SIERRA CLUB
LONE STAR CHAPTER

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To: Legislative Budget Board
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September 24, 2026

Sierra Club's Comments on the 2028-2029 Legislative Appropriation Request Submitted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

The Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter is pleased to offer these comments on the 2028-2029 Legislative Appropriation Request (LAR) submitted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). We have been actively engaged with the agency on a number of issues, including the development of new parks following the historic investment in park funding through the Centennial Parks Conservation Fund, issues related to predator species like the Mountain Lion, the agency's Wildlife Conservation Plan, and our concern about how federal border security efforts are impacting state and federally protected habitat. As an organization whose mission is "to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth," this agency holds a special place for the thousands of Sierra Club members in Texas who fish, hunt, hike and visit the special places of Texas, and often volunteer alongside employees of the TPWD.

Before turning to the specific LAR and exceptional item requests, we did want to highlight the progress being made by the agency in the acquisition of new parklands, whether through the $1 billion Centennial Parks Conservation Fund approved by voters, or other monies appropriated by the Legislature. In particular, we were excited to see Palo Pinto Mountains State Park open this spring, with Kronkosky State Natural Area opening soon as well, but equally important are completely new areas open up to the public including Enchanted Rock State Natural Area and Post Oak State Park, at least on a limited basis. In fact, Post Oak officially opens today, September 24th, and we look forward to bringing our members and volunteers out to this new park just across the river from Colorado Bend State Park. To be clear, even after opening, these new areas will require additional development and maintenance funds.

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Furthermore, we agree with the need to find new sources of revenue for Fund 9, and look forward to working with the legislature to make sure the non-park part of TPWD is appropriately resourced. TPWD's ability to carry out wildlife, fisheries, enforcement and related responsibilities is facing numerous challenges, from the development pressures facing much of rural Texas to reductions in the population engaged in certain activities that help fund the agency like fishing and hunting. Without identification of new dedicated resources, this part of the agency's mission could be in jeopardy. We do support shifting the cost of law enforcement to GR, as opposed to funding it with Fund 9.

We do want to highlight two additional concerns. Like Texans of many political beliefs, we are worried about the short- and long-term impacts of the federal government's ongoing and proposed construction of border security, often impacting protected habitats and state-owned lands. We believe the state of Texas must have a seat at the table in designing border security that both addresses security concerns but also protects the places that Texans love. Too often we have seen the results of border security that looks "tough" but actually leads to real impacts on communities and wildlife, and can even create its own security concerns due to flooding and erosion. As the state lead on wildlife and parks, TPWD should be directed to be active in conversations with the federal government.

Second, as an organization, we have for decades called for a real management plan for the Mountain Lion. While we were pleased with recent rules and guidance adopted by the agency to deal with the hunting and trapping of mountain lions, we agree with TPWD staff that a real population study is desperately needed, since voluntary reporting has clearly not worked. We would support a rider calling on the TWPD to conduct such a study, and provide funding for such a study, and are happy to provide language as needed.

Sierra Club's Comments on the Agency's Exceptional Item Requests (EIRs)

TPWD is requesting nine exceptional items totaling $202.2 million and 93 FTEs over the 2028-2029 biennium. The Sierra Club is not taking a position on all of these request but does support the following EIRs:

Sierra Club supports EIR 1: RESTORATION OF 3% REDUCTION. The proposed cuts directly impact park operations, and capital constructions, both of which are real needs that impact Texans visiting or recreating in parks and natural areas. We support restoration of these funds.

Sierra Club supports EIR 3: Agency Technology Modernization. This funding seeks to continue the existing agency network modernization initiative that began with the exceptional item funding from the FY26/27 session. The request would allocate approximately $10 million per fiscal year for salaries, technology and contracts. This funding would be used to contract with outside entities for information technology items and services. One area of particular need is to

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support disaster preparedness and response, but also for ongoing park services such as reservations, scientific research and data collection, as well as other needs.

***Sierra Club supports EIR 5: Capital Repair and Improvement*.** This request would provide $31.8 million over the biennium to address priority capital construction and a backlog of repair needs at the TPWD Headquarters, Perry R. Bass Fisheries Research Center, Possum Kingdom Fish Hatchery, CCA Marine Development Center, Statewide Boat Barns, Matador WMA, and A. E. Wood Fish Hatchery. These repairs are directly tied to programs that benefit the public.

***Sierra Club supports EIR 8: ACCESS TO & CONSERVATION OF FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES*.** This exceptional item requests $5.0 million in GR over the biennium to offset the anticipated drop in federal funds. The request includes several items of importance but for the Sierra Club in particular this exceptional item requests $1.2 million from GRD 9, Saltwater Fish Stamp, to continue the acceleration of the oyster license buyback program. The goal of the program is to allow for a more stable, sustainable, economically viable oyster ecosystem. This program was established in 2017 as a way to stabilize fishing efforts & support healthy fisheries stock by purchasing and retiring commercial licenses from willing license holders.

***Sierra Club supports EIR 9: TEXAS FARM AND RANCH LANDS CONSERVATION PROGRAM*.** The Texas Farm and Ranch Lands Conservation Program (TFRLCP) is aimed at conserving working farm and ranch lands that have high values for water, fish, wildlife and agricultural production and that are at risk of development. Texas is a private property state and the majority of property will always be held in private lands, not in state parks. Conservation is achieved by providing grant funds to purchase long-term conservation easements. According to the TPWD, the TFRLCP Council has approved funding for a total of 45 projects, bringing more than 70,200 acres of the state's high value working farms and ranchlands under perpetual protection. TPWD is requesting an additional appropriation of $8.0 million over the biennium to increase grants awarded for the purchase of long-term conservation easements. The Sierra Club supports this request.

Finally, we support the agency's request to carry forward unexpended balances of land acquisition appropriations into future fiscal years, which allows for strategic planning to target conservation efforts and strategic tracts of land and allows the department to respond to emerging business needs.

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.