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Texas Wetlands

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Dear Reader,

We are pleased to provide this first edition of our newsletter for your enjoyment. The purpose of this newsletter is to provide readers with information on wetlands and related activities throughout the state.

Because wetlands contribute major biological and economic benefits, numerous agencies and organizations have begun working together to prepare a State Wetlands Conservation Plan. The Plan will focus on identifying voluntary methods of conserving wetlands. We will keep you informed of its development.

Because our readers are interested in learning about planned wetland activities throughout the state, we welcome the receipt of short articles or notices of events which can be published in the newsletter. With the majority of wetlands in the state privately owned, we are particularly interested in hearing from our landowners. Learn how one landowner has chosen wetland conservation as part of his management program (see Landowner Profile on page 5).

We look forward to working more closely with all entities to provide more options for wetland conservation.

Bob Spain



State wetlands work gets a boost

Work on wetlands conservation and restoration received a significant boost with the development of a "State Wetlands Conservation Plan." For Texas, the Plan will enhance current activities involving wetlands by creating partnerships with other agencies and landowners.

"The Plan is unique because unlike other approaches, which are specific to a particular agency or entity that sponsors or funds the wetland program, this plan will attempt to use all existing state, federal, and private programs and build on these," said Bob Spain with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Resource Protection Division. "The key will be the participation in and acceptance of the Plan by private landowners. The main theme of the Plan will be a 'non-regulatory' approach that relies on incentives for the person who controls or owns the wetland."

The Plan will draw attention to wetlands whose importance to sportfish, game and non-game animals has long been recognized by biologists and conservationists. This recognition has also grown with other federal, state, and private organizations due to the economic value of wetlands.

The main theme of the Plan will be a 'non-regulatory' approach that relies on incentives for the person who controls or owns the wetland.

A survey in 1991 revealed that wetlands are good business. A total of \$792 million was spent by Texans on fishing related activities, of which \$350 million was for food and \$185 million for lodging. Total wetlands economic benefits nationwide amount to \$1.5 billion annually.

Because wetlands are key components of healthy aquatic systems, and more than 2.6 million people fish in Texas, conservation is not only necessary biologically but prudent economically.

In the past, wetlands were not considered important, had no particular monetary value, and therefore, were exploited beyond their capacity to renew themselves. Lands were converted to agriculture or other land uses that provided food or fiber for the landholders.

Recent surveys reveal that Texas is one of 22 states that has lost more than 50% of their wetlands. To stop the current trend of wetland loss, See **BOOST**, pg 2

recognition of the problem must be communicated to the public, and interagency cooperation to address the issue is necessary.

In 1987 at the request of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), The Conservation Foundation (a non-profit organization) convened the National Wetlands Policy Forum. The purpose of this conference was to address major policy concerns involving the nation's protection and management of its valuable wetlands resources.

The Forum developed an extensive list of recommendations designed to promote better private and public stewardship through nonregulatory approaches and to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of existing regulatory programs.

A major element in these reforms has been the recommendation that all states develop State Wetland Conservation Plans (SWCPs) which may provide a basis for subsequent acquisition, regulation, and other wetlands protection and management activities. The specific components of the SWCP are to be determined by the states themselves and may be either voluntary or regulatory in nature.

The EPA has since volunteered financial support, technical assistance, and guidance to aid all states in developing SWCPs by the year 2000.

In 1993, the World Wildlife Fund hosted a workshop in Austin funded by the EPA and private foundation grants for the Region 6 states (Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana). The purpose was to provide an overview of techniques for developing a SWCP and to provide the initiative for starting the process by 1996 and completing the plan by 2000.

Following the 1993 workshop, TPWD advanced the concept of a state plan in meetings with the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission, General Land Office, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, Texas Water Development Board, Texas A&M University, and State Soil and Water Conservation Board. With the support of these agencies, TPWD is developing a framework for an SWCP that will allow the state agencies to coordinate efforts to conserve and protect wetlands.

An SWCP for Texas means the development of a comprehensive approach to wetlands planning including the coordination of a variety of wetlands projects that are ongoing in Texas state agencies. The Plan for Texas focuses on non-regulatory, voluntary approaches for conserving wetlands, primarily through the development of new incentives encouraging wetland conservation on private lands. Information transfer between landowners and agencies and wetlands conservation strategies are also important components of the Plan.

Statewide Scoping Meeting emphasizes landowner involvement

A State Scoping Meeting for the State Wetlands Conservation Plan (SWCP) was held in September, 1994. Approximately 100 participants, including representatives from landowners, state and federal agencies, conservation, agriculture, forestry, and business groups attended. The scoping meeting offered participants an opportunity to provide input at an early stage in plan development on three main components: (1) economic and other incentives for conserving wetlands, (2) transfer of information to landowners, and (3) wetlands conservation.

The primary components of the SWCP were developed through a series of brainstorming and voting sessions. The principle recommendations made at the Scoping Meeting include:

- Develop new economic and other incentives for private landowners to protect wetlands.
- Encourage partnerships (e.g., public/private, interagency, inter-level of government) to manage and conserve wetlands.
- Increase wetlands education/outreach.
- Promote positive aspects of wetlands through increased education, demonstration projects, and promoting the potential economic benefits that wetland may bring to landowners.
- Explore funding options for wetlands conservation (acquisition, easements).
- Support research by monitoring wetlands projects to expand and improve database information for wetlands.

The participants' primary comments demonstrated both an overwhelming support for landowner involvement throughout the Plan's development and a desire for new private lands tax incentives that would encourage landowners to conserve wetlands. For a complete copy of recommendations and voting, please contact Julie Anderson, Wetlands Planner, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (512) 389-4328.

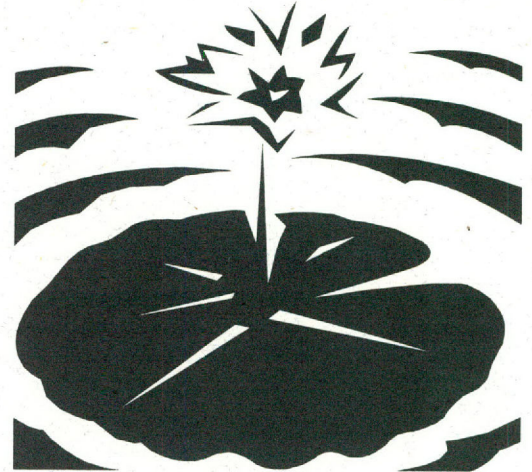
Regional advisory groups to be formed

As the lead agency in the development of the State Wetlands Conservation Plan (SWCP), the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) values the input of a variety of agencies and groups in guiding the development of the SWCP. The near-term efforts of TPWD will concentrate on assembling regional advisory groups made up of landowner, agricultural, forestry, and conservation representatives who will expand upon many of the recommendations that resulted from the statewide scoping meeting.

"The purpose of the regional advisory groups is to provide the 'meat' of the plan," said Julie Anderson, the State Wetlands Planner for TPWD. "The groups will help determine how the main objectives of the Plan can be realistically fulfilled. Some of the objectives that groups will be addressing are related to economic incentives, restoration efforts, wetlands education and regional management strategies."

"Regional approval is essential in Texas. Each region of the state has specific wetlands issues that are different from other regions and may require an individual approach," said Anderson.

Regional groups will be established for at least three regions (East Texas, the Panhandle, and the coast). Public meetings will be held in each region to provide information on the SWCP and to explain how a cooperative effort of landowners, agencies and other interested groups can conserve wetlands.



Interagency Coordination Group provides link

An Interagency Coordination Group has been formed to increase staff-level cooperation and coordination among agencies working toward similar goals of protecting our state's wetlands resources. The Interagency Coordination Group will act primarily in an information transfer and sharing capacity. By providing a forum for regular program updates, the group will facilitate the exchange of information among agencies and projects, identify areas where agencies can work together to maximize productivity, avoid duplication of activities, coordinate progress on EPA grants and minimize costs by sharing information.

Agencies initially included in the group are those that have applied for, or have received in the past, EPA Wetlands Program grant funding. Agencies participating in the Interagency Coordination Group include: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission, Texas A&M, Texas Agricultural Extension Service, General Land Office, State Soil and Water Conservation Board, and the Texas Water Development Board.

Interagency Coordinating Group Members

Julie Anderson
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Mark Fisher
Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission

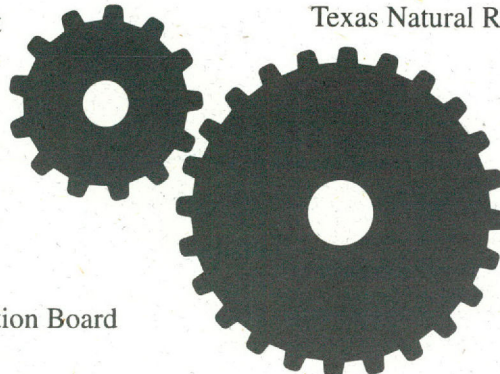
Tom Calnan
General Land Office

Bill Longley
Texas Water Development Board

Dr. Will Cohen
Texas Agricultural Extension Service

Dr. Ed Soltes
Texas A&M University Department
of Forest Science

Mel Davis
Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board



State Coordination Group meets

Representatives from a variety of federal and state agencies and private organizations attended the first Statewide Coordination Group meeting February 1995 in Austin. The purpose of the Group meeting was to provide members a means to represent their agency/organization's interest in the early development of the State Wetlands Conservation Plan (SWCP).

During this first meeting, the Coordination Group developed the overall goal of the SWCP which emphasizes the conservation and restoration of wetlands through voluntary efforts.

Concerned with the need for cooperation and communication between landowners and agencies, the Coordination Group also outlined the structure of regional advisory groups which, in later meetings, will provide updates to the Group on particular conservation topics specific to those regions.

Future roles of the Coordination Group include providing feedback and support to guide the development of the SWCP, enhancing communication between landowners and regional interests and agencies, and facilitating coordination, communication and cooperation among Texas resource agencies and private groups on wetlands. Landowner involvement and interagency cooperation are fundamental concerns of the Coordination Group.

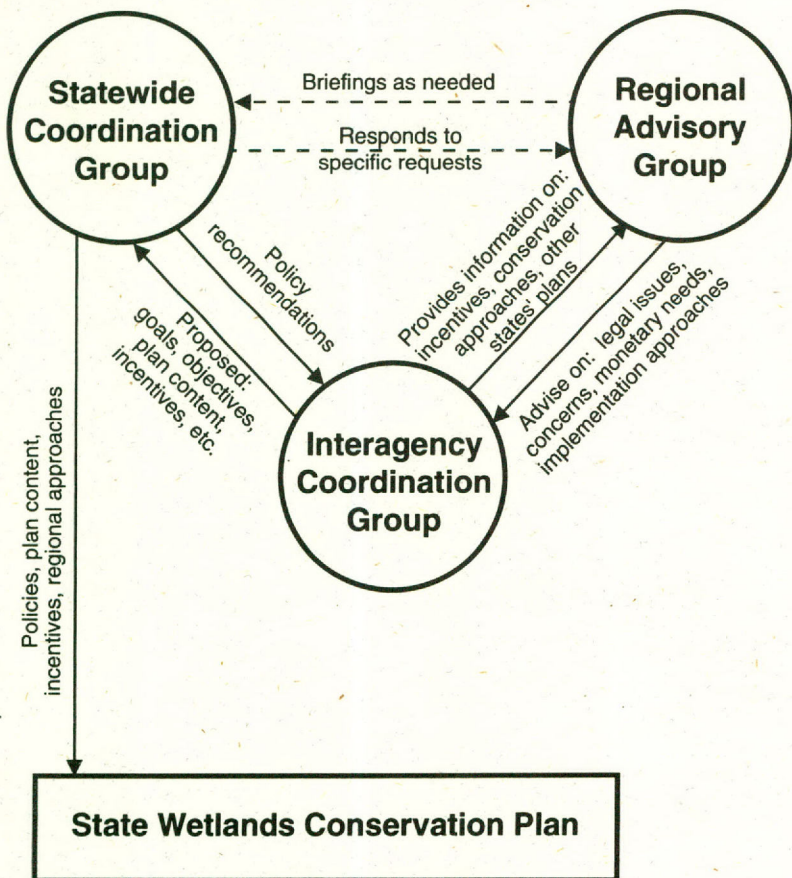
State Wetlands Conservation Plan Goal:

It shall be the goal of Texas to enhance our wetland resources with respect to function and value through voluntary conservation and restoration of the quality, quantity and diversity of Texas wetlands.

Statewide Coordinating Group Members

- Harold Bob Bennett*
Consolidated Farm Service Agency
- Will Cohen*
Texas Agricultural Extension Service
- Caryn Cosper*
Texas General Land Office
- Mel Davis*
Texas State Soil and Water Conservation Board
- Beverly Ethridge*
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
- Jon Fisher*
Texas Chemical Council
- Pat Henson*
Natural Resource Conservation Service
- Laura Koesters*
Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission
- William Longley*
Texas Water Development Board
- Larry McKinney*
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Mike McMurry*
Texas Department of Agriculture
- Ned Meister*
Texas Farm Bureau
- Steve Munday*
Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association
- Dianna Noble*
Texas Department of Transportation
- John Norris*
Texas Forest Service
- Joe Shaw*
Champion International Corporation
- Kimberley Sims*
Office of the Governor
- Fred Werner*
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Eric Frasier*
Wetlands Habitat Alliance of Texas
- David Wesley*
Ducks Unlimited

Interaction between advisory groups



Wetlands Assistance Guide for Landowners



The future of Texas' wetlands is closely linked to land-use decisions made by the stewards of the wetlands resources. Because approximately 98% of the state's lands are privately owned, the role of the private landowner in wetlands conservation is crucial. As understanding and appreciation for wetlands increases, there has been a growing number of voluntary programs to help landowners act as stewards of their land by conserving and restoring wetlands.

Many federal, state and private programs are available to assist landowners in protecting wetlands according to their different needs within the context of broader conservation goals.

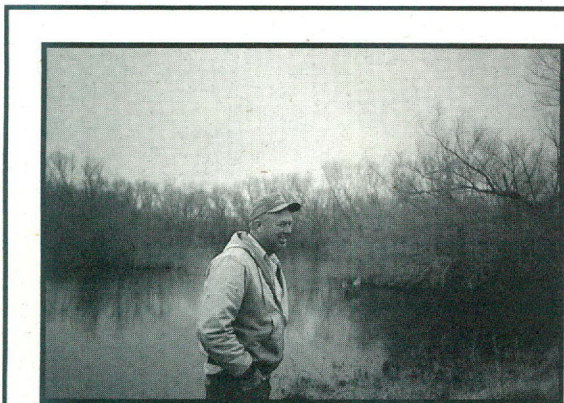
The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), in conjunction with other state and federal agencies, is currently developing a Wetlands Assistance Guide for Landowners to assist landowners in selecting voluntary programs that provide economic and other incentives for wetlands conservation.

The Guide is intended to provide a quick reference to landowners who are interested in protecting wetlands on their property. The Guide focuses on summarizing existing state and federal programs that provide financial and technical assistance to landowners who would like to protect their wetlands.

The Guide enables landowners to choose programs applicable to their financial needs, specific concerns, restoration and conservation goals, federal and state regulations, and the existing management or creation of wetlands on their properties. Options include technical information and advice, financial contributions for projects or practices that provide long-term improvements in wetland values, and payment at fair market rates for permanent protection on wetland areas.

Other topics discussed in the Guide include the importance of wetlands, an assessment of landowner options for wetlands protection, a summary of existing regulations affecting wetlands, contacts, and a description of the roles of state and federal agencies that are involved in wetlands regulation and management.

The Guide should be available in July, 1995, and copies may be obtained through county agents statewide, or by contacting Julie Anderson, TPWD, (512) 389-8196.



LANDOWNER profile:



Barry Austin ♦ Chatfield, Texas

Bottomland hardwood forests, like those found along Mr. Barry Austin's property on the Trinity River, are some of the most productive ecosystems in the world. The rich, alluvial soils deposited on the riverbanks after floods grow tall trees and good crops, and dense vegetation provides a home for a variety of wildlife, including excellent deer and waterfowl populations. Mr. Austin manages the property for the Pettigrew family who has owned the 2,800 acre Ranch in northern Navarro County since the 1950's. He knows well the water level fluctuations that create such productive lands. By managing the land in ways that

complement Mother Nature's forces, he has reaped the benefits of the land, both aesthetically and monetarily.

Mr. Austin's property is an excellent example of land management for multiple uses. His commercial fly-fishing operation runs year-round on a part of his property that was formerly a gravel mine. Crawfish raised on eight acres of wetlands are sold locally, pecans from his trees and those of his neighbors are harvested each fall, and hay from fields along river bottoms feeds his cattle, Mr. Austin's primary

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PROFILE

income source. He advises landowners to take advantage of the wildlife resources on their property, because improving wildlife habitat can be profitable.

Mr. Austin's wetlands demonstrate how wildlife and habitat can be improved through wetlands incentives programs. In 1990, Mr. Austin began three Partners for Wildlife projects covering a total of 300 acres, with the assistance of Mike McCollum at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The projects, on two restored wetlands and one natural site, involved building small levees equipped with plugs that maintain water through the winter. The three sites are connected by pipes, allowing water from the Trinity River to be pumped to the sites in years when rainfall has not been sufficient to fill

We sat down and talked about what I wanted, and everyone involved, both my family and the agencies, was so happy with it.

the wetlands. In the five years since the projects were begun, the pipes have not been needed. The USFWS funded 65% of the cost for the pump, pipes, and levee work, with technical assistance provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

The wetlands vegetation, including pecans, cattails, smartweed, and bulrush, attracts a variety of waterfowl and other birds, including coots, cormorants, eagle, and snipe. Mr. Austin has planted cypress trees along the banks of the wetlands. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the USFWS donated 120 wood duck boxes, which Mr. Austin maintains. Although the Austin family uses the wetlands for waterfowl hunting, half of the Partners wetlands are left as resting areas for the birds.

The Partners for Wildlife wetlands have provided many benefits to the Austins. For example, the Partners projects provide additional wetland habitat for crawfish, resulting in increased sales for the family business.

Many of Mr. Austin's neighbors also have Partners projects on their lands, which adds up to significant waterfowl habitat. The wetland areas, each providing a different habitat type, complement each other by attracting different wildlife species. The large network of wetlands found on adjacent properties creates an ideal environment that encourages usage by waterfowl all year long. Typically, waterfowl would use the wetlands found in northern parts of Texas only as stopover areas on their way to the coast.

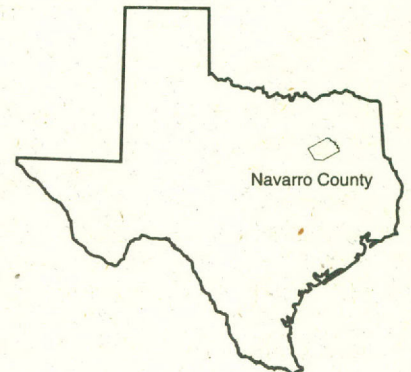
Interest in the Partners program has been steadily growing. In 1990, Mr. Austin was the first Texan to use the Partners program. Since then, approximately 130 Partners projects have been started in Texas. Most landowners learned of the program through neighbors who were pleased with the results. Mike McCollum of the USFWS explains that success: "People recognize that river bottoms may not always be ideal for cropping, and may be too wet for cattle. They would like to get some benefits, either aesthetic or financial, from their lands."

Mr. McCollum emphasizes that participation in the Partners program does not remove any property rights of the landowner - participation depends strictly on landowner interest in the program. "Cultivating a relationship with landowners is essential to success of the program. They can choose not to participate if they do not like the Partners policies."

Mr. Austin has been very pleased with his wetlands. "The project was so easy - Mike took care of the whole process. We sat down and talked about what I wanted, and everyone involved, both my family and the agencies, was so happy with it. We were planning to restore some wetlands anyway, and I was just grateful to get the help."



Barry Austin's property along the Trinity River in Navarro County provides an excellent home for deer and a variety of waterfowl populations.



Educational video to be offered to landowners

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is producing an educational wetlands video which provides citizens with information about wetlands in Texas.

The video includes information regarding the different types of wetlands found in Texas, the function of wetlands and their importance to both humans and the natural environment, their rate of loss, and the efforts currently employed to conserve wetlands by various state agencies.

Available June 1995, the video will be distributed free of charge through TPWD (while supplies last). For further information, contact Julie Anderson, Wetlands Planner, TPWD (512) 389-8196.

New awards program honors private landowners

A new program was launched in March by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to recognize private land owners for their critical role in conserving and enhancing wildlife habitat. The Lone Star Land Steward Awards program recognizes and honors the achievements of up to 30 private landowners in Texas each year.

The Lone Star Land Steward Awards program recognizes excellent wildlife conservation efforts in all habitats within the 10 ecological areas of Texas - from timberlands to native prairies and from marshes to mountain ranges.

"We want to identify those landowners who plan and implement conservation practices that enhance wildlife habitat on traditional farms and ranches, as well as those who manage and protect rare resources, such as native prairies or bat caves," said Bob Cook, director of the TPWD Wildlife Division.

As many as three land owners from each of the 10 ecological areas of Texas will be honored at a special reception hosted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission and the Private Lands Advisory Board each March. One landowner will be honored as the statewide Lone Star Land Steward. For more information, contact Kirby Brown, TPWD, (512)389-4395.

Resource management is an essential conservation tool and private landowners are the key to conserving wildlife habitat.

"Landowners committed to sound wildlife management are producing the highest quality wildlife populations," said Andrew Sansom, executive director of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. "Resource management is an essential conservation tool and private landowners are the key to conserving wildlife habitat."

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Texas Wetlands Plan Update is produced by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's Resource Protection Division. We welcome short articles or notices of coming events concerning wetlands or wetlands related activities. Address submissions to Resource Protection Division, Texas Wetlands Plan Update, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, Texas, 78744; or telephone (512) 389-8196.

Robin Cypher..... Student Intern
Julie Anderson State Wetlands Planner
Bob Spain..... Branch Chief, Habitat Assessment
Larry McKinney..... Division Director, Resource Protection
Andrew Sansom..... Executive Director, TPWD

Texas Wetlands

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Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
4200 Smith School Road
Austin, TX 78744