



# TEXAS CONSERVATION ACTION PLAN

## Southwest Tablelands

ECOREGION  
HANDBOOK  
August 2012



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See links on Texas Parks and Wildlife Department’s Texas Conservation Action Plan 2012 website

<http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/>

or the Wildlife Diversity Program website

[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife\\_diversity/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/)

for additional references and supporting documents related to this handbook.

*“Action that grows out of urgency, frustration, or even determination is missing a critical ingredient. For action to be effective, for action to be meaningful, it must also grow out of respect and a deep sense of connection to the things and people that surround us.” – Orion Magazine Editors, March/April 2011*

## SUMMARY

The Southwest Tablelands (SWTB) Handbook is one of the Texas Conservation Action Plan (TCAP) thirteen handbooks, available on the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department’s Texas Conservation Action Plan website<sup>1</sup>:

- an **Overview** – background information about how this Plan came about and was revised;
- a **Statewide/Multi-region handbook** – broad resource concerns and opportunities; and
- 10 other ecoregion handbooks like this one for different areas of Texas with more local information.

This handbook provides insight into specific SWTB resources and conservation issues, including a list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), rare communities, and important habitats that support these unique features. The SWTB handbook also presents a compiled list of issues – things that prevent us from doing our best conservation work here – and proposed solutions or actions. Throughout this document, there are resources – web links, programs, incentives, and contacts – to help you participate in implementation and learn more about the natural resources this region of Texas has to offer.

**The TCAP SWTB Ecoregion Handbook takes advantage of many different perspectives to understand local changes and identify actions that will reduce threats to specific natural resources: SGCN, rare communities and the habitats on which they rely.** The Plan aims to ensure that we are able to share our natural heritage with future generations of Texans and that they understand what we did to make *progress* toward that goal.

It’s important to prioritize where we need to work to the degree that we can: human and financial resources are limited, certain issues demand more immediate resolution, and some species and habitats are simply more in need. The TCAP 2012 taps into a broad network of conservation service providers, natural resources managers, alliances and working groups, policy makers, stakeholders and the public to define **what’s at risk, what issues are most important, where we need to work, how to best engage the right partners to solve the problems, and what to do.**

This handbook is divided into sections to guide priority setting and actions:

- resources at risk - SGCN, rare communities, and the habitats on which they rely;
- issues that are most important, which could benefit from targeted stakeholder involvement; and
- conservation actions to benefit resources and make progress toward solving issues.

Certain resources also have a statewide context – riparian areas, grasslands – and additional actions at that level are proposed in the Statewide/Multi-region handbook. For more information about how content was developed for all handbooks of the Action Plan, please see the Overview handbook.

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<sup>1</sup> TPWD. 2012. Texas Conservation Action Plan – all handbooks and supporting documents can be found online at <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/>

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

This handbook contains a list of partners and programs that provide conservation services and/or information in this area. Additionally, certain conservation actions at the end of this handbook may help you connect with partners working on specific issues.

There are many wonderful, energetic public and private conservation providers in Texas who have active volunteer networks, strategic needs, and programs. For more information, check the Natural Resource Conservation Programs and Services for Texas Landowners.<sup>2</sup> In addition, work with the Texas Land Trust Council to find a local lands and waters conservation organization near you:  
<http://www.texaslandtrustcouncil.org/>

If you have questions about the TCAP content and cannot find what you need on the TPWD Texas Conservation Action Plan website or in one of the handbooks,<sup>3</sup> please contact the TCAP Coordinator at the TPWD Headquarters in Austin, Texas:

Phone (512) 389-4800

Email [tcap@tpwd.state.tx.us](mailto:tcap@tpwd.state.tx.us)

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<sup>2</sup> TPWD. 2007 Natural Resource Conservation Programs and Services for Texas Landowners.  
[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd\\_bk\\_w7000\\_1198.pdf](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/publications/pwdpubs/media/pwd_bk_w7000_1198.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> TPWD. 2012. Texas Conservation Action Plan – all handbooks and supporting documents can be found at this website: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/>

## OVERVIEW

The Southwestern Tablelands (SWTB) ecoregion, also known as part of the Rolling Plains, is a beautifully irregular area on a map, winding around extents of the High Plains, Edwards Plateau, and Central Great Plains and even bumping up against the Arizona – New Mexico Mountains in New Mexico. In Texas, this ecoregion extends from our northmost county on the eastern corner of the Panhandle (Lipscomb) south to the Edwards Plateau, with a finger running the length of the Canadian River watershed through Texas. Low rainfall, extreme temperatures, broad flat expanses and rough broken terrain shape the diversity and distribution of the plant communities of this region, including shortgrass and midgrass prairies, a few pockets of tallgrass prairie, shinnery oak, mesquite savanna, wooded swales and rough breaks, riparian areas of Plains cottonwood. One of the grasslands of North American conservation significance, Ellis, is in this ecoregion shared with Oklahoma.<sup>4</sup>

Although most streams in this region are intermittent and ephemeral, the gently rolling hills and broad flats of the Rolling Plains harbor the headwaters of several of the great rivers of Texas - Canadian, Colorado, Concho and Red – which originate in the brakes of the Cap Rock Escarpment. Sub-irrigated wet meadows persist along portions of the Canadian River and other riparian systems east of Pampa, Clarendon, and Childress. Rivers and their tributaries are inhabited by some of the rare and unique fauna of Texas such as the Concho Water Snake and the Brazos Water Snake. Sand bars on the upper reaches of these rivers provide nesting habitat for the Interior Least Tern and the Snowy Plover.

Grasslands here, as in other areas across Texas and North America, are important habitats. Shortgrass and midgrass prairies with blue grama, black grama, sideoats grama, sand dropseed, threeawns, little bluestem, western wheatgrass, buffalograss, and alkali sacaton, with some sand sagebrush, yucca, and cholla harbor iconic wildlife of this region: pronghorn, prairie dog colonies and their associated animal compadres in the “towns”, grassland birds, Swainson’s hawk. Some sandy areas have Havard shin oak, fourwing saltbush, sand bluestem; breaks may harbor pinyon and juniper, scrub oaks, and other shrubland species. Riparian oodlands have cottonwood, willow, elm, and hackberry. The Palo Duro mouse, a close relative of the Pinyon mouse of the Rocky Mountains, can be found in the juniper woodlands on the steep canon breaks; Texas kangaroo rats burrow at the base of mesquite trees on certain clay loam soils of these Rolling Plains.

There are elevated tablelands with red-hued canyons, mesas, badlands, gorges, and dissected river breaks in a topography that is mostly broad, rolling plains gives this ecoregion its names. Because of the rough terrain, most of the land is in arid livestock production, and may include hunting as a primary use. Most of the low flats are cultivated, or have been at one time or another, in hay, alfalfa, corn, grain sorghum, or wheat. Very little urban development occurs in this ecoregion as the rough terrain deterred much settlement. Oil and gas production is also an evident land use.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> D. Pool and A. Panjabi. 2011. Assessment and Revisions of North American Grassland Priority Conservation Areas. Background Paper, Commission for Environmental Cooperation. 66 pgs.

<sup>5</sup> Griffith, G. 2010. Level III North American Terrestrial Ecoregions: United States Descriptions. Prepared for the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation ([www.cec.org](http://www.cec.org)), version May 11, 2010. Corvallis, Oregon.

Griffith, G.E., S.A. Bryce, J.M. Omernik, J.A. Comstock, A.C. Rogers, B. Harrison, S.L. Hatch and D. Bezanson. 2007. Ecoregions of Texas. R.S. Geological Survey, Reston VA. [http://www.epa.gov/wed/pages/ecoregions/tx\\_eco.htm](http://www.epa.gov/wed/pages/ecoregions/tx_eco.htm) (accessed May 2009).

Table 1 crosswalks this ecoregion with other conservation planning units.<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1 illustrates the location and extent of this ecoregion in Texas.

Table 2 documents the Ecological Drainage Units (EDU) and Hydrologic Units (“HUC 8”, finer scale watersheds within EDUs), Reservoirs and Ecologically Significant Stream Segments<sup>7</sup> (ESSS) which occur in this area.

Figure 2 shows those EDUs, HUC8s and ESSS by ecoregion.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information about planning boundaries, see the Overview handbook on the TCAP 2012 website <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/>

<sup>7</sup> TPWD. 2002/2005. *Ecologically Significant Stream Segments*.

[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/water/environconcerns/water\\_quality/sigsegs/](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/water/environconcerns/water_quality/sigsegs/)

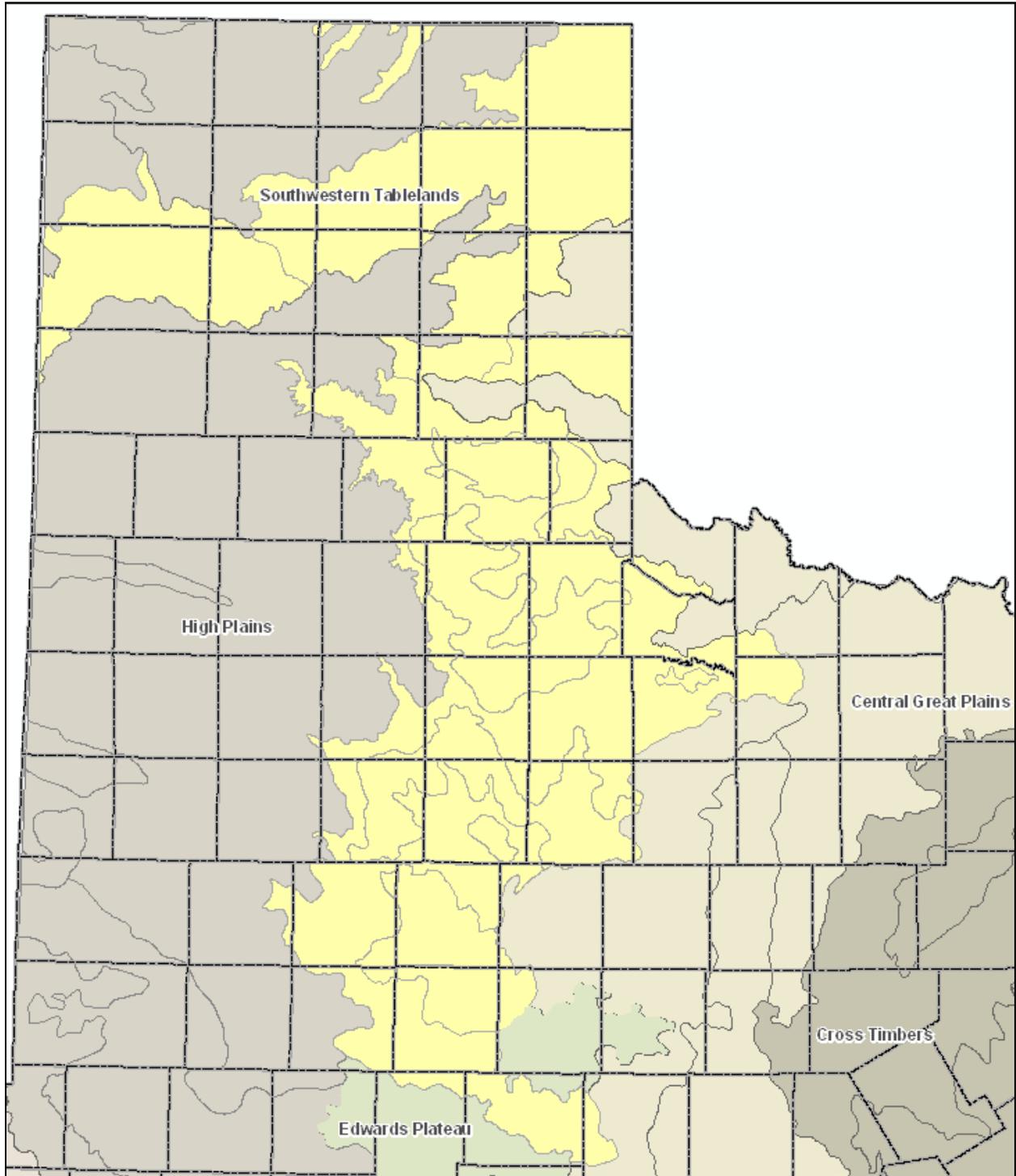
**Table 1. Crosswalk of SWTB Ecoregion with Other Conservation Plan Units**

Note Table is formatted 8-1/2" x 11" landscape orientation; see also Ecoregions map on TCAP 2012 website.

2012 TCAP	2005 TXWAP (Gould 1960)	The Nature Conservancy Terrestrial Ecoregions (1999)	Ecological Drainage Units (Watersheds) From the National Fish Habitat Action Plan <i>TX = Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership and Desert Fish Habitat Partnership (AFWA 2006, Fish Habitat Partnership 2009, Esselman, et.al. 2010)</i>	All Bird Joint Ventures (JV) and Bird Conservation Regions (BCR) (NABSCI-US 2004, USFWS 2009a)	Landscape Conservation Cooperatives (LCC) (USFWS 2009b)	2010 TPWD Land & Water Plan Strategic Regions (TPWD 2010)	Major Land Resource Regions and Areas (MLRA) (NRCS 2006)	Natural Regions of Texas (LBJ School of Public Policy 1978)
Southwestern Tablelands (SWTB)	Rolling Plains	Southern Shortgrass Prairie (28), Central Mixed Grass Prairie (33), Central Shortgrass Prairie (27)	Upper Red River Brazos River – Prairie Canadian River Colorado River – Prairie Colorado River – Ed Plateau	Playa Lakes JV Shortgrass Prairie BCR Central Mixed Grass Prairie BCR	Great Plains	Colorado Upper (5a) Brazos Upper (6a) Plains Rivers (10)	Western Range and Irrigated Region: <i>Canadian River Plains and Valleys (70A), Upper Pecos River Valley (70B)</i> Central Great Plains Winter Wheat and Range Region: <i>Southern High Plains, Northern (77A), Southern High Plains Breaks (77E), Central Red Rolling Plains Western (78B) and Central Red Rolling Plains Eastern (78C)</i>	Rolling Plains

**Figure 1. SWTB Ecoregion with County Boundaries**

Southwest Tablelands ecoregion in yellow



**Table 2. SWTB EDUs with Ecologically Significant Stream Segments and Reservoirs**

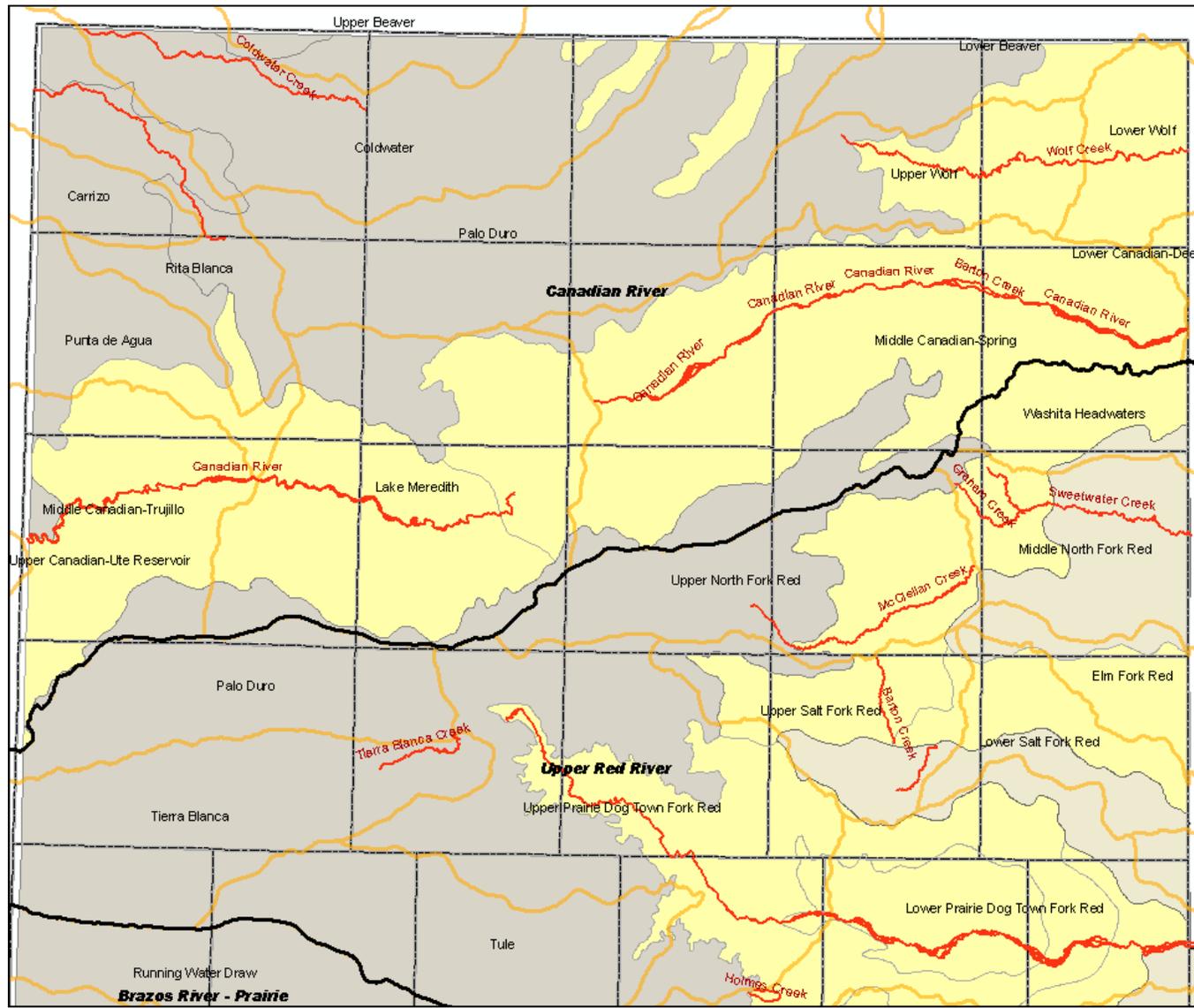
<b>ECOLOGICAL DRAINAGE UNIT SubBasin (HUC 8)</b>	<i>Ecologically Significant Stream Segment TPWD 2002, w/updates 2005</i>	<b>Lakes and Reservoirs</b>
<b>CANADIAN RIVER</b>		
Lower Beaver		
Coldwater		
Rita Blanca		
Punta de Aqua		
Middle Canadian - Trujillo	Canadian River	
Upper Canadian - Ute Reservoir	Canadian River	
Palo Duro		Palo Duro Reservoir
Upper Wolf	Wolf Creek	
Lake Meredith	Canadian River	Lake Meredith
Middle Canadian - Spring	Canadian River	Lake Meredith
Lower Wolf	Wolf Creek	
Lower Canadian - Deer		
<b>UPPER RED RIVER</b>		
Upper North Fork Red	McClellan Creek	
Tule		
Washita Headwaters		
Middle North Fork Red	Graham Creek, Sweetwater Creek	
Upper Salt Fork Red	Barton Creek (Donley), Leila Lake Creek	Greenbelt Lake
Upper Prairie Dog Town Fork Red	Prairie Dog Town Fork Red River	
Lower Prairie Dog Town Fork Red	Holmes Creek, Prairie Dog Town Fork Red River	Baylor Lake
North Pease		
Middle Pease	Middle Pease River	
Elm Fork Red		
Lower Salt Fork Red		
Groesbeck - Sandy	Red River	
Pease	Pease River	
Southern Beaver		
North Wichita		Truscott Brine Lake
South Wichita		
Wichita		Lake Kemp
<b>BRAZOS RIVER - PRAIRIE</b>		
White	Salt Fork Brazos River	White River Lake
Salt Fork Brazos	Salt Fork Brazos River	
North Fork Double Mountain Fork Brazos	North Fork Double Mountain Fork Brazos	

<b>ECOLOGICAL DRAINAGE UNIT SubBasin (HUC 8)</b>	<i>Ecologically Significant Stream Segment</i> <i>TPWD 2002, w/updates 2005</i>	<b>Lakes and Reservoirs</b>
Double Mountain Fork Brazos	South Fork Double Mountain Fork Brazos, Sage Creek, Double Mountain Fork Brazos	Alan Henry Reservoir
Middle Brazos - Millers	Brazos River	Lake Davis
Upper Clear Fork Brazos		
<b>COLORADO RIVER - PRAIRIE</b>		
Colorado Headwaters		Lake J.B. Thomas, Lake Colorado City, Champion Creek Reservoir
Beals		Red Draw Lake, Mitchell County Reservoir
<b>COLORADO RIVER - EDWARDS PLATEAU</b>		
Upper Colorado	Colorado River	E.V. Spence Reservoir
Middle Colorado - Elm	Colorado River	

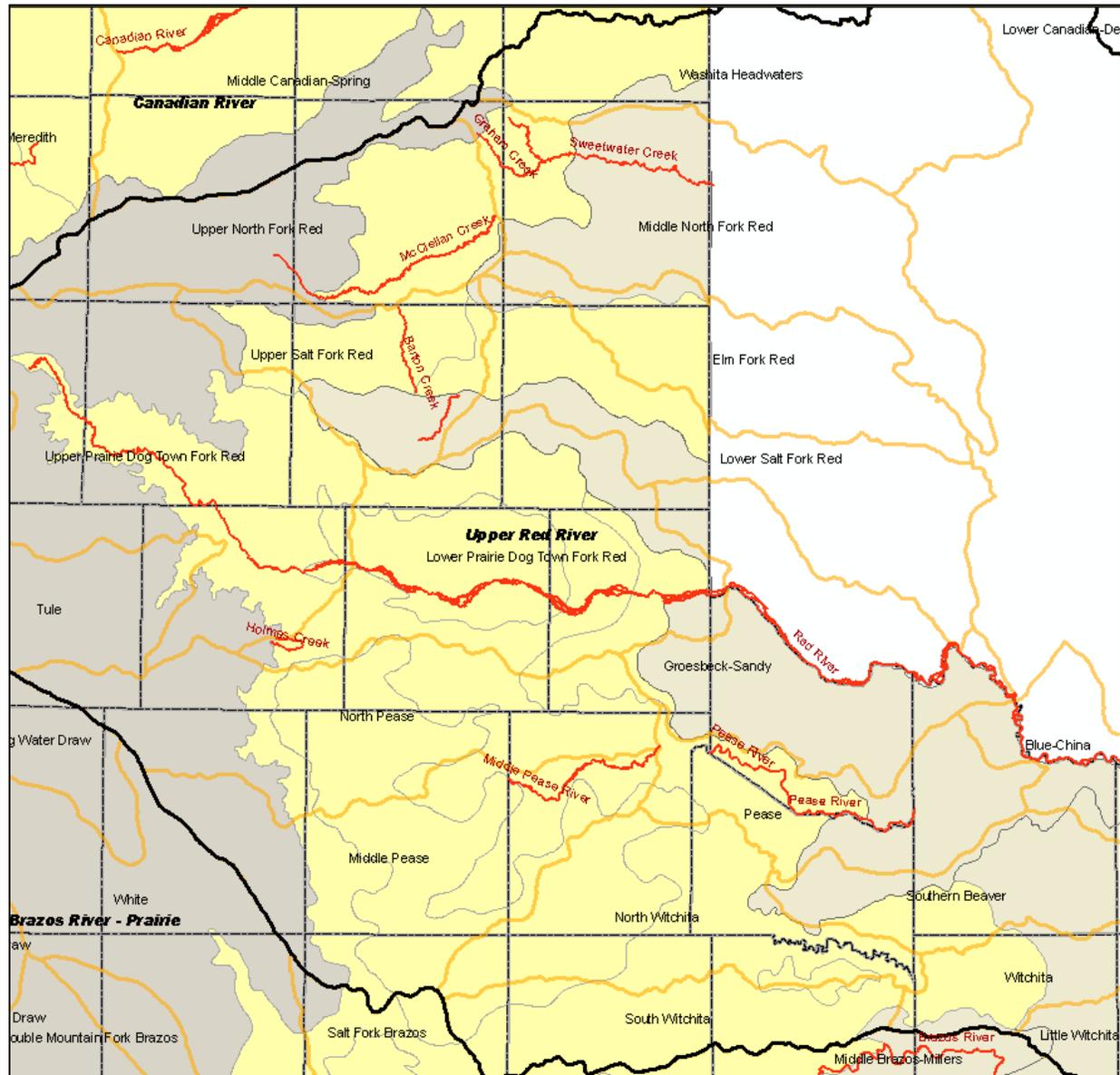
Note: Ecologically Significant Stream Segments and Reservoirs which occur in the Subbasin (HUC 8) but not in the ECOREGION are not included in this table. There may be other significant stream resources mentioned in the Priority Habitats section

**Figure 2. SWTB EDUs, HUC 8s, and ESSS**

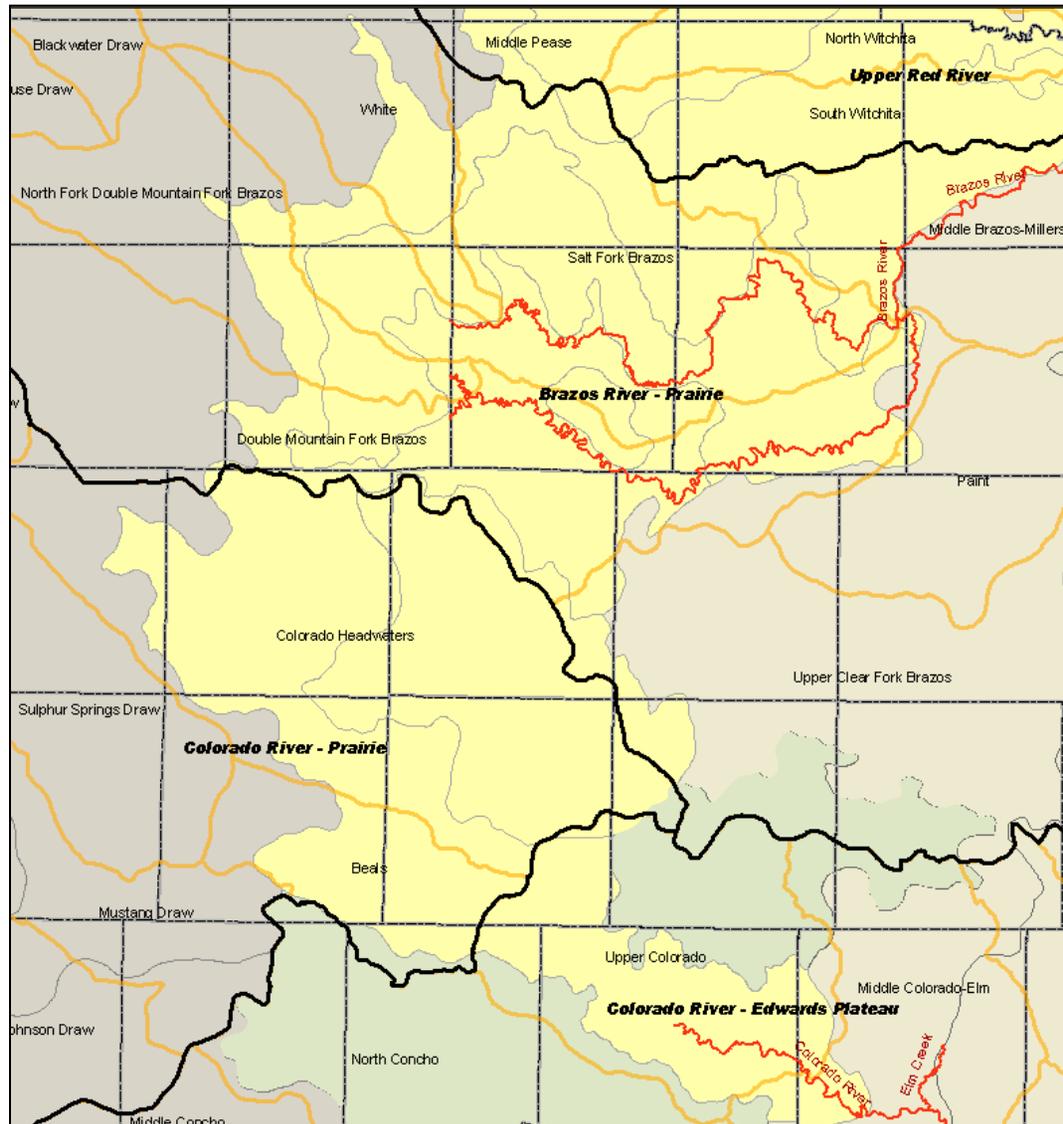
Canadian River EDU black outline (Upper Red River EDU shown in more detail next frame), HUC 8s orange outline, ESSS red lines



Upper Red River EDU black outline, HUC 8s orange outline, ESSS red lines



Brazos River – Prairie, Colorado River – Prairie, and Colorado River – Edwards Plateau EDU black outline, HUC 8s orange outline, ESSS red lines



Note: other important stream segments may be mentioned in the Priority Habitats section

## RARE SPECIES AND COMMUNITIES

While most conservation work is done at the habitat level to address issues and threats, Action Plans' stated primary purpose is to improve and sustain *species'* populations and prevent the need to list species as federally or state threatened or endangered.<sup>8</sup> The Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) list, one of the Eight Required Elements in all states' Action Plans, is the foundation for the habitat- and issues- based actions in the Plan. In Texas, we've also identified Rare Communities for this planning process. For more information about how the SGCN and Rare Communities lists were developed, including the changes from the 2005 list, see the Overview Handbook.<sup>9</sup>

Species and rare communities included in the 2012 TCAP Final SGCN and Rare Communities lists are supported by current science, peer-reviewed references and/or other dependable, accessible source documentation, and expert opinion.<sup>10</sup> Each species has a NatureServe calculated state and global conservation rank, which accounts for abundance, stability and threats.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, several species have federal<sup>12</sup> and/or state<sup>13</sup> listing (endangered, threatened, candidate) status. See the key to conservation status and listing ranks<sup>14</sup> on the TPWD TCAP 2012 website.

The revised lists for TCAP 2012 are substantial and representative of conservation targets needing attention in this Plan and are sorted into the following categories:

Mammals	Birds
Reptiles and Amphibians	Freshwater Fishes
Invertebrates	Plants
Plant Communities	

Both the SGCN and Rare Communities Lists are on the TCAP 2012 website as large-but-sortable Microsoft Excel files: <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/sgcn.phtml>

Once you open this webpage, you can choose to look at the SGCN or Rare Communities lists. In each workbook, the first bottom tab is the complete final statewide compiled list, with habitat information and additional references where available; **each ecoregion tab in the workbook provides an excerpt of the statewide list, sorted to contain just the ecoregion's species or communities.**

## PRIORITY HABITATS

Nationally, an SGCN list forms a basis for every Action Plan; however, *species* conservation cannot be successful without defining the *lands and waters species need to survive and thrive*. If it was only

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<sup>8</sup> Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. 2011. State Wildlife Action Plans. <http://www.wildlifeactionplans.org/>

<sup>9</sup> TPWD. 2012. Texas Conservation Action Plan: Overview Handbook.

[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/tcap\\_draft\\_overview.pdf](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/tcap_draft_overview.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> TPWD. 2012. Texas Conservation Action Plan: Species of Greatest Conservation Need List and Rare Communities Lists. <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/sgcn.phtml>

<sup>11</sup> NatureServe. 2011. A network connecting science and conservation (online resources). <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer> (accessed 2011).

<sup>12</sup> USFWS. 2011. Endangered Species List, by state and county.

<http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/EndangeredSpecies/lists/ListSpecies.cfm> (accessed 2011).

<sup>13</sup> TPWD. 2011. State Listed Species.

[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/maps/gis/ris/endangered\\_species](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/maps/gis/ris/endangered_species) (accessed 2011)

<sup>14</sup> TPWD. 2011. Texas Conservation Action Plan: Key to Conservation Status and Listing Ranks.

[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/species\\_key\\_tcap\\_2011.pdf](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/species_key_tcap_2011.pdf)

important to know about individuals or even populations, we could put representatives in zoos or herbaria or other curated collections and that would be enough; but, it's not .... **It's important to conserve populations in the context in which they thrive, to the best of their abilities, where they can contribute to and benefit from the systems in which they live.**

Broad habitat categories were developed to organize all ecoregional handbooks.<sup>15</sup>

See also the Statewide/Multi-region handbook for habitats that are of broader importance – shared with many other regions and/or other states or nations (e.g. riparian or migratory species' habitats as a general category).

See documentation for *Ecoregions of Texas* and the *Texas Ecological Mapping Systems Project*.<sup>16</sup>

### **SPECIAL NOTE: PLAYAS AND NATURESERVE DESCRIPTIONS**

The NatureServe descriptions found in the supporting documentation on the TCAP website, noted in the last column of Table 3, are *inaccurate in their descriptions of playas and rainwater basins for this ecoregion of Texas*. While playas are not the prevalent feature they are in the High Plains ecoregion, a few do occur in the SWTB.

Texas Parks and Wildlife and The Nature Conservancy plant communities' ecologists, USFWS Panhandle Refuges' biologists, and researchers at Texas Tech University need to review the recent work by Loren M. Smith<sup>17</sup> to amend and refine these descriptions to truly represent Texas playas for updates to NatureServe descriptions. A conservation action has been defined to accommodate that need.

Playas in the Texas panhandle are not the lacustrine, mostly-wet or even wet-year-round features described; however, our playas go through extremely unpredictable wet/dry cycles and are highly ephemeral. Most are not wet even a percentage of a year unless they receive agricultural or municipal runoff. Ecologists also noted that individual playas are so dynamic and variable that the "closed" or "open" descriptors vary with time of season, rainfall timing, rainfall amount, etc. Playas soils are highly impermeable (but not completely) when saturated, and highly permeable when dry; they are important recharge features for the Ogallala Aquifer.

Priority habitats in these ecoregions which support SGCN were identified through workshops, surveys and other ecologists' and/or literature and are listed in Table 3.

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<sup>15</sup> TPWD. 2011. Texas Conservation Action Plan: Broad Habitat Category Definitions.

[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/habitat\\_categories\\_tcap\\_2011.pdf](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/habitat_categories_tcap_2011.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Griffith, G. 2010. Level III North American Terrestrial Ecoregions: United States Descriptions. Prepared for the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation ([www.cec.org](http://www.cec.org)), version May 11, 2010. Corvallis, Oregon.

Griffith, G.E., S.A. Bryce, J.M. Omernik, J.A. Comstock, A.C. Rogers, B. Harrison, S.L. Hatch and D. Bezanson. 2007. Ecoregions of Texas. R.S. Geological Survey, Reston VA. [http://www.epa.gov/wed/pages/ecoregions/tx\\_eco.htm](http://www.epa.gov/wed/pages/ecoregions/tx_eco.htm) (accessed May 2009).

TPWD, Missouri Resources Assessment Partnership, and Texas Natural Resources Information Service. In progress, 2005 – 2012. Ecological Systems Classification and Mapping Project <http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/maps/gis/tescp/index.phtml> (accessed 2010). Austin TX.

<sup>17</sup> Smith. L.M. 2003. Playas of the Great Plains. UT Press. 275 pgs.

**Table 3. SWTB Priority Habitats**

Note Table is formatted 8-1/2" x 11" landscape orientation

GENERAL HABITAT TYPES	SOUTHWESTERN TABLELANDS (SWTB) also called Rolling Plains	SWTB Ecological Systems
NATURAL AND SEMI-NATURAL TYPES	<p><i>Habitats in this column were identified in the workshop; additions were made by editor to riverine and cultural aquatic</i></p> <p><i>Note: Workshop participants mentioned native-managed Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) as a "habitat" type; however, CRP is a conservation program or method, not a habitat type. CRP can be applied to a broad spectrum of vegetation types which should be listed in these columns.</i></p>	<p><i>NatureServe. 2009. International Ecological Classification Standard: Terrestrial Ecological Classifications for Ecological Systems of Texas' Southwestern Tablelands. NatureServe Central Databases. Arlington, VA. U.S.A. Data current as of 08 October 2009.</i></p>
Barren/Sparse Vegetation <i>See also Marine/Coastal</i>	caprock escarpment "breaks"	LLano Estacado Caprock Escarpment and Breaks Shrubland and Steppe Western Great Plains Cliff and Outcrop
Grassland	shortgrass prairie mid grass prairie tallgrass prairie	Central Mixedgrass Prairie Western Great Plains Sand Prairie Western Great Plains Shortgrass Prairie Western Great Plains Tallgrass Prairie Chihuahuan-Sonoran Desert Bottomland and Swale Grassland (mixed upland and wetland)
Shrubland	oak shrublands sand-sagebrush shrublands	Edwards Plateau Limestone Shrubland Western Great Plains Sandhill Steppe
Savanna/Open Woodland	mesquite savanna	Western Great Plains Mesquite Woodland and Shrubland
Riparian	periodically flooded or subirrigated floodplain shrublands associated with the upper Red and Canadian Rivers and their tributaries woodland ravines	Southeastern Great Plains Floodplain Forest Southeastern Great Plains Riparian Forest Western Great Plains Floodplain Western Great Plains Riparian Western Great Plains Wooded Draw and Ravine

GENERAL HABITAT TYPES	SOUTHWESTERN TABLELANDS (SWTB) also called Rolling Plains	SWTB Ecological Systems
Riverine	Sand and gravel bars Instream habitats of the watersheds which intersect this ecoregion (see Table 2) Ecologically Significant Stream Segments - McClellan Creek, Graham Creek, Sweetwater Creek, Barton Creek (Donley), Leila Lake Creek, Prairie Dog Town Fork Red River, Holmes Creek, Middle Pease River, Pease River, Red River, Salt Fork Brazos River, North Fork Double Mountain Fork Brazos River, Sage Creek, South Fork Double Mountain Fork Brazos River, Brazos River, Colorado River	NA
Lacustrine <i>See also</i> Cultural Aquatic	saline lakes	NA
Freshwater Wetland	wet meadows shallow open natural fresh wetlands <b>*See the note in the introduction to the habitats section about playas and descriptions</b>	Eastern Great Plains Wet Meadow, Prairie and Marsh Western Great Plains Closed Depression Wetland Western Great Plains Open Freshwater Depression Wetland
Saltwater Wetland	shallow open natural salt/saline wetlands	Eastern Great Plains Wet Meadow, Prairie and Marsh Western Great Plains Closed Depression Wetland Western Great Plains Open Freshwater Depression Wetland
Aquifer	Ogalalla Seymour	NA
Caves/Karst		NA

GENERAL HABITAT TYPES	SOUTHWESTERN TABLELANDS (SWTB) also called Rolling Plains	SWTB Ecological Systems
CULTURAL TYPES	<i>habitats in this column must support SGCN or rare communities to be considered in this plan</i>	
Agricultural		NA
Developed		NA
<i>Urban, Suburban, Rural</i>	Vacant lots and parklands which harbor prairie dog towns	NA
<i>Industrial</i>	Abandoned mines (bats)	NA
<i>Rights of Way</i>	Transmission line corridors which may harbor prairie dog towns	NA
Cultural Aquatic	Reservoirs: Palo Duro, Lake Meredith, Greenbelt Lake, Baylor Lake, Truscott Brine Lake, Lake Kemp, White River Lake, Alan Henry Reservoir, Lake Davis, Lake J.B. Thomas, Lake Colorado City, Champion Creek Reservoir, Red Draw Lake, Mitchell County Reservoir, E.V. Spence Reservoir	NA

**SHARED HABITAT PRIORITIES WITH ADJACENT STATES**

Texas shares its border with four states – New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. A highly dissected ecoregion, the SWTB crosses into Oklahoma and New Mexico Table 4 identifies habitat priorities which have been identified in the Oklahoma and New Mexico Wildlife Action Plans which may be adjacent to the SWTB. Every adjacent state’s Action Plan mentions the importance of **intact native riparian zones** and **floodplains, high quality instream habitats, wetlands** of all types, and **native grasslands**. These habitat types are also found in the SWTB and are priorities for conservation in this ecoregion. See Statewide/Multi-region handbook for broadscale Conservation Actions for these priorities.

**Table 4. Shared Habitat Priorities with Adjacent State – Oklahoma and New Mexico**

Adjacent States	Ecoregions Shared with Texas	Habitat Priorities Shared with Texas <sup>18</sup>
New Mexico (NM)	Arizona – New Mexico Mountains Chihuahuan Desert High Plains <b>Southwestern Tablelands</b>	semi-desert grasslands and scrub/shrublands shortgrass prairie ephemeral and perennial tributaries and mainstem of the Canadian and associated riparian zones and floodplains springs and seeps wetlands playas TX – NM HUC 8 watersheds are all mapped at low to very low risk
Oklahoma (OK)	High Plains <b>Southwestern Tablelands</b> Central Great Plain Cross Timbers East Central Texas Plain Western Gulf Coastal Plain	shortgrass prairie playas, springs and other wetlands sand sagebrush/bluestem shrublands mixed grass prairie ephemeral and perennial tributaries and mainstem of the Canadian and Red Rivers, and associated riparian zones and floodplains shinnery oak shrubland tall grass prairie oak woodlands and savanna mesquite savanna TX – OK HUC 8 at moderate risk: Palo Duro, Lower Beaver, Washita headwaters, Lower North Fork Red, Lower Salt Fork Red, Blue-China, Farmers-Mud

<sup>18</sup> Priorities were determined by reviewing the states’ Action Plans online (Oklahoma Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. 2006. <http://www.wildlifedepartment.com/CWCS.htm> AND New Mexico Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. 2006. [http://fws-nmcfwru.nmsu.edu/cwcs/New\\_Mexico\\_CWCS.htm](http://fws-nmcfwru.nmsu.edu/cwcs/New_Mexico_CWCS.htm)) and the National Fish Habitat Risk Assessment Viewer online (NBII and USGS. 2011. [http://fishhabitat.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=42&Itemid=61](http://fishhabitat.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=42&Itemid=61)).

## ISSUES

There are **activities and conditions** which may negatively affect the SGCN populations, rare communities, and the habitats on which they depend in this region. These issues can include **direct or indirect harm** (e.g. inappropriate mining reclamation which uses non-native vegetation or indirectly provides an opportunity for non-native invasive vegetation, streambed gravel mining that directly removes spawning habitat and/or indirectly creates poor water quality downstream) **plus basic “gaps” that prevent us from acting most effectively** (e.g. lack of information, lack of coordination to share current data, incompatible practices among land managers, lack of funding). For information about how this list was developed, see the Overview Handbook and the descriptions of the broad issue categories.<sup>19</sup>

**Habitat fragmentation and habitat loss, including open-space land conversion,** are always going to be broad issues that need to be addressed, at various scales – local, regional, statewide, interstate, and international. These are such broad categories and, depending on the scale of the problem, these three issues can be symptoms or causes of many other issues. These three issues are not specifically included in the Issues list, although they may be implied in many of the categories presented.

The issues covered in the SWTB Ecoregion Handbook in Table 5 attempt to present more of the specific causes of SGCN, rare communities, and habitats’ decline, providing appropriate context to help target our actions, identified later in this handbook. Several of the habitat types in this handbook are also considered priority habitats in the Statewide/Multi-region handbook.

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<sup>19</sup> TPWD. 2012. Texas Conservation Action Plan: Broad Issues Categories  
[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/broad\\_issues\\_categories.pdf](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/broad_issues_categories.pdf)

**Table 5. SWTB Priority Issues Affecting Conservation**

Table is formatted 11" x 17", landscape orientation

General Issue	Ecoregion Issue Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)	Description of Adverse Effects Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)
Invasive Species		
Non-native Plant	Salt cedar/tamarisk ( <i>Tamarix spp.</i> ) Cultivated and Old World grasses (e.g. Lehmann's lovegrass, King Ranch (KR) bluestem)	Salt cedar affects water use, monotypic stands, and outcompetes native riparian vegetation at all seral stages and canopy levels; salt cedar armor the banks and contribute significantly to channel incision and narrowing, which reduces the diversity and quality of habitat for aquatic species Non-native grasses as revegetated Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands, improved pastures or naturally expansive are a substantial threat to grassland-dependent species (e.g. grassland-obligate birds and pronghorn)
Non-native Animal	FERAL HOGS	Feral hogs decimate important and fragile habitats (e.g. springs, seeps, riparian areas, swale depressional wetlands, playas), degrade instream water quality
Native Problematic	Native shrub (e.g. mesquite, juniper) or "brush" encroachment into grassland systems; mesquite has displaced grasslands especially in areas with subsurface moisture White-tailed deer	Invasive native brush/trees are a significant threat to grassland-obligate birds as well as pronghorn: grassland loss decreases habitat availability and quality for grassland nesting birds, trees provide perches for hunting raptors which also decrease grassland bird, small mammal and reptile success; brush "spooks" pronghorn who need vast open spaces to feel safe from predators and brush-degraded grasslands are no longer suitable for pronghorn foraging. White-tailed deer are not harvested as sufficient levels to keep populations in balance with available habitat; many of these habitats are important to SGCN - oak shinnery, shrublands, riparian areas – which are overbrowsed
Pests, Parasites, Pathogens		
Parasites	<i>Haemonchus</i>	Pronghorn populations devastated by this parasite; thought to be a major contributing factor to the pronghorn decline across its range.
Pathogens	White-nose Syndrome (WNS)	WNS affects hibernating bats and is spread through human (we think) and bat vectors, through cave visitation. Mortality is high; prevention and overall cause is unknown. Also unknown – whether WNS is viable in non-cave environments (mines)
Power Development and Transmission		
Wind Generation	Competitive Renewable Energy Zones (CREZ): Panhandle A, Panhandle B, Central and Central West Turbine siting and operations	See also full discussion in Statewide Handbook. Entire Panhandle is a high potential wind energy area for Texas. High ridges in west Texas are highly desired dense sitings (wind "farms"), which intersect raptor migration corridors. Nocturnal migrating birds and bat mortality through collision with structures; barotrauma in bats and birds causes mortality during operations In this region, tall structures are a deterrent to Lesser Prairie Chicken and Pronghorn habitat use; structures present a threat to species which are adapted to open uninterrupted landscapes (grasslands, shrublands). From their perspective, tall structures provide a predator vantage point (hawks, eagles) and/or are simply a disruption to their normal viewshed. As with the oil and gas industry, the dense network of maintenance and access roads for wind facilities poses a threat to small mammals and reptiles, fragments grassland and shrubland habitats for all species dependent on these types, provides avenues for greater predator access along edges into the interior of these habitats. Lack of reclamation with native seed or plant sources contributes to invasive species problems on these and adjacent sites.
Solar or photovoltaic (PV) array siting	level or nearly level sites with high PV potential occur throughout the region	Array siting, with the network of maintenance and access roads, impacts shortgrass mesa and other open lowland grassland communities (direct loss and invasive species competition), blocks sun and rain needed for photosynthesis; solar development environmental considerations are voluntary; some may require large quantities of water
Hydro (Dam and Reservoir)	Unnatural hydrograph during generation periods – generation when water levels are low are not in sync with natural flood periods	see <b>Water Development, Management and Distribution</b>
Biofuels	Row Crop, Switchgrass, Herbaceous: native rangeland and open grasslands converted to croplands (monotypic stands of switchgrass and others)	Loss of native and open grassland birds' habitats for foraging, nesting, and shelter Additional irrigation need in the region which contributes to the groundwater management and allocation issues (see Groundwater below) Because these are not food crops, the application of fertilizer and pesticides is potentially a greater concern, especially adjacent to waterways (runoff and wastewater discharges can create unhealthy to intolerable water chemistry for SGCN) and wildlands (native insect fauna vulnerable, may favor invasive species)
Transmission	New development and expansion of existing lines/corridors	Broad, long, linear fragmentation of all habitat types. During route selection, environmental considerations are given secondary consideration to agricultural

General Issue	Ecoregion Issue Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)	Description of Adverse Effects Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)
	<p>construction of new power infrastructure corridors to meet urban user needs, from CREZ generation projects in this region to north and central TX loads</p> <p>maintenance and operations maintaining clear right-of-way for vehicle clearance/access, prevention of line and tower danger</p>	<p>and developed areas. Contributes to edge through interior habitats (grasslands, shrublands) in the same way that oil/gas pipelines and road networks for wind generation sites, causing potential for greater predator and invasive species access. Also not required to reclaim cleared areas with native seed or plant sources. May hinder daily or seasonal movements and behavior for species which avoid open areas or tall structures (e.g. Lesser Prairie Chicken and Pronghorn). Transmission lines can be strike hazards for Whooping Cranes and raptors during migration.</p>
Oil and Natural Gas Production and Delivery		
Seismic exploration	<p>surface and subsurface impacts - linear networked vegetation clearing and soil disturbance, vibration and "explosive" disturbance</p>	<p>habitat loss and fragmentation in arid lands that do not recover quickly</p> <p>vector for invasive species (plant) introductions from equipment and opportunistic colonization in wake of habitat clearing and no reclamation</p> <p>disruption of daily and seasonal activities for burrowing and surface ground animals (small mammals, reptiles, ground-foraging and ground-nesting birds) and adjacent aquatic species (fishes)</p>
Traditional extraction site development and operation, including pumping and pad sites, gathering stations, transmission/delivery facilities (distribution lines, roadways)	<p>Panhandle Field (Hartley, Potter, Moore, Hutchinson, Carson, Gray, Wheeler, and Collingsworth counties) is one of the largest oil and gas deposits in Texas; part of the Permian Basin "formation" that produces oil and gas throughout the Panhandle and West Texas.</p> <p>on-site spill potential</p> <p>salt water injection wells</p> <p>road networks</p>	<p>limited ground and surface waters and species which rely on these waters are highly sensitive to change/contamination, are at risk from chemical, drilling material, and oil spill runoff and groundwater contamination caused by drilling mud chemicals and salt water injection</p> <p>Widespread extraction operations: clearing, road networks, pad sites, and large mechanical infrastructure(s) which contribute to direct habitat loss, direct and indirect habitat fragmentation, direct mortality from vehicles and operations, and noise/light disturbance (e.g. sand dunes west of Odessa, dunes sagebrush lizard is threatened by these operations and road mortality; nocturnal migratory birds and bats can be adversely impacted by the light and noise pollution at night; road networks, constant traffic and noise, and mechanical infrastructure interrupts seasonal and daily movements, foraging and mating behaviors of some mammals, reptiles, and birds; small geographically limited populations of desert plants fragmented or lost).</p>
Hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") or "shale gas" extraction	<p><a href="http://www.energyindustryphotos.com/shale_gas_map_shale_basin_s.htm">http://www.energyindustryphotos.com/shale_gas_map_shale_basin_s.htm</a></p> <p>this ecoregion is underlain by a portion of the Woodford, Bend, Palo Duro, and Permian Basin shale gas deposits. These deposits are being developed as the technology is available and demand puts pressure for more domestic sources.</p> <p>Extraction requires a deeply injected chemical liquid which fractures substrates and releases gas for capture and delivery: potential groundwater risks, potential chemical spill risks, geologic destabilization</p>	<p>The Ogallala Aquifer and its surface connections are extremely important habitats and resources for wildlife and humans alike in this ecoregion; groundwater contamination could cause total loss of isolated aquatic populations, adversely affect vegetation that depends on water quantity and quality in riparian areas. Contamination also poses a risk to human and livestock water sources. Fracturing activities may also destabilize and adversely affect the capacity of porous geologic layers to recharge the underlying aquifers.</p>
Lack of Reclamation	<p>reclamation standards vary, requirements limited</p> <p>unmonitored/unregulated decay of obsolete production sites - toxic chemicals in soils and leftover equipment, decaying equipment</p>	<p>Reclamation not required back to native vegetation (invasive species allowed to colonize or are directly planted for soil stabilization)</p> <p>Equipment leaking fluids and unremediated spills contribute to surface and groundwater contamination</p>
Mining		
Sand and Gravel - upland and riverine	<p>sand and gravel mining along and within streams and rivers</p>	<p>loss of riparian habitats</p> <p>sedimentation in streams contributes to loss and degradation of instream habitats</p>
Communications Infrastructure		
Cell and other communication towers	<p>towers need to be limited in height and lit to minimize bird strikes (bird-friendly)</p>	<p>Species impacted by towers include all nocturnal migrants including Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Painted Bunting, Summer Tanager, and other species. In rare instances kills totalling thousands of Longspurs have been found around towers.</p>
Transportation		

General Issue	Ecoregion Issue Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)	Description of Adverse Effects Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)
road and bridge construction (new)	<p>In this region, primarily bridge construction location (through remaining native habitats) and type (incompatible with wildlife crossing or bat roosting) are the concern</p> <p>Additional impacts occur where larger transportation facilities have been built which do not accommodate wildlife passages or provide stormwater pollution prevent controls (capture and “clean” runoff prior to discharge to waterways)</p>	<p>directly takes habitat and species during construction (loss), primarily concern with riparian loss</p> <p>degrades adjacent habitat – creates edge, long linear disruption, pollution from runoff into creeks and streams</p> <p>may hinder movement (daily or seasonal) – barrier to wildlife and stream passages</p> <p>Right of Way (ROW) restoration following construction is not native from native seed or plant sources</p>
right of way maintenance	maintaining clear right-of-way for vehicle clearance/access, minimizing fire danger, and maintaining driver visibility	<p>Mowing schedule not in sync with natural regeneration of native grasses (where they occur)</p> <p>herbicide application – runoff and/or overspray into wildland habitats</p>
Land & Water Mgmt: FARM	See also Water Development section	
Lack of soil and water management and conservation practices	<p>chemical-laden irrigation water runoff</p> <p>conversion</p> <p>unsustainable irrigation</p> <p>See also <i>Surface Water Planning and Distribution</i> and <i>Groundwater Planning and Distribution</i> in sections below</p>	<p>Contaminated runoff adversely impacts water features and sensitive aquatic insects and other invertebrates, fishes, and amphibians in all stream courses, playas, springs, groundwater, and all wetland types</p> <p>Playas, while not common in this ecoregion, are a very rare Panhandle habitat. Playa conversion to agricultural land removes this important habitat from the system and usually the conversion is irreversible (or more expensive to reverse) if the underlying substrate is “punctured” during plowing/tilling practices.</p> <p>Surface and groundwater resources used for agricultural irrigation; surface and groundwater management of all types lacks a full accounting of the withdrawals from these sources and does not sufficiently consider fish and wildlife needs in water planning processes</p>
Land & Water Mgmt: RANCH	See also Water Development section	
Incompatible stocking practices	<p>In some areas, working lands are still recovering from historic uses, out-of-date stocking and grazing practices (prior to soil, native vegetation, and water conservation knowledge we have today)</p> <p>historic and/or current range-intensive livestock operations out of sync with land capacity</p> <p>Insufficient harvest of white-tailed deer</p>	<p>In some areas, working lands are still recovering from historic uses, out-of-date stocking and grazing practices (prior to soil, native vegetation, and water conservation knowledge we have today)</p> <p>Area needs more wildlife-compatible grazing and stocking rates to recover native grasslands</p> <p>Area needs more white-tailed deer harvested to recover native shrublands and native grasslands</p>
Landowner/land management incentive programs working at cross-purposes	<p>Conservation Reserve Program, other Farm Bill Conservation Title incentives, Farm Bureau and Farm Service Agency programs, and technical guidance on wildlife issues from private individuals as well as TPWD resource specialists may work at crosspurposes</p> <p>inappropriate herbicide application for mesquite control</p>	<p>Native grasslands and shrublands are key habitats in this ecoregion; land management and restoration assistance in this region typically centers on brush removal and grass planting. Unfortunately, brush removal is not always appropriately recommended (sites may be too steep, highly erodible, not enough cover remaining to retain ground, or shrubs may be the desired ecological condition for that site) and nonnative grasses may be recommended for reseeding, farmland to pasture conversion, and even “restoration.” Additionally, certain herbicides recommended may not be appropriate for all sites and may cause more harm to aquatic surface and groundwater resources than benefits to terrestrial systems.</p>
Landowner/land management incentive programs working at cross-purposes	<p>single-objective management such as all-game, all-livestock, all-recreation</p> <p>Landowners do not have a one-stop shop to choose best management practices for their site, for their goals; and, occasionally, the incentive programs, technical guidance, and management assistance “menu” is limited typically by the perception that landowners are interested primarily in livestock production and are not open to other beneficial management practices for nongamepractices for their site, for their goals</p> <p>Some programs are being phased out or limited due to lack of enrollment or inability to keep up with market forces</p>	<p>Some sites would benefit from multi-species/habitat approach, but will depend on landowner objectives</p> <p>Incentive programs for private landowners need a suite of best management practices specific to the ecoregion to benefit all fish and wildlife species and reasonably support longterm sustainable livestock production or other landowner objectives (hunting, recreation); coordinated technical guidance resources need to be available to all practitioners.</p>

General Issue	Ecoregion Issue Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)	Description of Adverse Effects Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)
Fencing	netwire fencing high game fencing	Netwire fencing and most "game" fencing fragments pronghorn daily and seasonal movements, restricts their access to water and food, and increases their vulnerability to predation; their movements are interrupted by fences under which they cannot crawl (they do not jump fences). Issue causes lack of genetic diversity through inbreeding, lack of dispersal into available appropriate habitats, and potentially concentrates pathogens ( <i>Haemonchus</i> ) High game fencing also adversely impacts many species of native game and non-game wildlife by limiting genetic flow, availability to access food and water across the landscape (different habitats provide different services at different seasons); management within these facilities must be careful and intense, and can concentrate an onerous financial burden on a private landowner for management of a public resource; depending on the size of the facility and the resources of the landowner, this is not a sustainable practice
Clearing and loss of important natural sites/habitats	Springs, wet swales, playas and riparian zones altered for stock uses	Loss of natural spring, wet swale, and playa habitats for aquatic species, waterfowl, migrating Whooping Cranes, and grassland species (in naturally dry periods, playas are grassland habitats), loss of riparian zones critical for water quality and quantity protection, water temperature maintenance, and riparian dependent species; loss of water, trampling, and poor water quality from fecal-infused runoff changes vegetation community in these areas
Lack of soil management and conservation practices	<b>inappropriate herbicide application (Spike)</b> lack of soil conservation (vegetation conservation/restoration) along stream courses and on grazing lands, soil erosion	<b>is this in the right place – what category better??</b> Hydrology and streamside vegetation are altered, soil and vegetation is lost in upland areas, water quality is degraded through sediment-laden runoff; dealing with historical and contemporary issues, need, in some instances, different approaches for recovery/restoration
Fire suppression and lack of or inappropriate application of Rx fire	reduced or no efficacy of applied fire - scale of application does not match ecological need Prescription is not always written for longterm applications – how often, what season, how to mimic natural <i>cycles</i> not just single <i>episode</i>	The lack of fire, excessive grazing during drought, and invasive plant species have impacted natural grassland habitats, which could be restored by prescribed fire if applied at a scale, period, and frequency that mimics historically natural fires. Small scale application is insufficient to prevent reinfestation from adjacent lands. Too frequent or too intense application can shift the vegetation community and may cause some species to drop out if the fire is not applied in the season, intensity and timing that natural fires would have occurred.
Trapping, poisoning programs	Gassing, poisoning and flushing rattlesnake dens or prairie dog towns frequently has significant adverse effects on non-target species Trapping programs are indiscriminate and impact several mammal species (skunks, swift fox, badger)	Invertebrates, amphibians and reptiles, small mammals, and some birds (e.g. burrowing owl) are adversely affected directly by the actions, but also over the longterm there are potential impacts to groundwater resources
<b>Land &amp; Water Mgmt: Conservation &amp; Recreation</b>		
Fire suppression and lack of or inappropriate application of Rx fire	reduced or no efficacy of applied fire - scale of application does not match ecological need Prescription is not always written for longterm applications – how often, what season, how to mimic natural <i>cycles</i> not just single <i>episode</i>	The lack of fire, excessive grazing during drought, and invasive plant species have impacted natural grassland habitats, which could be restored by prescribed fire if applied at a scale, period, and frequency that mimics historically natural fires. Small scale application is insufficient to prevent reinfestation from adjacent lands. Too frequent or too intense application can shift the vegetation community and may cause some species to drop out if the fire is not applied in the season, intensity and timing that natural fires would have occurred.
Inadequate/Inappropriate Management	Inappropriate stocking rates to recover or maintain natural communities for fish and wildlife resources on public lands	If the primary purpose, according to an agency's or organization's mission, is natural resources management or conservation, then livestock <i>production</i> should be considered secondary to the complete recovery and sustainability of natural habitats for SGCN fish and wildlife resources. If stocked, then stocking rate should mimic some missing species' (e.g. bison) movement/activity or should act as a surrogate <i>process</i> (e.g. replacing fire with grazing or browsing animals)
Inappropriate Recreational Uses	ORV use in sensitive areas (stream beds/riparian areas, steep breaks) Trail placement and maintenance	ORV use on private and public sites (whether legitimate or trespass) on highly erodable soils, steep slopes, riparian areas and streambeds can degrade or remove habitat suitability for species in certain niches. Ecologists need to work with ORV community to find suitable sites. While most public lands in this region are managed for recreation compatible with wildlife and fisheries resources, some improvements could be made to trails and recreation facilities to prevent soil erosion, vegetation (especially stream and canyon adjacent) loss, and water quality impacts.
Lack of connectivity between public lands managed for conservation	Habitat connectivity is important for many of the SGCN in this region – wide-ranging and migratory species in particular	Connectivity does not have to be directly adjacent lands managed by one entity, but could include grassland and shrubland “stepping stones”, riparian corridors, and/or voluntary longterm or perpetual participation in management strategies to benefit SGCN between/among public lands in the region.
<b>Water Development, Management and Distribution</b>		
	SEE ALSO STATEWIDE HANDBOOK	

General Issue	Ecoregion Issue Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)	Description of Adverse Effects Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)
Surface Water Planning	<p>Natural resources not well-defined or required as a "constraint" in Regional Water Planning (RWP) processes; natural resource professionals are not consistently involved in RWP processes</p> <p>Agricultural uses are the primary driving force in surface and groundwater planning</p> <p>Overallocation and dewatering of region's principle rivers; rivers are not wholly contained with in Texas jurisdiction/management (headwaters of the region's mainstem rivers lie in New Mexico)</p>	<p>Surface water "accounting" and allocation processes do not provide sufficient protection for fish and wildlife resources' (especially state-listed threatened or endangered) instream and riparian needs</p> <p>See also <b>Reservoir Construction and Operation</b> below</p>
Reservoir Construction and Operation	<p>Timing/Periodicity/Intensity of Water Releases releases are unnaturally intense and short duration, out of season, and do not mimic natural flooding processes</p> <p>Releases from dams typically do not have the same water chemistry from behind the dam into the stream below; aquatic life cannot tolerate extreme shifts in oxygen, temperature, or salinity.</p>	<p>Unnatural hydrograph scours instream and stream-adjacent habitats, shifts vegetation communities out of sync with other riparian communities where flooding is more "natural", vegetation communities and instream animal (invert, fishes, etc.) cannot "rely" on the seasonal changes under which they evolved. Changes to water amount and chemistry no longer support a full complement of the aquatic system's species or habitats. Riparian habitats also disappear, become more vulnerable to non-native vegetation invasion, and/or shift to a different vegetation community more tolerant of the new water availability and quality (which may or may not be suitable for riparian-dependent species).</p>
Groundwater Planning and Distribution	<p>Not all aquifers have groundwater districts; groundwater districts are political subdivisions, not aligned necessarily with aquifer boundaries</p> <p>Ogallala resources are used by many states and decisions are made by many managing entitie</p> <p>Extraction: groundwater pumping without full accounting for natural resources as a "use"</p>	<p>Inconsistency in districting across the landscape creates conflict and natural resources do not fare well.</p> <p>Subirrigated terrestrial habitats (like riparian areas, some wetlands) and instream aquatic habitats which rely on springflow are adversely affected by insufficient water (pumping lowers water table below surface expression) and changes in instream water conditions such as temperature, oxygen availability, and other nutrient and chemical factors (such as the age of water source that comes from the aquifer) can reduce or eliminate habitats which rely on at least seasonally available water and certain water chemistry parameters</p>
Other Water Source Developments and Technologies	Interbasin Transfers (Surface and Groundwater)	This is addressed at the statewide level
	Desalination and Chloride Removal Operations	This is an issue in the Brazos River basin: dewatering surface flows , extract salts/chlorides and discharge disposal brine back to stream – intense shifts in water chemistry out of tolerance levels for many aquatic organisms and riparian vegetation.
Lack of Information & Resources	One response stated this is an issue, but did not provide additional information	
Lack of Data/Information	<p>SGCN bird <i>population</i> trend data for riparian and shrub ecosystems</p> <p>Texas Kangaroo Rat distribution information, quality of habitat</p> <p>Shin oak landcover groundtruthing; most is classified as mesquite</p> <p>Lesser Prairie Chicken lek distribution and quality (habitat suitability within and adjacent to the lek) and success by lek</p> <p>Lack of information on the population/distribution/etc on numerous SGCNs, especially small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects in this region</p> <p>GIS analysis of land conversion and change overtime – available opportunities for conservation corridors and focus</p> <p>Climate Change predictive model for habitat impacts affecting SGCN, especially reptiles, amphibians, migratory birds</p> <p>See also Climate Change section in Statewide handbook</p>	<p>Lack of access to private lands, lack of funding for surveys and monitoring on public land, and lack of complete vegetation coverage mapping and association with SGCN prevents a complete understanding of just how rare or not rare a species may be, and limits cooperative stewardship and best management practices.</p> <p>Species-specific monitoring needs: all breeding birds of riparian and shrubland ecosystems</p> <p>Lack of downscaled climate models prohibit conservation practitioners from planning for eventual needs, building resiliency in key areas now</p>
Perceived Management Need	Predator control without biological standards or supporting	It is unknown whether predator control activities are affecting the stability of SGCN populations or their contribution to natural system function. Predator control efforts cannot be declared "insufficiently regulated" or "underreported" as limited information is available to assess the stability of these populations.

General Issue	Ecoregion Issue Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)	Description of Adverse Effects Identified in Workshops (2010) and Surveys (2011)
without Data	management	Community-based solutions need to be devised based on a full and accurate accounting of these populations and their effects on the natural systems and ranching communities in which they range. Predator trapping and/or baiting has an adverse effect on non-target species such as smaller mammals skunks, foxes
Lack of Processing <i>Existing Data</i>	Where census, survey, records and collections are documented, little is done with the data to detect trends and causes for upward or downward shifts. Without this information, it is difficult to focus or prioritize management objectives or share information with private landowners about the importance of some sites, populations or communities. Sharing this information with landowners is crucial as most of Texas is privately owned and conservation must occur with their stewardship help.	Texas Kangaroo Rat habitat and distribution data from past collection efforts PLJV data specific to Texas to assist in habitat and population management goals Prairie dog town census according to protocols needs analysis, would contribute to information needs for other species as well (black-footed ferret, burrowing owl)
	Inadequate understanding of available or widely-accepted conservation Best Management Practices	Inconsistent presentation or application or understanding of Best Management Practices for riparian conservation, grassland restoration, and prescribed fire application are detrimental to the coordinated partnerships that advise landowners in this region.
Inadequate Policies, Rules, Enforcement		
	Loss of and impact to "non-jurisdictional" wetlands and other waters	Playas and other wetlands have no protection from agricultural conversion, fill and loss to other development, and/or surface water runoff impacts
Other Cross-Cutting Issues		
Lack of Conservation Funding	See Statewide Handbook	
Climate Change	speciesClimate Change predictive model for <i>habitat impacts</i> affecting SGCN, especially reptiles, amphibians, migratory birds highly localized and intrinsically rare species will have few options to adapt as habitats shift, change, or disappear with climate change in this region; options for transplanting or translocation are few to none as many of these habitats are edaphically specialized in the region.	See Statewide Handbook also isolated habitats are more at risk than others: playas, wetlands, grassland fragments, caprock and other "island" outcroppings Other arid-land wetland and water-dependent features such as riparian and instream habitats Invasive
Economics	Working Lands	Landowner incentives cannot compete currently with market forces to encourage more longterm conservation practices; market forces in some areas cannot support continued agricultural or ranch ownership

## CONSERVATION ACTIONS

*“Like the resource it seeks to protect, wildlife conservation must be dynamic, changing as conditions change, seeking always to become more effective.” – Rachel Carson*

*“Like the resource it seeks to protect, wildlife conservation must be dynamic, changing as conditions change, seeking always to become more effective.” – Rachel Carson*

To make conservation progress, we need to work with the information we have, document our progress, share lessons learned, and adapt our approach when necessary. Conservation actions in this handbook are aimed at reducing the negative effects of issues that affect SGCN, rare communities and their habitats at various scales. Broad actions categories are defined to help organize handbooks. For information about how the Actions framework was developed and for definitions of Action categories, see the *Overview Handbook*.<sup>20</sup>

Actions proposed for SWTB ecoregion (Table 6) state what we need to work on, where, and why (what problem we can solve with that action). Actions lay out how that work contributes to a specific desired effect –progress and success.

It is important to acknowledge that one conservation action typically does not solve one conservation problem. There may be several actions employed over time to achieve a conservation goal. In some instances, defining the conservation goal *is* the action – for some things, we don’t yet know enough to define what successful conservation looks like for that SGCN population, rare community, or habitat.

It has become increasingly important to determine if the work we do is actually leading to the overall conservation outcomes we desire – **restoration, recovery, sustainability, and resiliency**. As conservation practitioners, we can use milestones (or intermediate results) and reporting to communicate our progress and leverage future conservation action, partnerships, policy changes, and funding.

From project inception, well-crafted monitoring and evaluation (cost effective, answers key questions) informs management and allows conservation practitioners to “course-correct” as necessary for effective conservation.<sup>21</sup> With the need for Action Plans to take advantage of several “pots of conservation money,” the people we serve and those who govern private and public conservation funds demand reporting, transparency, and *demonstration* that projects are *positively impacting the conservation of species and habitats*. To get beyond reporting that money was spent and projects were done, AFWA TWW convened a committee in 2009 to craft “effectiveness measures” for the conservation actions across all Plans. A toolkit for classifying and measuring conservation action effectiveness was produced in 2011, approved by AFWA TWW Executive Committee comprised of state

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<sup>20</sup> TPWD. 2011. Texas Conservation Action Plan: Broad Action Category Definitions.

[http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/action\\_categories\\_tcap\\_2011.pdf](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/landwater/land/tcap/documents/action_categories_tcap_2011.pdf)

The category “*Data Collection, Analysis, and Management*” meets Action Plan Required Element 3 – “priority research and survey”. Many of the proposed actions include a monitoring component (Action Plan Required Element 5) and all actions are encouraged to follow the Effectiveness Measures to assist with adaptive management.

<sup>21</sup> Conservation Measures Partnership. 2010. [http://www.conservationmeasures.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/CMP\\_Open\\_Standards\\_Version\\_2.0.pdf](http://www.conservationmeasures.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/CMP_Open_Standards_Version_2.0.pdf)

Salzer, D. and N. Salafsky. 2006. Allocating resources between taking action, assessing status, and measuring effectiveness of conservation actions. *Natural Areas Journal* 26(3): 310-316.

fish and wildlife agency directors and others.<sup>22</sup> These measures will be an important part of moving the plans and conservation forward.

With this revision, the TCAP becomes more involved in a national movement to track conservation actions and progress across local, state, regional and national levels. As with the 2005 Plan, actions presented in this edition vary in detail, scale, and duration; however, this edition encourages the use of the incremental measures of success for conservation projects' development, implementation, and tracking. To that end, the toolkit in *Measuring the Effectiveness of State Wildlife Grants*<sup>23</sup> is **strongly recommended** to define conservation projects, target audiences and partners, identify desired step-wise intermediate results, and collect the “right” data to report our conservation achievements.

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<sup>22</sup> Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Teaming with Wildlife. Measuring the Effectiveness of State Wildlife Grants (conservation actions). 2011. <http://www.fishwildlife.org/files/TWW-Effectiveness-Measures-FULL-Report-Appendices.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Same as above

**Table 6. SWTB Conservation Actions**

Note: Table is formatted 11" x 17", landscape orientation – SEE ALL OF THE EFFECTIVENESS MEASURES FOR EACH OF THE OVERALL ACTIONS TO ESTABLISH FINER DETAIL IN PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Conservation Action
Invasive Species
Begin a coordinated approach with regional conservation service providers, regional Texas Master Naturalist chapters, and local volunteer groups in watersheds which have high ecological significance (see Habitat Table, Riverine Habitats) for invasive riparian species (e.g. Tamarisk) removal through targeted landowner incentive programs and priority activities on public lands; document progress with an ecoregional invasive species management team and spatially-explicit website to track the progress of eradication – success and failures, to modify approaches as needed.
Prioritize landowner incentives for restoration of native grasslands, including conversion of non-native grasses to native, where feasible and where landowner can commit to longterm conversion practices and success. Promote the use of site-appropriate native grasses only in landowner incentive programs for livestock or wildlife recommendations.
Encourage site-appropriate invasive native brush removal with least ecological collateral damage to promote healthy native grasslands for grassland-obligate birds, shortgrass prairie species such as burrowing owl and black-tailed prairie dog, and pronghorn; monitor before and after to determine benefits to target species. Promote understanding and appreciation of native shrublands where these vegetation types are the desired ecological condition. Incentivize conservation of brush in appropriate areas for SGCN.
Pests, Parasites, Pathogens
Sample and monitor <i>Haemonchus</i> distribution in pronghorn populations and determine source of vulnerabilities, spread, and avenues for containment and recovery if needed.
Power Development and Transmission
Encourage voluntary compliance with the USFWS Wind Power Development Guidelines and coordination with TPWD’s Habitat Assessment section for environmental review of impacts, potential avoidance strategies, and mitigation opportunities for highest ecological value.
Map sensitive sites within well-identified migratory pathways for hawks and other raptors, neotropical migrants, and waterfowl in addition to lesser prairie chicken leks, prairie dog colonies and pronghorn herds potentially impacted by wind tower siting and operations. Provide this information to TPWD Habitat Assessment section so that they can better assess wind tower and operational impacts, propose avoidance and mitigation measures. Support the development of an online mapper for developers to use to avoid areas of highest ecological significance.
Provide conservation outreach to power developers and providers, especially those interested in solar, algal farms and biofuels, to inform them of the importance of native grasslands to regional wildlife and fish resources, areas of highest significance for avoidance, and potential areas to concentrate mitigation dollars and projects in the event avoidance is not feasible or prudent.
Document and publish timing (periodicity, seasonality, frequency) and intensity of barotrauma impacts to regional SGCN migratory and residential birds and bats from wind turbines; share this information with existing and developing wind operations managers, encourage wind generation companies to modify practices to avoid or minimize impacts. Study avoidance and minimization based on practices’ modifications and publish results. Adjust management and development recommendations as needed for best practices.
Oil and Natural Gas Production and Delivery
Identify key overlap areas between oil and gas production, including fracking and shale gas plays, with listed, proposed listed, candidate and very rare (imperiled G1S1 – G2S2) species to identify data gaps (surveys needed), conservation needs (monitoring, avoidance, protection, planning) to help prioritize where limited resources can be most useful in preventing the need to list and/or promoting recovery.
Continue to work with the oil and gas industry to find creative avoidance, minimization and mitigation solutions to industry impacts to listed species while addressing <i>indirect and cumulative potential effects</i> . Small fossorial and limited range mammals and reptiles and rare plants are most potentially affected. Review recovery potential of listed species and find intersections for cooperation, high-conservation-value mitigation, and incentives. For non-listed, candidate species potentially affected by this industry, review thresholds and concentrate on Candidate Conservation Agreements and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances incentives for private landowners to prevent listing, where possible.
Communications Infrastructure
Provide conservation outreach to regional communications providers to inform them of areas of highest significance for avoidance – migratory bird pathways (especially nocturnal; also known impacted species such as Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Painted Bunting, Summer Tanager), adjacency to pronghorn herd patterns -- and potential areas to concentrate mitigation dollars and projects in the event avoidance is not feasible or prudent. Identify non-compliant communications towers work collaboratively to bring into compliance (lighting, height); outreach to communications companies about the local hazards of communication towers and recommendations to improve practice to improve conditions for all
Land & Water Mgmt: FARM
Use appropriate NRCS Farm Bill, USFWS Partners, Playa Lakes Joint Venture and other technical guidance and grant programs to incentivize landowners to permanently protect and restore wetlands with ecologically-determined native buffers to slow or halt sedimentation; fence where appropriate to protect sites from ORV use; map these important conservation efforts as part of a monitoring program. These same programs can be used for NATIVE grassland restoration to benefit most SGCN in this region. Use the direct management (stewardship) effectiveness measures to track progress of these important conservation actions.
Land & Water Mgmt: RANCH

Conservation Action
Use appropriate NRCS Farm Bill, USFWS Partners, and other grant programs to incentivize landowners to permanently protect and restore grasslands and be sensitive to brushlands where they are the desired ecological condition supporting a natural mosaic of habitats
Host local and absentee landowner workshop series related to SGCN and habitat “target areas” (see Effectiveness Measures for training and technical guidance), add a focus module on conservation instruments – Safe Harbor Agreements, Candidate Conservation Agreements, conservation easements – to dispel myths about regulatory constraints and promote benefits in preventing the need to list and promoting recovery. Showcase specific studies and examples from the region (or adjacent ecoregions) for better relationship building. Document through conservation practice and partner surveys over the course of three to five years whether the workshops increase opportunities for these tools to be used and the SPECIFIC barriers to their use. Share lessons learned in an annual conference through the Land Trust community.
Conservation easements and landowner incentive programs are the best instruments to encourage private landowner participation in conservation practices in this region. Landowners with intact priority habitats, priority habitats which could be restored for minimal investment, willing to change to pronghorn- and/or lesser prairie chicken-sensitive fencing, riparian corridors along Ecologically Significant Stream Segments (and to their headwaters), and/or saline or freshwater wetlands should be first-eligible. Monitoring of key SGCN must be a part of these projects. Use effectiveness measures for conservation easements and direct management (stewardship). Information about methods, short and longterm success (or failure) need to be shared through conservation networks and publications.
<p>Implement relevant sections of Playa Lakes Joint Venture Bird Conservation Region 19 Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convert 744,516 acres of cropland to CRP or CRP-like habitat (<b>Cassin’s and Grasshopper Sparrow</b>); new acres should be planted to native grasses with forbs (<b>Lesser Prairie-Chicken</b>)</li> <li>• Manage 19,115 acres of shinnery so it contributes to large blocks of habitat by targeted placement of CRP-like habitat (<b>Lesser Prairie-Chicken</b>)</li> <li>• Convert 1,000,000 acres of Juniper to mixed grass prairie (<b>Swainson’s Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike</b>)</li> <li>• Convert 3,708,500 acres of Mesquite/Juniper habitat to mixed grass prairie (<b>grassland birds</b>)</li> <li>• Manage 6,581,113 acres of mixed grass with few shrubs (1-3% cover) (<b>grassland birds</b>)</li> <li>• Convert 3,162,817 acres of current mesquite shrubland to savannah (<b>Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Lark Sparrow</b>)</li> <li>• Increase large native cottonwoods in urban/suburban areas by 137,060 acres (<b>Mississippi Kite</b>)</li> <li>• Increase late successional riparian forest by 234,923 acres (<b>Mississippi Kite</b>)</li> <li>• Increase native riparian shrubland, especially along the Canadian and Red Rivers, by 174,983 acres (<b>Bell’s Vireo</b>)</li> <li>• Manage 28,424 acres of shortgrass prairie for few shrubs and high grass, within the northern third of the Area (<b>Lark Bunting</b>)</li> <li>• Restore and employ moist-soil management practices on 36,704 acres of wetlands (<b>waterfowl</b>)</li> </ul> <p>Other important actions to preserve the function of existing habitats (e.g., buffering wetlands) also are needed. These recommendations are intended for implementation over a 30-year timeframe (2007-2037).</p>
Land & Water Mgmt: Municipal
<p>Implement relevant sections of Playa Lakes Joint Venture Bird Conservation Region 19 Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase large native cottonwoods in urban/suburban areas by 137,060 acres (<b>Mississippi Kite</b>)</li> </ul>
Work with private landowners and conservation partners to minimize feral hog populations through aerial shooting, hunting, and trapping. Provide technical guidance and educational programs about the impact and management of feral hogs to benefit ground nesting birds, small mammals, aquatic species
Determine market values that are driving agricultural and livestock production, hunting and other recreation, and land sales in this region. Craft a recommendation to landowner incentive program providers that can be used to index conservation practice incentives in ecoregions. Monitor whether this approach was effective to change the conservation program values AND landowner participation in those programs before & after the change.
Land & Water Mgmt: Conservation & Recreation
Use a Decision Support System, Texas Ecological Systems Mapping Project data and Texas Natural Diversity Database information to craft a priority areas map to focus outreach and incentive programs to private landowners and maximize benefits to priority habitats and SGCN, connectivity among conservation lands, and functional riparian zones and migration routes
<p>Implement relevant sections of Playa Lakes Joint Venture Bird Conservation Region 19 Recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convert 744,516 acres of cropland to CRP or CRP-like habitat (<b>Cassin’s and Grasshopper Sparrow</b>); new acres should be planted to native grasses with forbs (<b>Lesser Prairie-Chicken</b>)</li> <li>• Manage 19,115 acres of shinnery so it contributes to large blocks of habitat by targeted placement of CRP-like habitat (<b>Lesser Prairie-Chicken</b>)</li> <li>• Convert 1,000,000 acres of Juniper to mixed grass prairie (<b>Swainson’s Hawk, Loggerhead Shrike</b>)</li> <li>• Convert 3,708,500 acres of Mesquite/Juniper habitat to mixed grass prairie (<b>grassland birds</b>)</li> <li>• Manage 6,581,113 acres of mixed grass with few shrubs (1-3% cover) (<b>grassland birds</b>)</li> <li>• Convert 3,162,817 acres of current mesquite shrubland to savannah (<b>Scissor-tailed Flycatcher, Lark Sparrow</b>)</li> <li>• Increase large native cottonwoods in urban/suburban areas by 137,060 acres (<b>Mississippi Kite</b>)</li> <li>• Increase late successional riparian forest by 234,923 acres (<b>Mississippi Kite</b>)</li> <li>• Increase native riparian shrubland, especially along the Canadian and Red Rivers, by 174,983 acres (<b>Bell’s Vireo</b>)</li> </ul>

Conservation Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage 28,424 acres of shortgrass prairie for few shrubs and high grass, within the northern third of the Area (<b>Lark Bunting</b>)</li> <li>• Restore and employ moist-soil management practices on 36,704 acres of wetlands (<b>waterfowl</b>)</li> </ul> <p>Other important actions to preserve the function of existing habitats (e.g., buffering wetlands) also are needed. These recommendations are intended for implementation over a 30-year timeframe (2007-2037).</p>
Work with willing landowners <i>especially adjacent to and in corridors between</i> well-managed public lands to restore and manage grassland and riparian communities in large single-ownership or smaller acreage cooperatives – opportunities to connect/improve historically fragmented management
River rehabilitation in/adjacent to identified stretches of the Canadian, Red and Brazos River: recommendations for instream flow, quality and intensity management; riparian restoration; and specific work to increase resiliency to climate change; work with adjacent ecoregions as needed. Use effectiveness measures for direct management and restoration.
<p>Species Restoration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pronghorn populations (not just individuals) coincidental with habitat improvement, fence replacement, restocking, parasite research and plan to deal with this problem, genetic enhancement</li> <li>▪ Lesser Prairie Chicken in resilient, redundant populations working with adjacent states (Lesser Prairie Chicken Working Group)</li> <li>▪ Black-tailed prairie dog – burrowing owl – black-footed ferret ecosystems: introductions, habitat improvement, management recommendations for compatible land uses</li> </ul>
Identify key areas to promote netwire fencing replacement (with strand barbed wire) for pronghorn benefits. Monitor pronghorn use of these areas to determine if this fencing program is an effective conservation technique or whether it should be coupled with other strategies (what other strategies)
ORV use is on the rise in this ecoregion and users need assistance to find suitable sites which do the least ecological harm so that the adverse impacts from ORV use in this region can be minimized or avoided. Ecologists need to identify sites where this may be possible, explore opportunities with the ORV community to assess their needs, and work with private landowners to incentivize access on appropriate areas.
Work with private landowners and conservation partners to minimize feral hog populations through aerial shooting, hunting, and trapping. Provide technical guidance and educational programs about the impact and management of feral hogs to benefit ground nesting birds, small mammals, aquatic species
Water Development, Management and Distribution
River rehabilitation in/adjacent to identified stretches of the Canadian, Red and Brazos River to support recommendations for instream flow, quality and intensity management; riparian restoration; and specific work to increase resiliency to climate change; work with adjacent ecoregions
Form a local ecologists' working group to evaluate environmental water flow and TMDL recommendations and craft/deliver specific environmental water flow recommendations and rationale that connect ground and surface water issues for the Regional Water Planning Groups (surface waters: <a href="http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/wrpi/rwp/rwp.asp">http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/wrpi/rwp/rwp.asp</a> ), Groundwater Conservation Districts and Groundwater Management Areas ( <a href="http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/gwrp/pages/gwrpindex.html">http://www.twdb.state.tx.us/gwrp/pages/gwrpindex.html</a> )
Determine effects of dechlorination and desalination on regional waterways, groundwater and terrestrial habitats. Publish findings and management recommendations to protect specific SGCN, if relevant.
Lack of Information & Resources
Form multi-partner working group(s) to establish scientifically sound best management practices for <b>prescribed fire application</b> for the ecoregion (timing/season, period/duration, intensity, parameters for RX, how often to mimic natural fire occurrences) for the restoration of SGCN-specific habitats (longterm health and sustainability of desired ecological conditions); work with Rx fire technical experts, SGCN and rare communities experts to identify concerns, barriers, and solutions. Identify a suite of key species to monitor post-burn to determine effectiveness of the applied practices
Form multi-partner working group(s) to establish scientifically sound best management practices for <b>chemical/mechanical brush control</b> for the ecoregion and specific watersheds (slope, aspect, soils, targets, methods, rates, proximity to water features) for the restoration of SGCN-specific habitats (longterm health and sustainability of desired ecological conditions); work with Rx fire technical experts, SGCN and rare communities experts to identify concerns, barriers, and solutions. Identify a suite of key species to monitor post-burn to determine effectiveness of the applied practices
Form multi-partner working group(s) to establish scientifically sound best management practices for <b>native riparian restoration</b> , including timing, water needs, reasonable recommendations for initial planting diversity, ways to encourage full complement of desired ecological condition of community, how to prevent or control specific invasives without negatively impacting restoration, locally sourced seed and plant materials for the ecoregion (and finer scales if needed) for the restoration of SGCN-specific habitats (longterm health and sustainability of desired ecological conditions); work with Rx fire technical experts, SGCN and rare communities experts to identify concerns, barriers, and solutions. Identify a suite of key species to monitor post-burn to determine effectiveness of the applied practices

Conservation Action
<p>Create a multi-disciplinary ecology committee to identify three to five years of highest priority research projects (actual projects, not just concepts) that can be rolled out to universities and colleges to collect the information most needed at the PRACTICAL level for management and conservation improvement on the ground. Some priorities mentioned in this plan development include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mapping the most invasive species in the region, to determine priority areas for control and restoration</li> <li>▪ Mapping intact native shrublands and riparian corridors, in addition to suitable high priority sites for protection and restoration through landowner incentives to benefit SGCN</li> <li>▪ Distribution, status and trend needs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Texas Kangaroo Rat</li> <li>○ Grassland and Riparian Breeding and Wintering SGCN Birds</li> <li>○ Pronghorn</li> <li>○ Wetland Dependent Species including SGCN invertebrates</li> <li>○ Riparian Species and Communities</li> </ul> </li> <li>• LPC aerial surveys for trend in lek density</li> <li>• Updates to NatureServe’s “playa” definitions to accurately describe Texas playa communities (see Priority Habitats – Special Note section)</li> <li>• Specific levels of impact of groundwater withdrawals on aquatic habitats that support SGCN</li> </ul>
<p>Many SGCN which are not federally listed lack distribution and population status information. This lack of information can contribute to “false rarity” determinations; more information and cooperation from private landowners may reduce the risk of listing, enhance recovery options, and contribute to conservation of many sensitive habitats just through awareness and documentation. An effort should be made to collect information and deposit it into the TXNDD to help document species population status.</p>
<p>Identify a host website to share ecoregional practitioner (not novice, not landowner, but professional) <i>cross-training opportunities</i> for RX fire, stream rehabilitation, reintroductions, brush management, GIS, and wildlife corridor identification</p>
<p>Identify the barriers to RX fire application to significant grassland restoration areas. Make management recommendations (timing, season, periodicity) to overcome barriers AND match more natural fire episode timing. Craft TARGETD outreach plans to overcome these barriers and work with landowners in core grassland restoration and recovery areas to benefit pronghorn, grassland birds, and small mammals and reptiles. Select a few keystone species for monitoring in these areas – see above.</p>
<p>Inadequate Policies, Rules, Enforcement</p>
<p>Review TPWD policies and regulations on trapping of furbearers and non-game species to reduce unintentional loss of non-target SGCN including (badger, hog-nosed skunk, hooded skunk, western spotted skunk, and swift fox). Increasing trap inspection intervals from every 36 hours to every 24 hours for furbearers and requiring 24 hour trap checks for non-furbearing target species would potentially reduce the number of non-target losses. Consider implementing trapper education classes to improve trapping techniques that reduce non-target losses</p>
<p>Other Cross-Cutting Issues</p>
<p>Climate change models and effects on isolated habitats - playas, wetlands, grassland fragments, caprock and other “island” outcroppings</p> <p>Other arid-land wetland and water-dependent features such as riparian and instream habitats</p> <p>Invasive species</p>
<p>Improve Environmental Review and Consultation for voluntary practices (wind, solar, communications, transportation):</p> <p>Create mapped zones of sensitive areas (raptor migration corridors, proximity to colonial habitats) to share with wind developers to encourage better siting and voluntary mitigation</p> <p>Identify timing and intensity of barotrauma and impact hazards from wind turbines and encourage wind generation companies to modify practices</p>

NOTE: Almost all of these actions would benefit from more regular cooperation among conservation practitioners in the region. A share-site for conservation practice would be a useful tool. See Statewide/Multi-region handbook AND the Effectiveness Measures report’s evaluation of existing conservation practice sharing tools (Appendix IV). This will go a long way toward landscape-level planning and shared priorities.

