



Photo: Al Braden

Sierra Club Priorities for the 87th Texas Legislature

Priority 1: Community Protection from Pollution

Communities across Texas are suffering from pollution, generation after generation. It has to stop. There are no sacrifice zones without sacrificed people. Every Texan deserves to breathe clean air and live in a healthy and safe environment. The Sierra Club prioritizes bills that will address the adverse impact pollution has on communities, especially those on the frontline which are disproportionately communities of color. Our main goals include:

- Improve and enact performance standards for above-ground petrochemical storage tanks, and require safety standards to lower industrial accidents
- Expand and improve air quality monitoring along the Gulf Coast and in Permian Basin
- Include of cumulative impacts, improved community monitoring, and consideration of environmental justice in state permitting decisions
- Enhance public participation on environmental permitting at the TCEQ through improved notice and requirements for local government, citizens, and organizations concerned about pollution impacts from permits
- Oppose efforts to site interim high-level radioactive waste in West Texas
- Support improved regulations and siting of concrete batch plant and aggregate operations.
- Improve oversight and regulation of oil and gas activities, including:
 - Control emissions of methane and eliminating the use of routine flaring and venting
 - Require higher bonding amounts for oil and gas wells to ensure clean-up
 - Change the name of the Railroad Commission of Texas to reflect reality
 - Increase max administrative penalties on oil and gas facilities from \$10,000 to \$25,000
 - Create improved standards for underground wastewater disposal injection wells

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- Eliminate potential for direct discharge of fracked wastewater in West Texas
- Require companies that want additional permits for oil or gas wells to have a good compliance record and existing well sites cleaned up
- Require the TCEQ to develop health-based standards on hydrogen sulfide pollution

Priority 2: Clean Energy, Energy Efficiency, and Climate

The solutions to our climate and pollution crises are right in front of us, but our elected leaders have not kept up with the times. Advances in renewable energy, energy storage, electric vehicles, and energy efficiency need better policy support at the state level for Texas to make them real solutions. Our transmission system needs upgrading to get cleaner forms of power to and from homes and businesses. Continued funding for the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan is also a priority. The Sierra Club prioritizes bills that enable these technologies in a way that supports good jobs and includes a just transition from fossil fuel industries.

- Increase energy efficiency savings and expand use of electric vehicles
 - Require transmission and distribution utilities to achieve a goal of reducing energy use by 1% of sales by 2025 through energy efficiency programs
 - Improve energy use reporting from state agencies and local utility companies
 - Adopt statewide appliance standards for a suite of 18 water and energy-saving appliances
 - Update our statewide building codes, and ensuring counties have the same powers as cities to adopt codes, require inspections, and enforce rules
 - Spend the full amount of funds (including money from Title Certification Fees) in the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan Trust Fund to reduce ozone pollution through cleaner vehicles, including electrification of transportation, reductions in oil and gas emissions and the utilization of energy storage facilities
 - Pass an Electrification Transportation Act that moves Texas forward on new electric vehicle and electric transit policy
- Reform the Public Utility Commission of Texas
 - Clarify rules on ownership and control and encourage utilities and third-parties to utilize “non-wires alternatives” like electric storage, energy efficiency, demand response, and renewable onsite generation to provide reliability services
 - Allow non-ERCOT transmission and distribution utilities to “secure” early retirement of fossil fuel plants, as well as worker transition and renewable energy development, through financial mechanisms
 - Bolster the transmission process at the Public Utility Commission and ERCOT to resolve constraints that impact generation, and to enable economic transmission and bulk transmission projects to proceed more readily

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- Increase Renewable Energy Equitably
 - Create a statewide goal to achieve 50% renewable energy by 2030, and 100% carbon-free energy by 2035
 - Create a Clean Energy Economic Development and Worker Training Taskforce
 - Create a statewide “Solar on Schools” program
 - Create a distributed renewable energy bill of rights for owners of renewable energy like solar and storage
- Act on Climate
 - Create a State Climate Plan for the State of Texas
 - Require state agencies to consider climate in their strategic plans
 - Require a biannual carbon emissions inventory and footprint report by key state agencies

Priority 3: Parks, Wildlife, and Land

Public land belongs to the people, but it doesn’t look that way right now. Oil and gas companies are allowed to drill in state parks, pipelines can cross critical wildlife management areas, and polluting corporations can abuse eminent domain provisions to snatch up land for corporate profit. Sierra Club prioritizes bills that will put Texas lands back on a path that protects and preserves it, and will seek fundamental reforms at the Departments of Agriculture and Parks and Wildlife to ensure adequate funding for healthy soils, wildlife and parks, and proper enforcement of pesticide use.

- Pass healthy soils legislation to encourage farmer/rancher soil sequestration & nutrient retention
- Enact important Parks and Wildlife/TPWD Sunset Reforms, including:
 - Ban oil and gas exploration in public parks, and improve mitigation for any required pipeline easements
 - Improve funding for the expansion of existing parks and the development of unopened state parks, and acquisition of new parks and Wildlife Management Areas, as well as an adequate and diversified funding for the wildlife diversity (non-game) program
- Enact a statewide ban on gassing and use of chemicals on wildlife, such as used in the Rattlesnake Roundup, to protect predators
- Study pollinator protection and restrict neonicotinoids
- Authorize a small impact fee on development to allow local governments to fund organizations that help wildlife and fund local wildlife officers to educate the public about wildlife protection
- Reform eminent domain by improving the process to give landowners greater rights in the event of an eminent domain request by private companies, such as oil and gas companies
- Establish a new pipeline routing process that requires evaluation and approval of routes through a public process, similar to the way that transmission lines are evaluated and approved

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Priority 4: Water Resources Management & Protection

There are two overarching challenges to water: ensuring there's enough of it for people and the environment and making sure it's clean. Right now, Texas is not doing enough to meet either challenge, though some progress has been made. Sierra Club prioritizes bills that lead to better water conservation in all sectors of the economy, bills that address unacceptable levels of water pollution in our lakes, rivers, and coastal areas, and bills that ensure adequate flows in our rivers, bays, and streams.

- Restore the rights of recreational and environmental interests to contest proposed TCEQ water and wastewater permits and restore the right of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department to seek or participate in those contested cases to protect fish, wildlife, and other state resources
- Enhance the role of the Parks & Wildlife Department in the operation and advancement of the Texas Water Trust, which holds water rights dedicated to maintenance of instream flows and freshwater inflows to bays and estuaries ("environmental flows")
- Provide adequate funding and statutory support for science-based approaches to maintain sufficient environmental flows
- Oppose efforts to allow direct discharge of "produced waters" from oil and gas operations into streams but setting strong effluent limitations if such discharges are authorized
- Support efforts to accurately identify and reduce loss of water from pipeline leaks and other problems in water utility distribution systems
- Ensure that management of groundwater and surface water recognizes connections between those sources

Priority 5: Local Democracy & Voting Rights

Our cities and counties have been under attack for too long from the Texas Legislature. We must continue to defend the right of local communities to establish safeguards for community safety and justice, and we must defend and expand the right to vote. Efforts to weaken local governments and make voting more difficult will be opposed by the Sierra Club as we seek to strengthen our democracy and local governmental accountability.

- Investigate Ken Paxton's role in the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection, including use of state funds
- Improve access to voting rights
- Improve and defend local control
- Improve and defend first amendment rights to protest

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