



SIERRA CLUB

LONE STAR CHAPTER

The Honorable Jeffery D. Hildebrand, Chair, TPWC
David Yoskowitz, Ph.D., Executive Director, TPWD
Trey Vick, Commission Staff, TPWD

Re: Item 9 on January 25th TPWC Meeting
Delivered by Email and Fax ((713) 209-2475 Fax)

January 23rd, 2024

Dear Chairman Hildebrand and Director Yoskowitz,

The Lone Star Chapter is and has been a big supporter of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, its budget, and the recent legislative action and subsequent constitutional amendment proposition to increase funding for land acquisition. We formally supported Proposition 14 and put time, effort and funds into making sure that this new funding will help with future land acquisition. In nearly all cases, we have been supportive of land acquisitions, land swaps and park development.

On January 25th, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission is scheduled to vote at its open meeting on a proposed land exchange in Cameron County involving the acquisition of “approximately 477 acres near the boundaries of the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Area in exchange for approximately 43 acres at Boca Chica State Park,” which would instead be turned over to SpaceX for its private use. This is item 9 on the agenda of Thursday’s meeting.

The Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club urges you to delay the vote on this item. We as an organization are concerned not only about the potential impacts of the land swap, and the loss of important parkland in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, but also about the rushed process of this proposed deal.

Importantly, Chapter 26 of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Code, which governs the taking or sale of any public land (such as the Boca Chica land), states that notice about a hearing on a particular subject must be published “at least once a week for three consecutive weeks.” It also states: “The notice must be given at least 30 days before the date for the public hearing.”

However, the first notice of the land swap discussion was published on January 6th, with subsequent notices on January 10th and 13th. We have confirmed the dates of these public notices through correspondence with the newspaper and publisher. We have concerns that the notices were not published for three consecutive weeks and that the first notice did not appear at least 30 days before the date for the public hearing.

Because we believe this action by the TPWD/TPWC may violate its own statutes on public notice, we ask that the vote be delayed and the matter be reposted. This will also allow community members to visit the site of the proposed swap and gather more information about both parcels of land. We would also urge you to publish the notice in Spanish in Spanish language publications since many members of the community speak Spanish as their first language and have limited English proficiency.

Rushing decisions on such an important matter would set a bad precedent for future land acquisitions and is not in keeping with public participation and transparency in government decision making. Please take more time to receive input, to provide the community with adequate time to respond, to consider further studies of the two parcels in question, and to carefully consider whether losing important existing state lands is in the interest of the state or local community practices.

Boca Chica is a special place that has a long history for the community, and rushing the sale or swap of part of that land deserves careful consideration, even when there may be land offered in exchange.

Sincerely,

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