

Adequate Funding for Public Lands & Wildlife



The Texas Legislature must maintain dedicated and adequate sources of funding to sustain progress in improving the state parks system. This includes acquisition, development, and management of new parklands and protected habitats, providing outdoor recreation opportunities to meet public needs, as well as exploring options to enhance protection of wildlife diversity in Texas.

Our priorities for funding for the legislative session include:

Deferred maintenance/Capital construction at state parks

Due to a reduction in base funding for this item, additional funds were requested in an exceptional item request in the previous session. Although the 85th Legislature did approve \$17 million, partially from Sporting Goods Sales Tax (SGST) funds, the amount was short of what is needed to address the backlog of deferred maintenance. Thus, we support the TPWD's exceptional request for \$40.6 million over the biennium to address TPWD's highest priority of deferred maintenance, capital construction, repair needs at state parks, WMAs, and hatcheries and other field locations across the state.

Hurricane Harvey

Second, while TPWD was able to secure some FEMA funding and spent some of the previous \$17 million on Harvey-related damage, there are significant damages from Harvey to both TPWD offices and facilities that must be addressed. In fact, over thirty department facilities suffered extensive damage due to Harvey. Thus the Sierra Club supports the exceptional item of \$9 million to fund additional projects, including levee repairs at Brazos Bend State Park (\$2M); restoration of the Buescher State Park Civilian Conservation Corps Dam Spillway (\$6M); and other needed repairs.

State park operations

Additional SGST appropriations would support additional personnel and funds

to purchase needed vehicles, equipment, and support communications technology. The exceptional item request for this category was not funded in the last legislative session. With increased visitors and usage, more money is needed.

Thus, the Sierra Club supports a total of \$15.4 million for state parks over the biennium, as follows:

- \$5.3M/46.0 FTEs to help manage state park operations statewide.
- \$375K/6.38 FTEs for pre-opening activities at Galveston Island and Palo Pinto State Parks in FY 2021.
- \$800K for minor repairs to address impacts of heavy visitation to aging park facilities.
- \$3.7M for transportation items and equipment. We would request that TPWD be directed to look at all technologies, including electric vehicles, when purchasing new vehicles.
- \$5.2M to address operating cost increases/other operational imperatives.

Local park grants

Since 1994, Texas Parks and Wildlife Local Park Grant programs have invested matching funds for more than one thousand projects throughout the state. This investment has provided for the acquisition and development of local park and recreation sites, and provided resources to supplement local conservation programs that introduce children and families to the outdoors. These grants have been funded from the Sporting Goods Sales Tax, reinvesting sales taxes paid by Texas citizens in close-to-home recreation opportunities.

The Local Park Grant program would benefit by restoration to its FY 2016-17 level of funding. The competitive grants are of critical importance to local municipalities. The program for FY 2018-19 was reduced by \$4.4 million compared to the previous biennium. While TPWD has asked for an exceptional item to provide \$5.0 million in Sporting Goods Sales Tax over the biennium to fund local park competitive grants and fund the local park grant program at 100% of FY 2018-19 levels, we would ask instead that a \$9.4 million exceptional items be considered.

New park development

Finally, it should be noted that we hope the Legislature will also consider the need to develop land that has been acquired or donated to Parks and Wildlife. Five undeveloped state parks require funding for staffing and facility development before they will be available for public use. A number of important facilities, including Palo Pinto Mountains State Park and the expansion of the Devils River SNA, are still underway, but additional support is needed to complete their planning and development.

Thus, the Sierra Club is in full support of the exceptional item that would develop Palo Pinto Mountains State Park, by providing \$12.5 million in construction grants. The new park will include a headquarters/visitor center, maintenance complex, canyon view day use, multi-use, equestrian and tent camping, lakeside day use, and hike & bike and equestrian trails.

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