlife cooperatives and landowner conservation networks focused on conservation of fish and wildlife habitats.
- 4.2 Incorporate watershed management goals and holistic management strategies for upland, riparian, and aquatic habitats into wildlife management plans.
- 4.3 Educate landowners, wildlife cooperatives, and nongovernmental organizations about management options, funding opportunities, and incentive-based programs aimed at achieving conservation goals.
- 4.4 Encourage landowners to cooperatively establish or enroll in conservation agreements to preserve intact, contiguous habitats and wildlife corridors.
- 4.5 Provide technical guidance on wildlife and habitat management, watershed management, and control of invasive, non-native, and feral species.
- 4.6 Provide technical guidance and recommendations on conservation practices and priority landscapes eligible for financial assistance through U.S. Farm Bill conservation programs.
- 4.7 Use wildlife management areas for research and to demonstrate recommended conservation and land management practices to private landowners.
- 4.8 Educate private landowners on the economic benefits of conservation.
- 4.9 Promote watershed and range management practices that improve ground and surface water quality and quantity.
- 4.10 Provide technical guidance, including incentive-based strategies, for protecting and managing habitats for rare and priority species.
- 4.11 Share information with landowners on the value of historical and cultural resources.

### ACTIONS

- 4.1 Collaborate with the Texas land trust community and cooperating landowners using conservation easements to protect an additional 56,000 acres of private working lands by 2033.
- 4.2 Implement and maintain TPWD-approved wildlife management agreements on 20% of the total land acreage of Texas.
- 4.3 Enhance the scope and functionality of the Land Management Assistance system to allow the tracking and reporting of TPWD's cost-share programs (including the number of participating properties and acreage restored or improved) by 2025.
- 4.4 Maintain the Texas Ecosystem Analytical Mapper Tool to enable access to data and information on vegetation communities and inform the management and conservation of fish and wildlife habitats.

GOAL 1  
OBJECTIVE **5**

Maintain the highest level of scientific validity and credibility.

## STRATEGIES

- 5.1** Conduct, support, and disseminate peer-reviewed research to ensure the science-based management and conservation of fish and wildlife resources.
- 5.2** Establish procedures that ensure all formal research follows the scientific method including the use of peer-review throughout the process to yield useful and credible findings.
- 5.3** Ensure study designs are rigorous and adequate to yield stated objectives.
- 5.4** Obtain technical training, pursue competitive research grants, and secure necessary resources to conduct innovative scientific research.
- 5.5** Disseminate research findings through technical presentations at professional conferences and through publication in peer-reviewed reports and journals.
- 5.6** Conduct periodic reviews of standard protocols, including fish and wildlife resource monitoring, to ensure internal use of the best scientific methods.
- 5.7** Develop position papers explaining the scientific basis for TPWD's perspectives and approaches.
- 5.8** Maintain lists of research needs and peer-reviewed publications for priority species, habitats, and ecosystems.

## ACTIONS

- 5.1** Conduct or collaborate on 70 applied research projects annually to inform the management and conservation of fish and wildlife resources.
- 5.2** Host 10 science events (e.g., virtual webinars, workshops) annually to facilitate information-sharing among TPWD scientists, external cooperators, stakeholders, and the public.

GOAL 1  
OBJECTIVE **6**

Restore, recover, and protect Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including state and federally listed species.

## STRATEGIES

- 6.1 Coordinate delivery of priority conservation actions identified for Species of Greatest Conservation Need within the State Wildlife Action Plan for Texas.
- 6.2 Cooperate with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners to implement conservation actions for federally listed species identified in conservation agreements and recovery plans.
- 6.3 Review best available science, conduct applied research to fill knowledge gaps, and periodically reassess the listing status of State Threatened species, State Endangered species, and Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

## ACTIONS

- 6.1 Reassess the conservation status of 25 Species of Greatest Conservation Need annually.
- 6.2 Review the best available science and update the lists of Species of Greatest Conservation Need, State Threatened species, and State Endangered species at least every five years.
- 6.3 Expand or restore the occupied range of five Species of Greatest Conservation Need by 2028 through repatriation, habitat restoration, and other conservation actions.
- 6.4 Perform a statewide assessment and prioritization of Conservation Opportunity Areas by 2026 to identify and focus conservation efforts on landscapes important to Species of Greatest Conservation Need.

# GOAL 1 OBJECTIVE 7

## Establish and enforce regulations to conserve fish and wildlife resources.

### STRATEGIES

- 7.1** Provide a comprehensive law enforcement program that strategically enhances public awareness, understanding, and support of the TPWD mission.
- 7.2** Using the best available science and human dimensions data, provide recommendations to policymakers that encourage legal, sustainable, and ethical use of natural resources.
- 7.3** Coordinate with federal, state, and local agencies to combat environmental crimes.
- 7.4** Educate and work collaboratively with businesses and industry to achieve compliance with natural resource regulations.
- 7.5** Promote Operation Game Thief to curb illegal exploitation of fish and wildlife resources.
- 7.6** Elevate voluntary compliance levels of licensees, permittees, and the general public through interactions with hunters, anglers, and other natural resources users.
- 7.7** Implement, strengthen, and enforce regulations that prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species, wildlife diseases, and other threats to native species and ecosystems.

### ACTIONS

- 7.1** Dedicate 500,000 hours annually to educate the public and enforce fisheries and wildlife rules and regulations.
- 7.2** Dedicate 165,000 hours annually to educate the public and enforce water safety rules and regulations.
- 7.3** Perform a comprehensive gap analysis by 2028 of laws, regulations, and enforcement strategies needed to conserve fish and wildlife habitats on public lands, public freshwaters including state-owned streambeds, and Texas tidal waters including state-owned submerged lands.
- 7.4** Perform a comprehensive gap analysis by 2028 of laws, regulations, and enforcement strategies needed to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive fish, shellfish, and aquatic plants.
- 7.5** Perform a comprehensive gap analysis by 2033 of laws, regulations, and enforcement strategies needed to prevent the introduction and spread of terrestrial invasive plant and wildlife species.

GOAL 1  
**OBJECTIVE** 

**Protect and interpret cultural resources.**

## **STRATEGIES**

- 8.1** Expand efforts to connect visitors with the cultural heritage of Texas.
- 8.2** Coordinate with the Texas Historical Commission on activities that protect and promote historic sites.
- 8.3** Implement archeological site-monitoring plans using best preservation practices and standards.
- 8.4** Develop training for TPWD site staff on the identification and protection of archeological and historic resources on public lands.
- 8.5** Document and mitigate impacts to cultural resources in all planning activities on TPWD sites.
- 8.6** Cooperate with federal and state agencies and tribes to protect cultural resources on relevant TPWD properties and projects.

## **ACTIONS**

- 8.1** Assemble a Cultural Resource Inventory Strategy for Texas State Parks by 2025 that prioritizes locations for which to conduct inventories and publish cultural resource reports.
- 8.2** Conduct five cultural resource inventories on state park sites by 2028.
- 8.3** Provide six training courses annually for relevant TPWD personnel on the identification and protection of archeological and historic resources on public lands.
- 8.4** Review 200 project planning proposals annually to address impacts to cultural resources on TPWD sites.
- 8.5** Assemble six new archeological site monitoring plans annually.
- 8.6** Install 18 interpretive exhibits at state parks focused on cultural heritage by 2028.

GOAL 1  
OBJECTIVE **9**

Anticipate and plan for emerging conservation issues.

## STRATEGIES

- 9.1** Engage in international, national, state, and regional scientific forums to identify and address emerging issues.
- 9.2** Develop and implement climate adaptation strategies to enhance ecosystem resiliency and mitigate anticipated impacts to fish and wildlife resources.
- 9.3** Evaluate and provide technical input to minimize impacts to fish and wildlife resources from energy, utility, and fuel technology projects.





# GOAL 2

**Increase access to and participation in the outdoors.**



## 2

TPWD's goal for increasing access to and participation in the outdoors is essential for promoting human health and quality of life. Engaging individuals in outdoor recreation offers TPWD a significant opportunity to educate the public on the importance of environmental stewardship. Additionally, these individuals contribute to community-led conservation and preservation of natural and cultural resources for future generations. Tasked with expanding outdoor access, TPWD aims to engage people from all backgrounds, while maximizing the use of limited public lands and incentivizing public access to private lands.

Key elements of TPWD's strategy for increasing access and participation include enhancing agency infrastructure, developing urban green spaces, fostering robust education and engagement, addressing accessibility barriers, collaborating with community organizations, integrating technology and youth and family programs, promoting outdoor recreation, and providing financial support.

## GOAL 2 OBJECTIVE **10**

Provide a variety of high-quality, nature-oriented outdoor recreational opportunities on TPWD sites.

### STRATEGIES

- 10.1** Increase public fishing and hunting opportunities.
- 10.2** Provide diverse outdoor recreational opportunities (e.g., urban and suburban programs, paddling trails, backcountry camping).
- 10.3** Expand outdoor programs for Texas youth.
- 10.4** Construct and maintain facilities and amenities that broaden access to the outdoors, protect natural resources, and enhance the quality of experiences for people of all ages, abilities, and interests.
- 10.5** Optimize visitation and visitor experience while protecting natural and cultural resources.
- 10.6** Increase public awareness of recreational opportunities at TPWD sites.
- 10.7** Increase compatible recreational opportunities and programs at wildlife management areas.
- 10.8** Manage public lands and waters for sustainable use and enjoyment compatible with TPWD conservation goals.
- 10.9** Expand and enhance state park sites by acquiring inholdings and adjacent tracts from willing donors and sellers.
- 10.10** Use the Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan, the Statewide Inventory, and the Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan to inform land acquisitions and other strategies for expanding public outdoor recreation.

### ACTIONS

- 10.1** Facilitate 31.5 million paid state park visits by 2028.
- 10.2** Provide fishing opportunities and related outreach to 30,000 visitors annually at the Texas Freshwater Fisheries Center.
- 10.3** Construct 65 miles of trails on state park sites by 2033.
- 10.4** Provide outdoor programs at TPWD sites reaching 226,000 youth annually.
- 10.5** Add 82,000 acres to the state park system by 2033.
- 10.6** Acquire and initiate development on five additional properties to add to the state park system by 2033.
- 10.7** Coordinate with federal, state, and local land management agencies to plan, construct, and provide access to five state park sites currently owned by the state park system by 2033.
- 10.8** Increase the amount of state park acreage within a 60-mile radius of the Texas Triangle by 5% by 2033.

GOAL 2  
OBJECTIVE **11**

Encourage people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to experience the outdoors.

## STRATEGIES

- 11.1** Provide education certification programs for hunters and boaters.
- 11.2** Conduct outreach activities and events targeted specifically for underrepresented communities.
- 11.3** Engage underserved populations through multilingual programs by using translation services that connect TPWD programs to expanded audiences.
- 11.4** Collaborate with organizations that serve Texans with disabilities in delivering TPWD outdoor recreation and education programs.
- 11.5** Enhance inclusivity by offering accessibility accommodations for outdoor programs and activities.
- 11.6** Expand Texas Outdoor Family program offerings.
- 11.7** Develop and implement programs that encourage children to connect with and experience nature.
- 11.8** Offer recreational workshops that physically engage participants in outdoor activities.
- 11.9** Encourage engagement in TPWD programs by fostering partnerships with education-focused non-profit organizations.
- 11.10** Develop and expand digital content and services that encourage the public to experience the outdoors.
- 11.11** Inventory and prioritize projects to enhance accessibility at TPWD sites.
- 11.12** Include accessibility information in all program descriptions.
- 11.13** Post accessibility information for each public site on the relevant TPWD web pages.

## ACTIONS

- 11.1** Update the Texas R3 Strategic Plan by 2026 to recruit, retain, and reactivate anglers, boaters, hunters, and target shooters.
- 11.2** Certify 60,000 students annually in hunter education.
- 11.3** Certify 30,000 students annually in boater education.
- 11.4** Reach 400,000 Texans annually through delivery of angler education, aquatic education, shooting sports, and other outreach and education programs.
- 11.5** Introduce 2,000 Texans to camping annually through Texas Outdoor Family workshops.
- 11.6** Increase fishing participation annually by 2%.
- 11.7** Increase hunting participation annually by 1%.

GOAL 2  
OBJECTIVE **12**

## Encourage nature and heritage tourism.

### STRATEGIES

- 12.1** Collaborate with public and private organizations to identify and implement creative strategies for promoting nature and heritage tourism.
- 12.2** Assist local communities and private landowners in developing economically viable recreational venues for activities such as wildlife watching, stargazing, photo safaris, camping, and other nature-based recreation.
- 12.3** Partner with public and private organizations to establish and promote natural and cultural areas and trails.
- 12.4** Market TPWD sites as nature and heritage tourism destinations.
- 12.5** Promote TPWD’s nature tourism and wildlife viewing information and resources through the Texas Travel Alliance and Texas State Agency Tourism Council.

### ACTIONS

- 12.1** Expand email subscriber lists for nature tourism programs annually by 10% through effective management, promotion, and targeted communication efforts.
- 12.2** Maintain the 79 existing Texas Paddling Trails for access to paddling, fishing, and wildlife viewing on rivers, lakes, bays, and coastal areas through 2028.
- 12.3** Increase Texas Paddling Trails by 150 miles by 2028.
- 12.4** Ensure 100 new miles of paddling trails are located within 60 miles of urban centers.
- 12.5** Engage Texas Master Naturalist volunteers in annual site visits to help promote and update information for at least 33% of all Great Texas Wildlife Trails sites by 2028.
- 12.6** Update the Great Texas Wildlife Trails website twice annually to ensure updated information on nature tourism destinations is provided to the public online.
- 12.7** Increase the registered number of Great Texas Birding Classic teams to 240 by 2028.





# GOAL 3

**Educate, inform, and engage  
Texans in support of conservation  
and recreation.**



### 3

In confronting the growing intricacies of conservation challenges in Texas, cultivating awareness and cooperation becomes pivotal for adept stewardship over the state’s natural and cultural resources. TPWD employs targeted educational approaches to effectively enlighten and involve individuals and communities, nurturing a culture of conservation advocacy. By elevating awareness and participation, TPWD transforms individuals into champions for wildlife and outdoor spaces, contributing significantly to the enduring sustainability of natural and cultural resources.

Key elements to the agency’s multifaceted approach to educate, inform, and engage constituents include incorporating public outreach campaigns, enhancing environmental education programs and interpretive exhibits, implementing community science initiatives, expanding volunteer programs, hosting public meetings and workshops, and collaborating with community organizations through interactive online platforms and various storytelling methods. This comprehensive strategy aims to empower and unite communities thereby fostering a collective commitment to the preservation of Texas’ rich ecological and recreational heritage.

GOAL 3  
OBJECTIVE **13**

## Cultivate support for the conservation of natural and cultural resources.

### STRATEGIES

- 13.1** Lead efforts to encourage Texans to protect natural and cultural resources.
- 13.2** Advance public awareness and understanding of the significance and benefits of well-managed lands and waters.
- 13.3** Promote land and water management practices that benefit fish and wildlife resources.
- 13.4** Increase public awareness of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and related contributions made by hunters, anglers, and other outdoor enthusiasts through user fees and license purchases.
- 13.5** Conduct demonstration projects and host field days to promote the benefits of restoring native habitats.
- 13.6** Encourage participation in TPWD volunteerism programs (e.g., Texas Master Naturalists, Texas Nature Trackers) in support of natural and cultural resources conservation.
- 13.7** Demonstrate the benefits of rainwater harvesting, renewable energy, and other green technologies.
- 13.8** Develop a communication approach that prioritizes multilingual and accessible resources to engage and serve all constituents effectively.
- 13.9** Post information at each TPWD site regarding its acquisition, mission, purpose, rules, and recreational opportunities.
- 13.10** Promote the enjoyable, responsible, and ethical use of natural, cultural, and recreational resources.
- 13.11** Collaborate with classroom educators and health and physical education instructors to advocate for a lifelong interest in outdoor recreational activities.
- 13.12** Expand the availability of training and curriculum tools to educators and conservation partners.

### ACTIONS

- 13.1** Conduct 800 presentations and consultations annually for the public focused on the management and conservation of fish and wildlife resources.
- 13.2** Conduct a Hunting for Conservation workshop annually to grow advocates for hunting and wildlife conservation.
- 13.3** Conduct a Fishing for Conservation workshop annually to grow advocates for fishing and aquatic resources conservation.

GOAL 3  
OBJECTIVE **14**

Increase awareness of the value of urban and suburban ecosystems.

## STRATEGIES

- 14.1** Provide technical guidance and planning assistance to municipalities, developers, and the public on the conservation of urban and suburban ecosystems.
- 14.2** Collaborate with local governments to manage and conserve green space, watersheds, aquifer recharge zones, and parklands.
- 14.3** Explore new ways to involve urban and suburban residents in outdoor activities.
- 14.4** Provide technical guidance and materials to urban and suburban audiences on coexisting with wildlife.
- 14.5** Increase awareness and engagement by urban and suburban audiences in TPWD conservation and outdoor recreation programs.

## ACTIONS

- 14.1** Support 18 high-use urban fishing sites annually through the Neighborhood Fishin' Program.
- 14.2** Complete 30 local park construction projects annually supported through the Recreation Grants Program.
- 14.3** Produce and disseminate seven videos annually that provide technical guidance to the public on urban and suburban wildlife topics.

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**Texas State Parks received the 2023 National Gold Medal Award, recognizing them as the best state park system in the country.**

State Parks leadership celebrated with park staff across the state to commemorate their monumental achievement.





4200 Smith School Road  
Austin, Texas 78744  
[www.tpwd.texas.gov](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov)

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