

# Building an unbeatable coalition for Texas state parks



**Luke Metzger**  
**Environment Texas**

Environment Texas works for clean air, clean water, clean energy, wildlife and open spaces, and a livable climate. Our members across the state put grassroots support behind our research and advocacy.

We envision a greener Texas: one that protects more places where nature can thrive, and offers us and our children a greater opportunity to live healthier, more enriching lives. Through our research, public education, advocacy, litigation and action, we advance policies and practices that put our state and our country on a better path.



**WE**



**OUR  
STATE  
PARKS.**

[environmenttexas.org](http://environmenttexas.org)



# Budget Cuts Could Close State Parks, Limit Hunter Education

State parks, hunting lands and even the parks agency's magazine could suffer if the Legislature enacts a hefty budget cut for the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department.

BY KATE GALBRAITH MARCH 9, 2011 11 AM

**Day Trips**  
Seven state parks to be closed or transferred  
BY GERALD E. MCLEOD, FRI., JUNE 24, 2011

*The Dallas Morning News*

NEWS > POLITICS

**Texas state parks may face closure in proposed budget cuts**

## Texas parks endure budget cuts

OUTDOORS  
Nearly 70 staff positions axed by a lack of funding  
By Shannon Tompkins, Houston Chronicle Published 6:30 am CST, Friday, December 2, 2005

## Texas Parks and Wildlife faces still more budget cuts

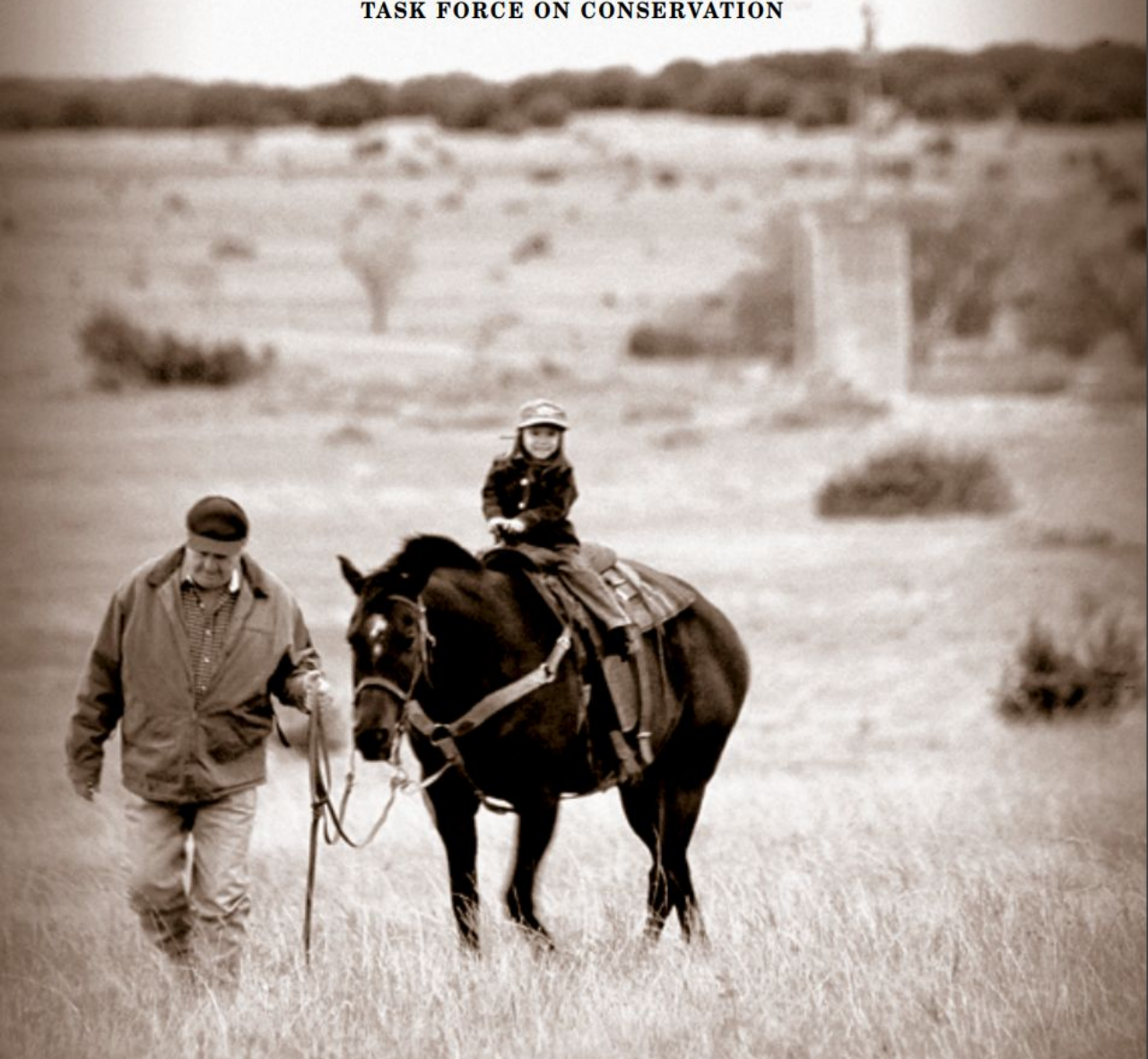
January 15, 2013 at 8:52 PM CST - Updated August 29 at 9:57 AM

SPORTS // OUTDOORS

# Texas voters approve Prop 5 by overwhelming majority

# TAKING CARE OF **TEXAS**

A REPORT FROM THE GOVERNOR'S  
TASK FORCE ON CONSERVATION



“population growth and its geographic distribution dictate the need for continued investment in public lands.”



TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE  
FOR THE **21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY**

AN OVERVIEW OF THE

TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY STUDIES

IN CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

FOR THE COMING DECADES

“There is a need to provide more state parks in all categories (State Parks, State Natural Areas, and State Historic Sites)...Achieving this goal would require an additional 1,428,117 acres of land by 2030.”

“going back to the legislature quickly will simply make them angry. Anything we do that looks like we're moving quickly has the potential to get back to legislators and touch off a backlash.”

“a better first step would be to find out TPWD's long range plans for land acquisition. Let's see what they have in mind and then figure out the best way we can help. I do like the idea of an up to date comparison of state park programs and budgets from around the country”



# **Allocating \$16 billion in coronavirus relief funds will be part of special legislative session in the fall, Gov. Greg Abbott says**

TPWD's analysis has identified the following categories of initiatives and investments for our agency which we believe meet the criteria established for CRF:

- Land acquisitions and infrastructure development to expand and improve existing state parks, state natural areas and wildlife management areas (\$90.6 million)
- Land acquisitions of new sites to expand access to outdoor recreation in strategic areas throughout the state (\$34 million)

# Texas should use COVID funds to grow state parks

By Seth Billingsley

It took a global calamity that forced the nation to stay indoors to remind us how much we need to be outside. From state parks to hike-and-bike trails, Texans have poured out of their homes in the last year to enjoy places of peace and beauty that they once assumed they were too busy to frequent.

Even as many of us return to some semblance of normalcy, parks remain packed to the brim.

From wide-open spaces beneath a starry sky at Big Bend Ranch to the cypress swamps of Caddo Lake, our parks make life better here in Texas. While parks provided a place of rest and recreation during troubling times over the course of the pandemic, demand for public lands has been rapidly increasing as the state's population has grown tremendously over the past decades.

Last week the Legislature began the third special session this year to make some of the most significant budgetary decisions of this generation. While redistricting is getting most of the attention, the allocation of nearly \$16 billion of flexible fiscal recovery federal funds, flying mostly under the radar, provides a once in a generation opportunity to invest in our future.

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has proposed using about \$240 million of the funds to acquire land for new and expanded parks, to construct and repair state park facilities and to help protect private land through the Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program. TPWD also requested funds for fishing piers, boat ramps, shooting ranges and Wi-Fi at state parks.

Today, it can be difficult to book a campsite without planning it months in advance. At Brazos Bend State Park near Pearland, almost no weekend



Karen Warren / Staff file photo

After two months in lockdown, Bart and Martha Squires of Sweeney took their daughter, Jordan, 15, on a camping trip in May 2020 at Brazos Bend State Park in Needville. Booking a campsite now takes reservations up to a year in advance.

campsites are available until next year. Even if you manage to secure a coveted campground, the park will be overcrowded.

Given COVID-19 and the ongoing difficulty of enjoying our existing parks, it should come as no surprise that 68 percent of Texans support allocating \$1 billion from the federal government's emergency American Rescue Plan Act funds to expand our parks system.

At least seven states have used some of their ARPA funds for parks and conservation, including Florida, which appropriated \$300 million to acquire land to protect wildlife.

Exposure to nature is just what the doctor ordered during the pandemic. Studies have shown that parks, by stimulating greater social cohesion, can enhance mental and physical wellness.

Children, especially, benefit

from an investment in parks. Studies continue to demonstrate that kids with the opportunity to live and learn outdoors tend to be happier, healthier and perform better cognitively.

Twenty years ago, Texas Tech University published Texas Parks and Wildlife for the 21st Century. This seminal report estimated the state would need to add 1.4 million acres of parkland by 2030 in order to keep up with population growth.

While we've made some progress since then, including the acquisition of Palo Pinto Mountains State Park and Powderhorn Ranch, the state still needs to add more than 1 million acres of parks to ensure that every Texan has access to the great outdoors.

Achieving that goal could require an investment of \$3 billion. The federal Great American Outdoors Act, private philanthropy and other sources will

help, but the state must also be an active partner.

This is particularly key given that the Local Park Grant Program, which provides matching grants to local governments to build playgrounds, ball fields, and other parks and recreation facilities, and the Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program, which provides grants to private landowners to preserve rural lands from development, have been depleted as demand has outstripped supply.

The Legislature should augment the TPWD's request with an additional \$60 million for these programs.

In 2019, the Legislature voted to guarantee that the sales tax on sporting goods go toward funding our state parks. Later, voters approved the measure through a constitutional amendment that passed with 88 percent support.

This was a historic step that finally guaranteed stable funding for our parks system, but the vast majority of the funds have been used for operations and maintenance. Maintenance does not open new parks.

Over the next two years, only \$3.5 million was appropriated annually for land acquisition.

In 2023, our state parks system will celebrate its centennial. As we look ahead to the next 100 years, we must make sure we set aside enough space for Texans to hunt, fish, hike and camp.

Parks remain a high priority for Texans; they should be a priority of our government, too.

*Billingsley is working to build a world class parks system for Texas as the conservation associate with Environment Texas. This op-ed echoes a Sept. 21 Environment Texas letter directed to the Legislature.*



## A Most Valuable Legacy

Investing in the next 100 years for Texas' state park system



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## How Texas compares

- Texas ranks just 35th in the nation for state parkland per capita - Florida has 54% more state parkland
- Insufficient parkland means our parks too often reach capacity and have to turn people away.
- Booking a campsite can require months of advance planning.



The Park is  
*Sold Out*  
for the day





## Natural areas at risk

- Between 1997 and 2017, more than 2.2 million acres of farms, ranches, and forests were converted to subdivisions, stripmalls and highways.
- That's an average of about 10 football fields of farms and open space lost per hour

# McKinney Falls State Park





Iley Tubbs

“it's an unrealistic pie-in-the-sky ask”

“Could you guys please work on something realistic and sustainable?”

“A billion dollar ask isn't something we can seriously pitch to our bosses.”

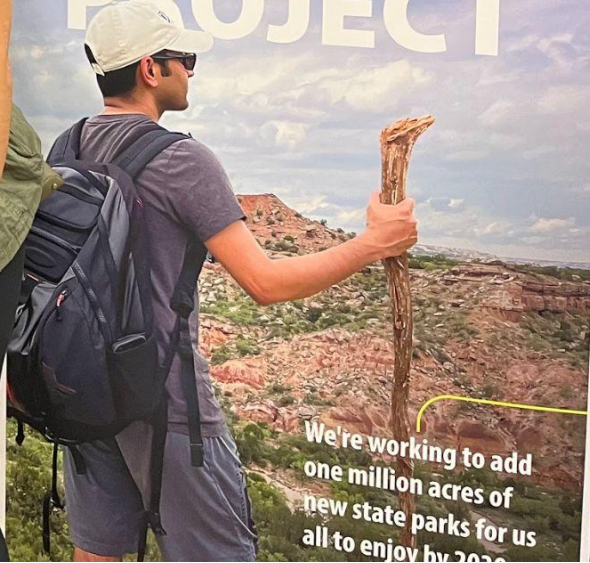
“Develop a legitimate and sustainable and realistic plan that's closer to \$75-150 million”





Clean Air. Clean Water. Open Spaces.

# MILLION ACRE PARKS PROJECT



We're working to add one million acres of new state parks for us all to enjoy by 2030



Clean Air. Clean Water.

## Texas rivers protected

In 2013, after a record drought in rivers and harmed wildlife, we he \$400 million for water conservati the Legislature.



**Celebrating  
100 years of  
State Parks.**

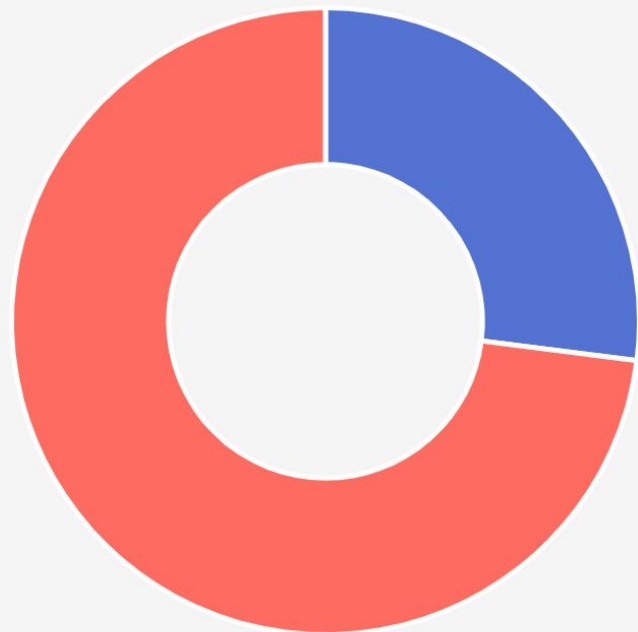


**100**  
— YEARS —



📷 Illustration by Todd Wiseman / Stuart Seeger

# State Parks



**73%**

of Texas voters favor using \$1 billion, or about 3% of the surplus funds, to **build new state parks and improve existing parks.**



# **“We’ve come to say goodbye”: Visitors flock to Fairfield Lake State Park on its last day**

For decades the park has sat on leased land that the owner recently decided to sell. As the staff closed the gates Monday night for the last time, visitors and staff held out hope that the state could find a way to save the park.





**Doug Deason** @DougDeason · Nov 13, 2021



And this proves what? There have been no quality studies done anywhere in the world. Checking for raptor carcasses every 30-90 days, as most studies do, will not prove anything. Predators and scavengers remove the carcass within hours.



1



**Luke Metzger** @lukemetzger · Nov 13, 2021



It, alongside a mountain of other studies, proves the most important thing we can do for wildlife is to stop dangerous global warming by moving toward 100% clean energy, inc wind power.



1



**Doug Deason** @DougDeason · Nov 13, 2021



Better options in the works than wind. Obviously, we have different opinions, which is good. That is what will keep technology progressing.



1



1



**Luke Metzger** @lukemetzger · Nov 13, 2021



And agreed we need more robust monitoring and protection of raptor populations!

The event itself, however much it felt like a passing of the torch, was largely beside the point; there would be more just like it. Doug had to admit that it was cool to text the governor, but the real question before him that evening was what he should do with this bounty of political gratitude. “I’ve got every single statewide elected official’s cellphone number and I know them personally,” he said. “That’ll probably last two weeks.” He was being modest; in truth, Deason-level access doesn’t have a short shelf life. And that’s what this would all come down to: access and what can be done with it.





**Doug Deason**

Hi Doug! 2023 is the 100th anniversary of the Texas state parks system. Environment Texas is working to get the Legislature to make a big investment in parks next session. Even with Prop 5, TX is ranked just 35th in per capita state park acreage, with many parks crowded and campsites booked far in advance. We also need more habitat for wildlife. I wanted to see if we might visit at some point to talk about this effort and get your advice. Seems like it could be a good campaign issue in the general election for Gov. Abbott and others. best, Luke

11:25 AM

Sure Luke, I am in Mexico but can talk later next week. Love the idea



# Texas must add more parkland

As our state parks system turns 100, let's invest for the next century

By LUKE METZGER and DOUG DEASON



ulation growth and development transformed Texas' iconic and cherished rural character. Between 2000 and 2017, more than 2.2 million acres of farms, ranches and forests were converted to development. That's an area nearly 10 football fields in length.

This development is encroaching on our state parks. A trail at Falls State Park in Austin is abandoned because hikers' buildings from the trail. Falls

# The Dallas Morning News

**Dallas conservative, Austin liberal unite in push for Texas to set aside \$1B for new parks**



# Ethan Hawke, leading Texans join Million Acres Parks Project steering committee

We're working to add one million acres to the Texas state parks system  
by 2030



Add your voice for 1  
million acres of new  
state parkland

**SHOW YOUR  
SUPPORT**

**Proposition 14 – SJR 74 "The constitutional amendment providing for the creation of the centennial parks conservation fund to be used for the creation and improvement of state parks."**



**Texas Coalition**  
*for* **State Parks**

# All messages were effective at moving voters toward supporting the Centennial Parks Fund Amendment.

## TCFSP Positive Messaging Results

■ Significant Movement Toward TCFSP (>0.20)  
 ■ No Significant Movement Toward TCFSP (<0.20)

		Overall
TOP	Q22. Investing in parks conserves land and water resources, which protects Texas' quality of life so future generations can enjoy our land, water, and natural beauty the way we do.	0.48
	Q24. A healthy wildlife habitat and open spaces are critical to our quality of life. The constitutional amendment would help protect the places we love to hike, bike, fish, picnic, hunt, and view wildlife.	0.47
	Q18. With the rapid growth of Texas we must protect Texas' last remaining natural areas today so that they won't be lost forever to development.	0.39
	Q19. A system of well maintained and easily accessible state parks is essential to healthy living and the active lifestyle that Texans need.	0.36
	Q25. No matter where you live in Texas - from the big city to rural areas - we all benefit from having natural areas, state parks, clean water, and wildlife habitat.	0.35
	Q21. Nothing is more important than having clean water to drink. By protecting our land around rivers, lakes and streams, we can prevent runoff and toxic chemicals from flowing into Texas' water supply.	0.33
	Q23. Our State Parks are already overcrowded; now is the time to develop more state parks for our growing population to enjoy	0.25
	Q20. State Parks strengthen local economies, create jobs, provide outdoor recreation, and attract visitors from across the state and country. The constitutional amendment is a good investment of taxpayer dollars with a strong return on investment for Texas' future.	0.22







Prop 14 will provide the space that both humans  
and wildlife will need in our growing state