

From: [Sunset Advisory Commission](#)
To: [Janet Wood](#)
Subject: FW: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)
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From: sunset@sunset.texas.gov <sunset@sunset.texas.gov> On Behalf Of Texas Sunset Commission
Sent: Tuesday, September 22, 2020 10:31 AM
To: Sunset Advisory Commission <Sunset@sunset.texas.gov>
Subject: Public Input Form for Agencies Under Review (Public/After Publication)

Agency: TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

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Your Comments About the Staff Report, Including Recommendations Supported or
Opposed:
September 22, 2020

Texas Sunset Advisory Commission
PO Box 13066
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Chairman Cyrier and Commissioners,

Thank you for your work to finalize the review of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) in advance of the 87th Legislative Session. We strongly support the mission of TPWD and have great confidence in its leadership. The review by the Sunset Commission provides a unique opportunity for the Department to do a top to bottom review of its operations and seek feedback from the public on possible improvements.

We emphatically agree with your staff that “the agency’s activities to protect Texas’ natural resources and provide outdoor recreation opportunities continue to be needed.” With Texas’ population continuing to grow, and expected to hit 47 Million by 2050, this work is paramount. We urge you to include in your recommendations that TPWD develop a long-range plan to acquire and develop new state parks and protected areas to meet the needs of Texas’ booming population and protect threatened wildlife habitats.

In 2001, in partnership with Texas Tech University, TPWD published Texas Parks and Wildlife for the 21st Century to “establish the foundation for the Department’s future planning efforts.” That report noted that the “land that once seemed so limitless is getting broken up into smaller and smaller parcels, and the state’s great ecosystems are becoming fragmented.

Some of the state’s smaller, fragile subsystems have become so diminished that they are in danger of disappearing forever.”

In order to keep up with our increasing population, protect natural areas and ensure recreational access, the report

recommended adding 1,428,117 acres of state park land by 2030. Unfortunately, with limited federal funding and essentially no state funding appropriated for new park and protected area acquisition, Texas has only been able to add roughly 200,000 acres to the system since then.

Our urban areas face particular demand for parks given booming population and rapid development. According to the 2018 Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan, “the urban metropolises have a much lower per capita allocation of recreation and conservation acreage than counties with smaller populations.” 20 out of 254 counties “reported zero recreation-conservation acres.” Over a quarter of Texans “indicate that their community lacks various outdoor recreation opportunities”, a sobering statistic. The report concluded that “moving forward, state and local officials will need to plan ahead to provide equitable access to conservation and recreation lands, particularly in urban areas.”

In 2002, TWPD published its first Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan. This report was initially developed after the 2000 Sunset Review found “TPWD did not have a comprehensive plan to meet Texas’ growing conservation and recreation needs”. According to your staff, this report “explicitly fulfilled” the requirement to state clear goals for conservation and recreation needs. For example, the plan set a goal of “opening a minimum of four, 5,000-acre or larger state parks near the major urban centers” within a decade. Again, with zero state appropriations and limited federal funding, it has been impossible to fully achieve even this modest goal.

Sunset Commission staff identified that, in subsequent plan editions, “the Land and Water Plan no longer includes metrics to measure progress toward its goals and objectives. The 2015 plan removed the plan’s specific action items with measurable goals, like increasing the number of youth participating in youth hunts and the number of acres added to state parks.”

Without clear metrics and a well-defined path for what resources we need to get there, we are at risk of losing much of what makes Texas great, including wildlife habitat, water resources, and wide open spaces in which our children can adventure. To ensure a vibrant future for our state and all Texans, it is of critical importance that TPWD update and implement its Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan, including clear goals and targets for funding and acquiring additional and essentially needed parkland.

We strongly agree that TPWD is absolutely an essential agency for the State of Texas. We also agree that the state will benefit from requiring “TPWD to include effectiveness measures for goals and objectives in the Land and Water Plan and biennially evaluate whether the agency is making progress toward achieving the goals and objectives.” (Rec. 3.1) The plan should be rooted in the goals laid out in Texas Parks and Wildlife for the 21st Century, including laying the groundwork and providing the funding mechanisms needed to add at least one million more acres of park lands and protected open space by Texas’ bicentennial in 2036.

We also agree with Sunset recommendation that the department should “establish a conservation and recreation planning subcommittee.” A subcommittee focused on meeting the conservation and recreation needs of the state will shine an appropriate spotlight on the current, inadequate level of public open space recreational access across the state, and develop a plan to meet this need, including sources of state and federal funding to acquire the land required to meet these goals.

Thank you for your work to review this essential agency working to provide outdoor recreational access for all, and preserve Texas’s diverse wildlife habitats and ecosystems.

Sincerely,

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Any Alternative or New Recommendations on This Agency: N/A

My Comment Will Be Made Public: I agree