

Shrinking Habitat

Background

Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes

A narrow band about 60 miles wide along the Texas coast from the Louisiana border to Brownsville roughly outlines the Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes. This area is characterized by long and continual confrontations with the sea, wind and rain. These confrontations shape this place creating a tapestry of shallow bays, estuaries, salt marshes, dunes and tidal flats. Because of this proximity to the Gulf of Mexico, the plants of this region must be highly salt tolerant or halophytic. Coastal areas are rich in wildlife. Coastal marshes harbor hundreds of thousands of wintering geese and ducks and provide critical landfall in the spring for neotropical migratory birds. Several important wildlife sanctuaries and refuges are located in this region including refuges for the endangered Attwater's Prairie-chicken and the Whooping Crane. Coastal dunes may serve as sentry roosts for north bound Peregrine Falcons in the fall. Coastal waters are often graced by willets, sanderlings, gulls, terns and Black Skimmers.

Common Vegetation

Texas madrone
Grasses
Tallgrass prairies
L Sugarberry
Green ash
Sweetgum
Water oak
Willow oak
Southern live oak
American elm
Holly
Yaupon
Red mulberry
Wax myrtle
Cherry-laurel
Sweet bay
Red chokecherry
Short-leaf pine

Rare Plants

Prairie dawn
Slender rush pea/South Texas ambrosia

Common Animals

Muskrat
Coyote
Marsh rice rat
Mink
River otter
Bottlenose dolphin
Alligator
Diamond back terrapin
Bull frog
Roseate spoonbill
Black skimmer
Gulls
Terns
Pelicans
Near shore fishes:
Spotted sea trout
Red drum
Southern flounder
Striped mullet
Sheepshead
Shrimp
Blue crab

Rare Animals

Attwater's prairie chicken: Tall grass coastal prairie
Eastern brown pelican: Offshore islands, spoil islands, mudbanks
Eskimo curlew: Migrates through the grasslands from the Arctic tundra to Pampas grasslands of Argentina
Piping plover: Winters along Gulf Coast; tidal mud flats, sandflats, or algal flats
Whooping crane: Winters on Texas Gulf Coast; marshes and sandflats of Aransas