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REGIONAL DESCRIPTION

The Prairies and Lakes region is in north central and central Texas. The region forms a transition between the plains of the West Texas Panhandle and the Pineywoods of East Texas. Extending from the north to the south, the region has three distinct ecoregions within the area. The Cross Timbers lies on the west side, Blackland Prairie in the center and Post Oak Savannah on the east side.

The Cross Timbers region acquired its name due to the patches of treed areas crossing the prairie grassland. Many different tree species can be found here, including post oak, blackjack oak, shin oak, Texas oak, live oak, mesquite, Ashe juniper, eastern red cedar, cedar elm, hickory, elbowbush, rough-leafed dogwood, flame-leaf sumac and many more.

The terrain in this area is very hilly, with steep sandstone and limestone slopes and long cliffs.

The Blackland Prairies region is named for the deep, fertile black soils that are found in the area. Blackland Prairie soils once supported a tallgrass prairie dominated by tall-growing grasses such as big bluestem, little bluestem, indiangrass, and switchgrass. Because of the fertile soils, much of the original prairie has been plowed to produce food crops for both people and livestock. Only an estimated 5,000 acres remain in their historic condition in terms of plant species.

The Post Oak Savannah region was originally dominated by native bunch grasses, broad-leaved herbs and wildflowers with scattered clumps of trees, primarily post oaks. Forested areas were generally restricted to bottomlands along major rivers and creeks, or in areas protected from fire. The region is located north of the Brazos River.
Today, most of the area has been converted into vast acreages of improved pastures consisting of Bermudagrass and/or Bahia grass.

The Brazos River is the largest river between the Rio Grande and the Red River has a total length of about 840 miles. Of the seven major regions of Texas, the Prairies and Lakes region has the most reservoirs, ranging in size from 65 surface acres (Bonham State Park Lake) to 74,686 surface acres (Lake Texoma). These water bodies provide water for metropolitan areas and offer excellent opportunities for boating and fishing.

The face of the landscape in North-Central Texas has changed dramatically over the past 150 years. Once-large tracts of land (2 – 10 thousand acres) now are rapidly being subdivided and sold as small "ranchettes." Historically, large farms and ranches afforded wildlife vast, unbroken expanses of habitat. Today, houses, roads, and towns dot the landscape, effectively isolating smaller and smaller patches of habitat. This process, called habitat fragmentation, ultimately diminishes available habitat and the number and variety of animals that can live in it. Conservation biologists are trying to restore some of the prairies that wildlife depend upon for survival.

Giant dinosaurs once roamed this region long, long ago. Fossils of 17 different dinosaurs have been found, including Tyrannosaurus Rex. Dinosaur Valley State Park near Glen Rose has the largest collection of dinosaur footprints.

Crop production and cattle ranching are the primary agricultural industries.

Learn more about the Prairies and Lakes region, its history, wildlife, and state parks.
Topography and Characteristics

Major Rivers: Trinity, Red, Brazos
Major Aquifer: Trinity
Size: 45,000 sq. mi.

The landscape of the region is gently rolling to hilly. Elevations range from 300 to 800 feet above sea level. Soils throughout the region vary ranging from light to dark gray acidic soils with textures ranging from sandy loams to clays.

Nearly all surface rocks of the North Central Texas were deposited during the Cretaceous Period (145 – 65 million years ago). Some exposed surface formations in the western part of the West Cross Timbers date from the 300-million-year-old Pennsylvanian Period. Learn more about the rivers and numerous lakes in this region.

Major Cities / Rainfall / Elevation

Avg. Net Evaporation rate: 41 inches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CITY</th>
<th>AVERAGE ANNUAL PRECIPITATION</th>
<th>ELEVATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>28.45 in.</td>
<td>1,400 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonham</td>
<td>44.56 in.</td>
<td>600 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnet</td>
<td>32.43 in.</td>
<td>1,275 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comanche</td>
<td>29.41 in.</td>
<td>1,358 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dallas</td>
<td>37.05 in.</td>
<td>440 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gatesville</td>
<td>33.43 in.</td>
<td>760 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glen Rose</td>
<td>34.82 in.</td>
<td>655 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonzales</td>
<td>36.02 in.</td>
<td>380 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlin</td>
<td>37.99 in.</td>
<td>388 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexia</td>
<td>41.40 in.</td>
<td>535 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineola</td>
<td>45.88 in.</td>
<td>385 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral Wells</td>
<td>31.79 in.</td>
<td>930 ft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wills Point</td>
<td>43.68 in.</td>
<td>522 ft.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Common Vegetation

Mexican plum  American elderberry  Bur oak
Sugarberry   Bald cypress        Eastern cottonwood
Green ash    Buttonbush          Post oak
Red oak      Pecan              Persimmon
Flameleaf sumac Black hickory   Wax myrtle
Green hawthorne Black walnut    Buckeye
Black cherry  Sycamore

Learn more on our Wildscapes page: Plant Guidance for Prairies and Lakes Region and Blackland Prairies

Rare Plants & Habitats

Large-fruited sand verbena
Navasota ladies-tresses
Tall grass prairie
Learn more about Endangered and Threatened Plants.

Common Wildlife

Plains pocket gopher  Bobwhite quail  Texas horned lizard
Beaver               Red-shouldered hawk Eastern hognose snake
Raccoon              Scissortail flycatcher Tarantula
Porcupine            White-tailed deer  Northern mockingbird
Hispid cotton rat    Mexican free-tailed bat Largemouth Bass
Ornate box turtle    Ringtail
Green-winged teal    Nine-banded armadillo

Learn more about these animals on our Wildlife Fact Sheets.

Rare Animals

Black-capped vireo
Golden-cheeked warbler
Texas kangaroo rat

Learn more about Endangered and Threatened Species.
ISSUES AND TOPICS OF CONCERNS

To become environmentally literate, we first have to consider these core concepts:

1. **Fish and wildlife resources are a public trust.**

   *Did you know that ownership of land does not convey ownership of wildlife? For example, a deer inhabiting Joe’s ranch does not belong to Joe—the deer belongs to all of us.*

2. **Conservation and management of terrestrial and water resources are essential to sustaining fish and wildlife, the outdoor landscape, and the quality of our lives.**

   *Would you agree that we all enjoy looking at a beautiful and healthy scenic landscape?*

3. **Understanding and active participation in the stewardship and support of our natural resources is key.**

   *Would you agree that when one participates in a service project such as a tree planting, that they take pride and ownership in that habitat now and in the future?*

These are the first three of five core concepts endorsed by Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). Learn more about the AFWA Core Concepts.

With the above concepts in mind, TPWD held a series of focus meetings with leading biologists across the state. They were asked: “What issues in your area are most important for people to know or understand?”

**Terrestrial Issues:**

- Invasive and Exotic Species
- Understanding the Landscape (value of Blackland Prairies & the role of outlying farms and ranches)
- Benefits of conservation / What is Conservation

**Aquatic Issues:**

- Water Conservation
- Understanding Stream Dynamics
- Trinity River

Learn more about the [habitats of Prairies and Lakes](#). Explore the [Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) of Prairies and Lakes region](#) Learn more about the [state of water in the Prairies and Lakes region](#).
Project WILD Activities Relative to Regional Issues

- From Bison to Bread (understanding the landscape)
- The American Prairie (understanding the value of prairies)
- To Dam or Not to Dam (understanding stream dynamics)
- Blue Ribbon Niche (understanding stream dynamics)
- How Wet is our Planet? (water conservation)

Project WILD Activities with Texas Adaptations

- Checks and Balances
- Happy Prairie (adapted from Dragonfly Pond)
- Here Today, Gone Tomorrow
- Watershed (Aquatic)
- World Travelers

TPWD Resources

People:
Find your local Game Warden
Find your local Wildlife Biologist

Student publications and activities:
Coloring pages for the Prairies and Lakes
Teacher activity pages for the Prairies and Lakes

Maps:
Cross Timbers ecoregion Map
Post Oak Savannah ecoregion Map
Blackland Prairie ecoregion Map
Major Aquifers map
Minor Aquifers map
Additional maps (rainfall, vegetation, river basins, etc)

Media, Videos and Webcasts:
Videos about the state parks of the Prairies and Lakes region
Webcasts for the Prairies and Lakes region
Search the TPW Magazine for articles about the Prairies and Lakes
Habitat and Wildlife Publications:

Habitat:
- Land Fragmentation in Texas: Meeting the Challenge
- An Analysis of Texas Waterways: A Report on the Physical Characteristics of Rivers, Streams, and Bayous in Texas
  - Brazos River
  - Red River
  - Trinity River
- Lake Survey Reports
- Farmland Management
- Livestock Management
- Habitat Management for Nongame Wildlife - Cross Timbers
- Guidelines for Bobwhite Habitat Management in the Cross Timbers and Prairies
- Guidelines for Native Grassland Restoration Projects
- Integrating Deer and Cattle Management in the Post Oak Savannah
- Oaks and Prairies Joint Venture
- Shared Wildlife Resources: An Ecological Approach to Cooperative Wildlife and Habitat Management in the Cross Timbers
- Sunflowers for wildlife in the Cross Timbers
- The Values of Wise Land Use in an Agricultural Landscape
- Wildlife and Habitat Management on Small Acreages in the Cross-Timbers and Prairies Region of Texas
- Dangers of Invasive Species brochure
- North Texas Wildlife Management News
- Additional water-related links

Wildlife:
- Identification of Basses of Texas
- On the Waterfowl of Texas
- Birds of the Oaks & Prairies of Texas
- Black-capped Vireo
- Black-capped Vireo life history
- Golden-cheeked Warbler Life History
- White-tailed Deer Food Habits and Preferences in the Cross Timbers and Prairies Region of Texas

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