



SIERRA CLUB

LONE STAR CHAPTER

Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 1032

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Dear Chairman Perry, Vice Chairman Hancock, and members of the committee,

The Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter supports Senate Bill 1032. The Sierra Club is the nation's oldest conservation organization, and the Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club has been actively engaged in Texas water and wildlife issues since its inception.

Our support for SB 1032 stems from our coastal need for oyster reef protection and restoration. Oysters provide integral environmental services including water filtration and storm protection. Many of these environmental functions and the overall health of the reefs are dependent on the reefs' vertical complexity and structure. Along the Texas coast, the primary method of harvesting wild oysters is dredging — essentially scraping up a portion of the water bottom and sorting through what comes up. Dredging as a whole has negative impacts on the structure of oyster reefs, and over-dredging of reefs will require longer-term full closure bays to give significant recovery time to the affected oyster populations. Moreover, the state's oyster populations are increasingly threatened by factors including climate change impacts, water quantity variability, and water quality degradation.

As many of you know, Texas oyster populations have faced unsustainable harvest in recent years. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has taken important steps to curb wild oyster harvest and protect Texas oyster populations, including the difficult decision to close the Mesquite Bay Complex to harvest — a bay system that represented **only 2.8% of Texas oyster habitat but produced 30.4% of coastwide landings.**

SB 1032 is an important step in the right direction — shifting away from a wild harvest regulatory mechanism and toward a more sustainable practice of caring for and supporting oyster reefs. Though, it is important to note that for many of these degraded reefs or partially degraded reefs, dredging as a practice should not be an option if they are to make any semblance of recovery. Dredging during a period of high stress for a reef and/or reestablishment risks the reef failing to recover altogether.

By expanding the ability of TPWD to categorize reefs as degraded, and expanding the department's ability to assign leases for both commercial and restoration uses — we hope to see a more resilient Texas coastline.

Sierra Club sincerely appreciates the opportunity to make comments.

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