



SIERRA CLUB

LONE STAR CHAPTER

To: The Honorable Chairman Will Metcalf, Chair, House Committee on Culture, Recreation and Tourism
The Honorable Vice-Chair Lulu Fernandez, Vice-Chair, House Committee on Culture, Recreation and Tourism
Honorable Members, House Committee on Culture, Recreation and Tourism

From: Cyrus Reed, Legislative and Conservation Director, Lone Star Chapter, Sierra Club, cyrus.reed@sierraclub.org, 512-888-9411

Re: Fund 9 comments

May 12th, 2026

We are pleased to offer brief comments on one of the interim charges of the House Committee on Culture, Recreation and Tourism related to **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Funding**.

Under the charge, the Committee is tasked with the charge to “Evaluate the long term sustainability of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Fund 9. Examine alternative or supplemental funding mechanisms to ensure stable funding for wildlife conservation, state parks, and agency operations.”

Sierra Club is supportive of this charge. While the Legislature has taken significant action to assure that park operations are well funded both through the dedicated sporting good sales tax approved by voters, as well as the \$1 billion centennial fund, there has been less effort to assure sufficient funding for Fund 009.

Fund 009 (Game, Fish, and Water Safety Account) is a foundational, constitutionally dedicated funding source for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). It finances the operational, conservation, and law enforcement activities vital to protecting Texas' natural resources and outdoor recreation.

Fund 009 is primarily funded by statutory revenues directed explicitly into TPWD accounts:

- License & Stamp Sales: Revenues from hunting and fishing licenses, as well as specialized tags like turkey, waterfowl, and white-winged dove stamps.
- Boat & Motor Fees: Boat registration fees, marine safety enforcement funds, and boat titling fees.
- Federal Excise Taxes: Apportionments from federal excise taxes on hunting and shooting equipment (Pittman-Robertson Act) and fishing tackle (Dingell-Johnson Act).

Statutorily, Fund 009 balances can only be spent on very specific game, fish, and water safety initiatives. Allocations are primarily divided into the following categories:

- Law Enforcement: Funding the operation of Texas Game Wardens, patrol equipment, and statewide water safety education.
- Fisheries & Wildlife Management: Research, habitat protection, and population monitoring for native species.
- Capital Improvements: The construction and repair of boat ramps, fish hatcheries, and wildlife management areas

In 2026 and 2027 as part of SB 1, the Legislature appropriated significant funds from Fund 009 for core function. For example for its operating budget, the Legislature appropriated \$ 130,608,276 in FY 2026 and \$ 128,608,276 in FY 2027 from Fund 9, as well as \$13,959,048 in FY 2026 and 11,959,048 in FY 2027 as part of the capital budget.

In addition as part of SB 1, the legislature directed the agency to produce a study on Fund 9 as Rider 46. **Study on Game, Fish and Water Safety Account No. 9 Revenues and Balances.** Out of amounts appropriated above, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department shall conduct a study of Game, Fish and Water Safety Account No. 9 revenues and balances. TPWD shall report any findings, as well as recommendations to promote the long term health of the Game, Fish and Water Safety Account No. 9, to the Legislative Budget Board and Governor's Office by no later than September 1, 2026.

Unfortunately, according to the State Comptroller of Public Accounts, the amounts of revenues going into Fund 009 is not keeping up with these needs. For example, the Comptroller is indicating a deficit of approximately \$4 million this year, and overall, when including both SB 1 and HB 500 (the supplemental appropriations bill), there is now a deficit of \$9.4 million in the account available for budget certification. Simply put the

revenues coming in from fishing and hunting licenses and federal funding is not keeping up with the needs identified by the TPWD and others.

Sierra Club is supportive of efforts to identify other funding sources and support the agency. We are particularly concerned about the lack of funding available for the needed science and identification of habitat conservation measures in both public and private lands to support wildlife. With habitat destruction, suburban sprawl and the development of large new loads like data centers and AI development, there is a real need to adequately fund the agency for its Fund 009-funded efforts.

Texas could look at some other states which have begun dedicating new funding sources to support wildlife conservation and protection. For example, recently the Sierra Club worked with legislators and stakeholders in Oregon to enact House Bill 4134, the landmark "1.25% for Wildlife" act, which increases the statewide transient lodging tax to generate roughly \$38 million annually for non-game wildlife and habitat conservation. Signed into law in April, the legislation creates a dedicated, recurring funding stream for imperiled species.

Under the legislation, the transient lodging tax (paid by hotel, vacation rental, and campground guests) increased by 1.25%, raising the total rate from 1.5% to 2.75%. The hike is expected to generate approximately \$38 million annually, with about 60% of this revenue coming from out-of-state visitors.

In Texas, we have a state occupancy tax on hotels of 6 percent, which could be raised slightly to help support wildlife. While Sierra Club does not at this point have a specific proposal we believe this is one area that could be explored.

Sierra Club looks forward to working with legislators to look at ways to increase dedicated fees and funds to support Fund 009, including supporting non-game species as well as other important functions of the "Wildlife" part of TPWD.