

# Devils River Working Group Action Plan



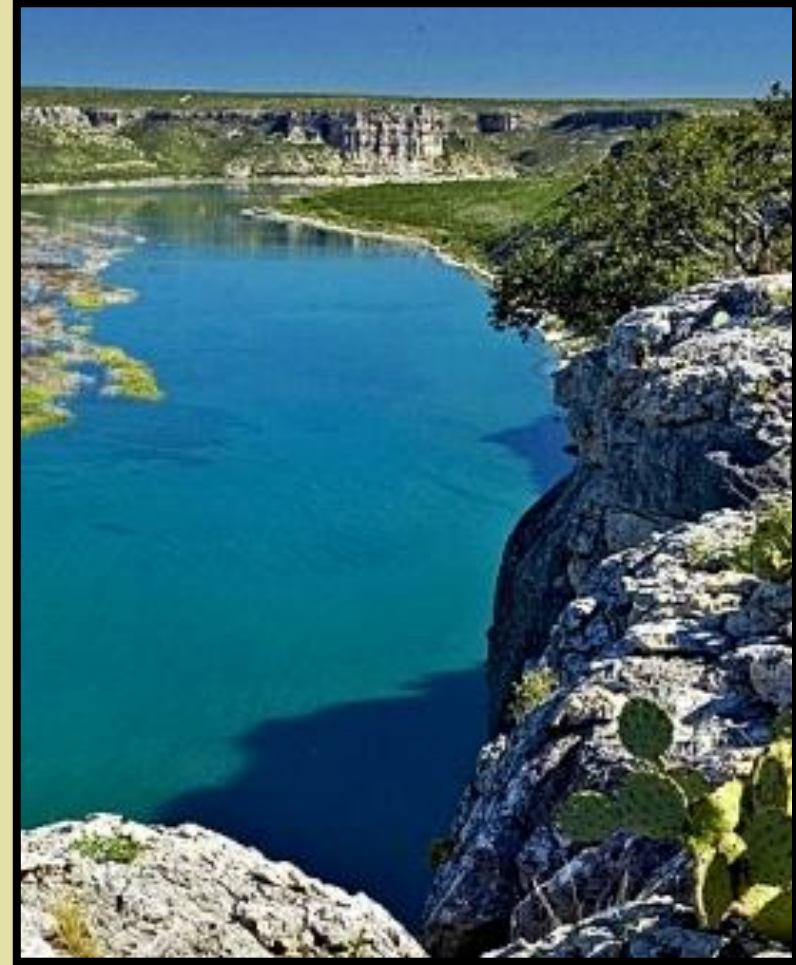
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# Background

The Devils River is arguably the most pristine river and river corridor in the entire desert Southwest. Gushing from numerous springs along its 50 +/- mile race to the Amistad International Reservoir, the crystal clear waters of the Devils River course over rapids and riffles through rugged canyons and ridges to create one of the most stunning landscapes in North America.

The remoteness and inaccessibility of the river have kept it wild and untamed up to the present. Endemic plants, fish and wildlife come together to form a community unique to the Southwest United States.



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# Background

Based upon a recommendation in the Devils River Working Group (DRWG) report of 2012, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Director of State Parks appointed a second working group to foster the recommendations of the original DRWG.

The Devils River Working Group II (DRWG-II) was formed in early 2013 and met four times throughout 2013 and 2014 at locations along the Devils River.

The DRWG-II was tasked with building from the recommendations in the first report as well as identifying additional opportunities and strategies to support sustainable, responsible, long-term conservation and use of the Devils River.

This report represents the outcome of the Devils River Working Group II's efforts.



# Formation of the DRWG-II & its charge:

1. Start with the original DRWG report as the foundation. Evaluate the prior recommendations and then develop specific strategies and action plans to assist TPWD with implementation.
2. Seek to identify additional opportunities to protect and conserve the Devils River while still allowing for responsible public access and use.
3. Provide a written report to TPWD leadership that outlines the DRWG's activities and any additional practical opportunities the group would like TPWD to pursue.



## 2013-2014 DRWG-II members:

A diverse, well-rounded group was formed that included river landowners, paddling community leaders, land conservation leaders as well as key TPWD personnel.



From left to right: J.R. McBee, Alice Ball Strunk, Richard Grayson, Joe Ranzau, Sky Lewey, Joline Moore, Adrian Van Dellen, Joe Joplin, Dan Snodgrass, Andy Iverson, Marcos Paredes, Dell Dickinson, Tom Goynes, Deirdre Hisler, Cody White. Not in picture: Jim Norman, Doug Meyer, Roy Fisher & Ken Watson

## 2013-2014 DRWG-II Guiding Principle:

Regardless of the stakeholder, there was universal agreement within the first meeting that the Devils River is too special not to protect, becoming the guiding principle we all worked from in every meeting and on each topic.



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# 2013-2014 DRWG-II – Action Plan approach

- Over the course of the four formal meetings, the following key priorities were defined as the most important areas to be addressed:
  1. Recreational Use Impact
  2. Water Quantity/Source Water Interruption
  3. Protecting the Cultural Resources
  4. Land Fragmentation and Development
  5. Incomplete Science - Need to fill in the “Knowledge Gaps”
  6. Unbalanced Media Exposure
  7. Riparian Disturbances
  8. Decline of Native Fishery
- The following pages break out each of these priorities in further detail with the specific tasks and strategies recommended that TPWD would use to effectively address these key priorities.



# ONE: Recreational Use Impact

A priority item was to control negative river impact created by increased recreational use. It's clear the public has the constitutional right to access and float this river, yet the DRWG-II agreed that for this river, there must be a way to manage usage to protect the quality of the river itself, as well as to protect the wilderness experience that initially draws people to this river.



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# ONE: Recreational Use Impact

## Devils River Access Permit (DRAP) Status

- During the DRWG-II's tenure the DRAP pilot program was launched, monitored, evaluated and discussed extensively.
- The DRWG-II agrees that the permit program has proven successful and effective in:
  - cultivating a more educated paddler
  - allowing for the monitoring of river usage and gaining detailed data
  - preserving the wilderness experience for everyone
  - increasing the accountability of paddlers
- The overall sentiment of the group is to make the DRAP system permanent on the Devils River.



# ONE: Recreational Use Impact – Recommendations

- The DRAP should be continued with associated documents being edited to ensure legal enforceability. This will also require the permit requirement be incorporated into TPWD rules and regulations.
- Through mutual beneficial agreements attempt to designate official camp sites on private lands as well as other public land (including Islands) that can be monitored and managed, i.e. rested and rotated to avoid resource damage.
- Work with approved outfitters to identify “ideal” island camping locations that can be recommended as camp sites of choice for unquestioned legal camping along the river.
- Design and install aesthetically fitting signage along select sections of the river to signify mileage to the SNA units.
- TPWD, outfitters, and other connected organizations should continue to foster the “How and Why” versus “Do and Don’t” educational approach to recreation on the Devils River.



# ONE: Recreational Use Impact – Recommendations

- Assist approved outfitters in designing paddling packages based on paddler experience and skill set.
- Continue to seek best approach to educate public on Devils River gradient boundary, which may include riverside kiosks, videos and visual aids on the TPWD web site.
- Produce a Devil's River Paddler Orientation Video (possibly delivered via YouTube) to help recreationists prepare for a trip on the Devils River, including respect for resource and private property, river etiquette, DRAP requirements, personal responsibility for wastes (WAG and use), explanation of Antiquities Code and other important information.
- Continue to facilitate relationships between landowners and outfitters to better manage public recreational use occurring along individual landowners' riparian lands.

# ONE: Recreational Use Impact – Recommendations

- Support paddling organizations with paddling education and camping curriculums to create more prepared paddlers.
- Design standardized river signage to signify private property which also includes a river protection message.
- Establish recreational use guidelines based on river flow rates.
- Prohibit any form of commercial “tubing” operations to utilize the State Natural Areas.
- Consider gaining oversight authority (through legislative action) over select Texas rivers systems with the goal of complete resource protection, i.e. Devils River Protection Bill.



## TWO: Water Quality/ Water Source Interruption

In 2013 & 2014, as the DRWG-II was meeting, there were strong, private entity partnership/companies creating proposals to pump large volumes of water out of Val Verde County to other municipalities. This issue became central in discussions regarding the Devils River. The DRWG-II felt strongly that **we all** need to act now to create strategies that ensure the Devils River does not become a casualty of water marketers targeting this region.



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## TWO: Water Quality/Water Source Interruption – Recommendations

- Publish general statement of caution regarding potential resource damage if large volumes of water are pumped from Devils River watershed.
- Support and encourage further studies of local hydrology effecting the Devils River source water.
- Encourage entities such as local landowners, outfitters, and paddling groups to hold each other accountable in following best conservation based practices to protect the river.
- Support action that leads to the eventual creation of a responsible groundwater conservation district that protects the Devils River Source waters.
- Deliver public education via interpretive exhibits at both SNA visitor centers illustrating where the water for the Devils River comes from and threats to the source of that groundwater.



## THREE: Protecting the Cultural Resources

Along the Devils River there are hundreds of rock art sites and prehistoric Indian shelters. The DRWG-II strongly believes that the TPWD must take a more active role along the river to both educate the public about cultural resource protection, as well as enforce stronger law enforcement measures for those caught trespassing at those sites.

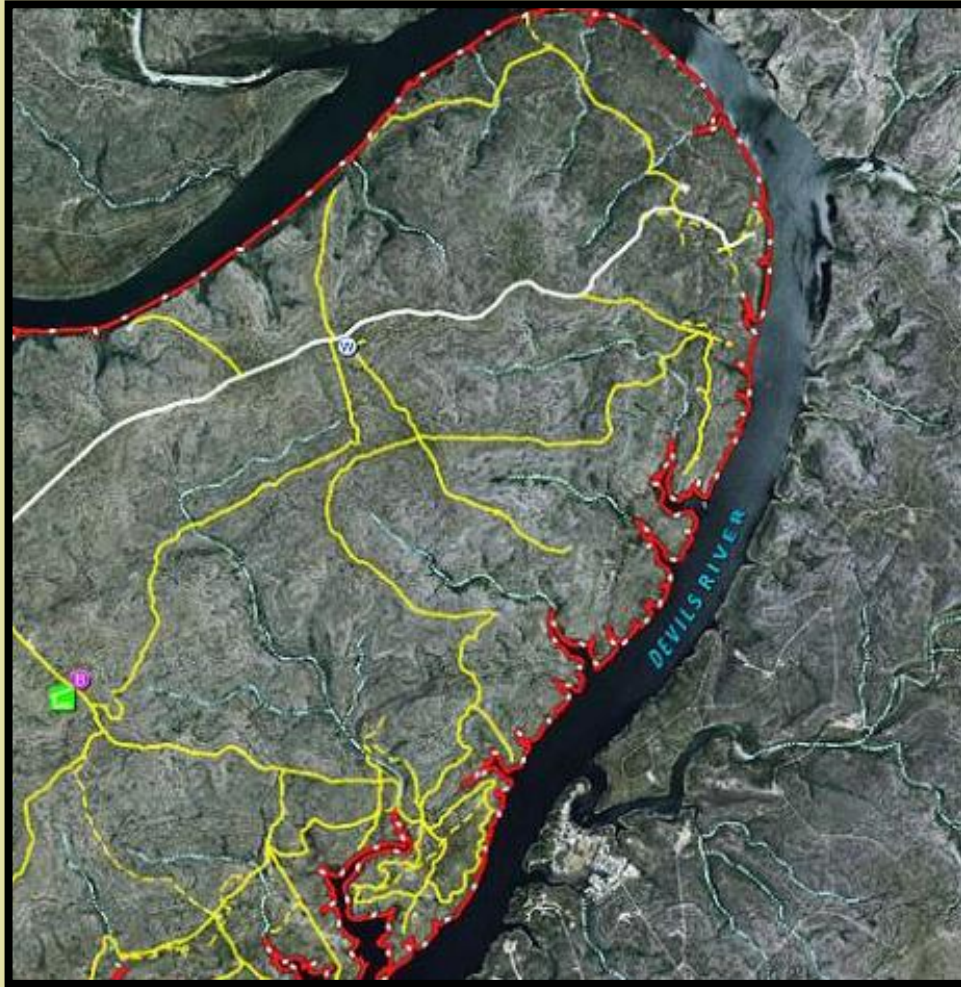


## THREE: Protecting the Cultural Resources – Recommendations.

- Present a clear explanation of Texas Antiquities Code and display associated fines at the SNA to discourage violations.
- Create Antiquities Code educational information/hand out materials for outfitters to share with paddlers before they start their trip.
- Partner with other organizations such as the Rock Art Foundation and Shumla Foundation, to educate paddlers/visitors on rock art viewing opportunities, resulting in a decrease in the desire to trespass onto private property along the river.
- Create law enforcement strategies for both prevention and to provide a strong reaction to violations related to cultural resource destruction.
- Publish media releases on prosecutions under the Antiquities Code.



## FOUR: Land Fragmentation & Development Issues



As the population in Texas grows, private land ownership increases, often resulting in the fragmentation of land.

To keep the Devils River as wild and natural as possible, strategies need to be implemented to help keep land fragmentation and development to a minimum.

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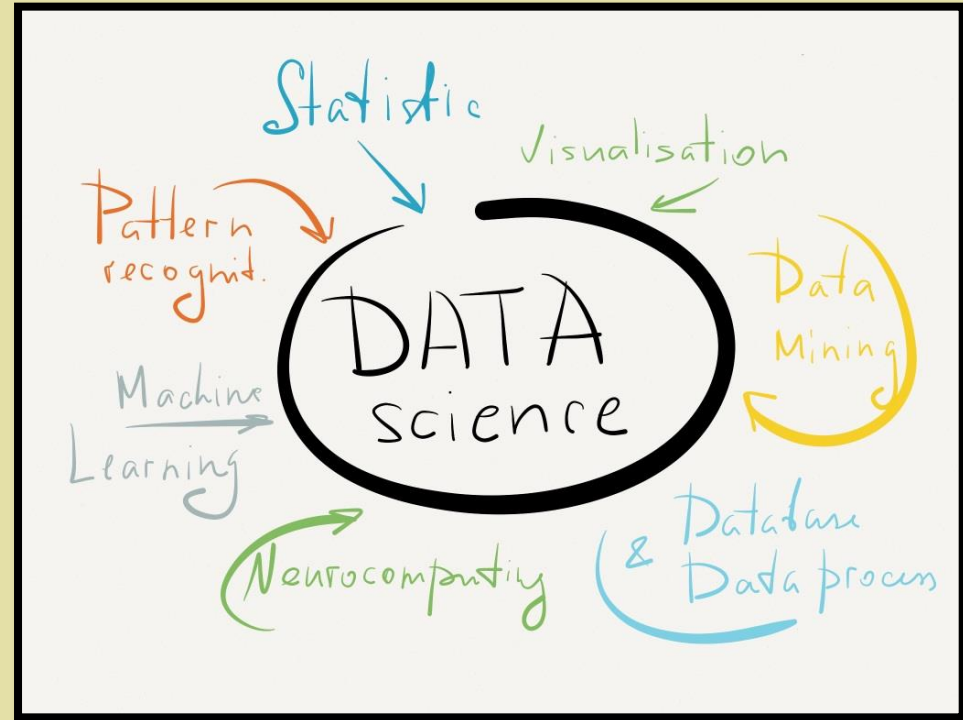


# FOUR: Land Fragmentation & Development Issues - Recommendations

- Continue to demonstrate the “best possible” stewardship practices as example to others.
- Develop informational and outreach tools for conservancy or trust use; seminars on estate planning, facts about impact from land fragmentation and examples of better ways.
- Encourage use of deed restrictions and conservation easement within the Devils river basin.
- Seek to acquire additional properties to prevent further fragmentation of lands in the area.

# FIVE: Incomplete Science – Need to fill in “knowledge gaps”

As TPWD continues to become more involved within the Devil River basin, there are a number of “knowledge gaps” that need to be addressed to ensure informed decisions are made on how the Devils River is managed, as well as TPWD policies regarding usage on the river.



# **FIVE: Incomplete Science – Need to fill in “knowledge gaps” - Recommendations**

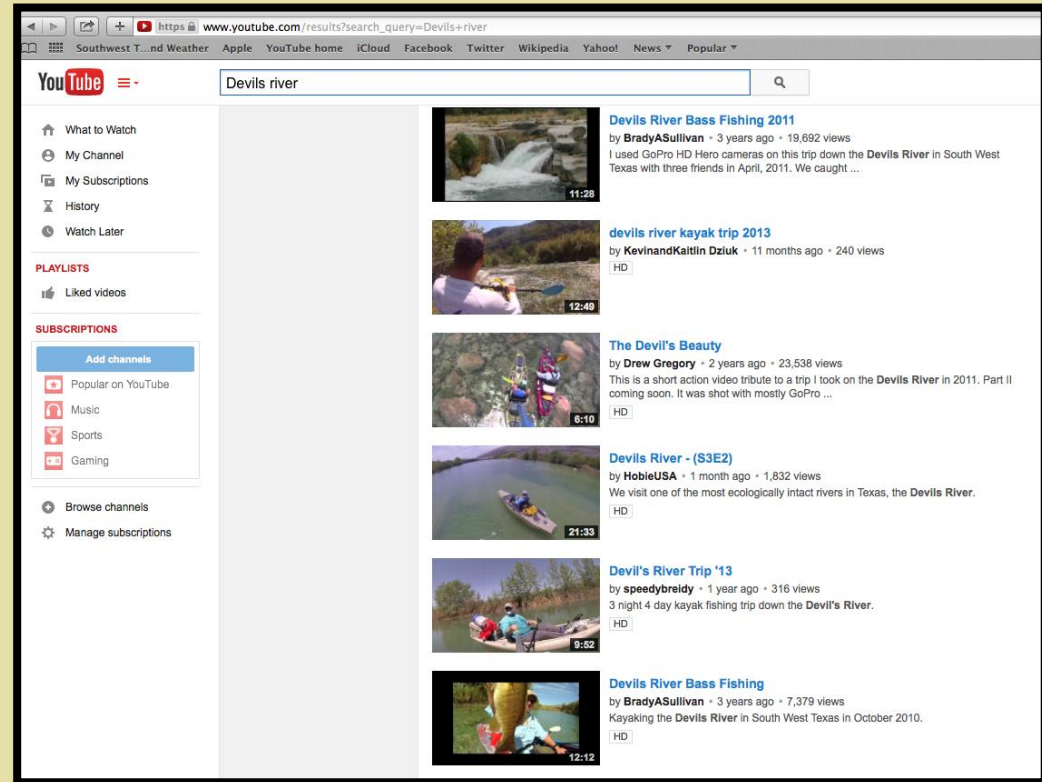
- Facilitate a large scale Devils River gradient boundary study to help give a more clear understanding of legal camping vs. trespassing.
- Utilize DRAP data YR1 and YR2 to create a “flow of traffic model” for use in recreational river traffic decision-making in order to avoid excess congestion on the river caused by overlapping paddling trips.
- Facilitate an invasive species survey along the entire Devils River to identify current and potential threats.
- Assemble and analyze the entirety of all scientific studies having to do with the Devils River; past, present, and future. (Anthology)
- Continue to do comprehensive fishery studies on various sections of the river.
- Continue post-trip survey with DRAP holders to gain specific key data points for future decision making.

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# SIX: Unbalanced media exposure

With the explosion of social media in the past five years, the Devils River has received much larger amounts of media exposure than it has in the past. The result: it's becoming a more and more popular place to visit. The key issue here is that much of this exposure is being provided by people who are not clear on facts nor sharing proper river etiquette. There needs to be creative ways to temper this type of media exposure.

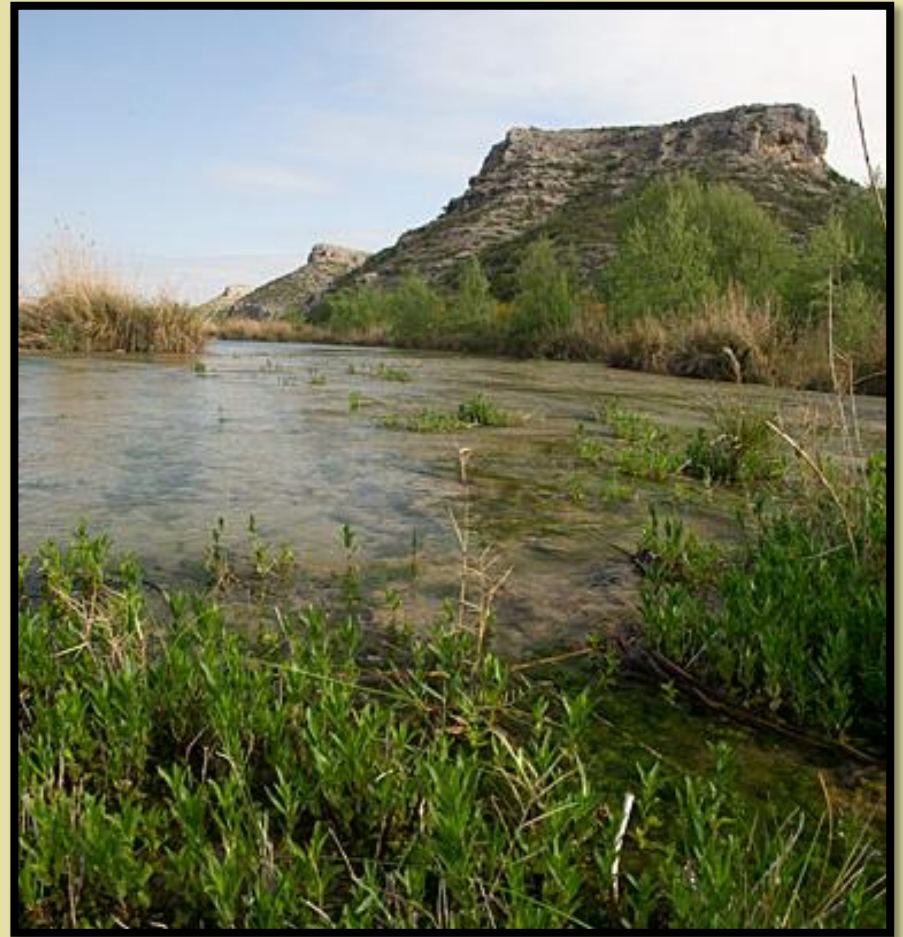


## SIX: Misleading and uncontrolled media exposure - Recommendations

- Work with outfitters to ensure their paddler orientation addresses restraint and wisdom when they post photos/videos of their Devils River trips.
- Whenever feasible, ensure all stories and articles regarding recreational use on the Devils River include a conservation based message along with basic river usage guidelines.
- Maintain an active internet presence to provide correct and up to-date information on forums and blogs as related to the Devils River and allow the Devils River TPWD staff to post comments and corrections to incorrect information
- Actively monitor internet for video and photographic postings of illegal activity on the Devils River addressing issues through educational and legal means as needed to ensure the material is revised or removed, resulting in a correctly informed public.

## SEVEN: Riparian Disturbances

In order for the Devils River to be as healthy as possible, focus must be given to the health of the bank and beds of this river. TPWD should continue to take a lead in guiding the public, landowners and the agency itself on the importance of the Riparian area of the river.



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# SEVEN: Riparian Disturbances

- Display components of a functional riparian area via interpretive exhibits at both DRSNA visitor centers.
- Continue to partner with non-profit groups such as the Devils River Conservancy and the Devils River Association to host riparian and other river conservation workshops for paddlers, landowners and general public to further educate on all topics related to the protection of the Devils River<sup>s</sup>.
- Support a new river front property owner orientation for property owners that are new to the area, bringing them up to speed on the river protection measures taking place.

## EIGHT: Decline of native fishery

The Devils River fishery is complex. Concerns include an increase in fishing pressure due to more public access, a growing population of sportsman, the presence of the aggressive non-native smallmouth bass and other introduced species that adversely effect native species. Ongoing attention to protect the fishery is needed.



## EIGHT: Decline of native fishery - Recommendations

- Remove smallmouth bass slot limits as they promote the protection of an introduced, aggressive, non-native species within this river.
- Actively encourage catch and release of native species overall on the Devils River.
- The use of unattended fishing methods such as trot lines, jug lines, and drop lines should be banned at DRSNA units. They create both a paddler and swimmer safety hazard. Furthermore, they are indiscriminate, are often baited with live invasive or exotic species, and are often left behind or lost, becoming trash in the river which remains a continued danger to fish and wildlife.
- Include a fishery interpretive feature at both units.
- Create a fisherman's guide to the Devils River to use as a tool to educate the public (and landowners) on how to protect the fishery while fishing at DRSNA



# Summary

- The Devils River Working Group I report recommended the creation of a Devil River Use Management Plan (DRUMP). Working Group II recommends incorporating their DRUMP principles and our attentional recommendations into a Devil River Protection Plan (DRPP).
- To help with implementation of the DRPP, the DRWD-II strongly recommends that the TPWD allow Superintendent Joe Joplin and his staff on the Devils River to create an 3 year advisory board made up of local and regional stakeholders (landowners, conservation leaders, paddling advocates, etc.). The board would be tasked with assisting with the implementation of a DRPP and providing support to the limited staff at Devils River State Natural Area to help them maintain the momentum needed to follow through on the plan.

# The Devils River: It's Worth Protecting



Thank You

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