

Texas Wildlife Action Plan

What is a wildlife action plan?

Congress asked each state to develop a wildlife action plan, known technically as a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy. These proactive plans examine the health of wildlife and prescribe actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and more costly to protect.

Texas snapshot

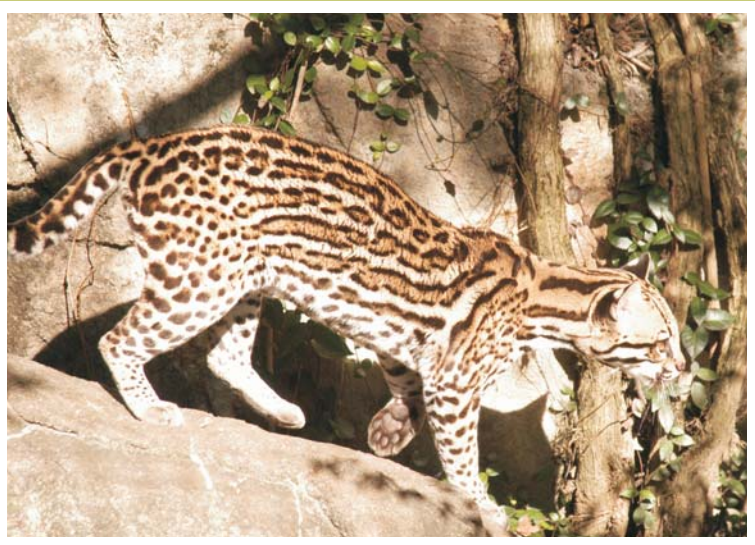
Geography: Texas is an extremely diverse state with 10 distinct ecoregions ranging from desert in the western portion of the state to the dense forests of the east. The area of the State of Texas is greater than 250,000 square miles, or about one-twelfth that of

the entire United States. According to NatureServe's 2002 States of the Union: Ranking America's Biodiversity, Texas is second only to California in terms of its biodiversity. Texas has the highest number of birds and reptiles and the second highest number of plants and mammals in the United

States. It has the third largest rate of endemism in the country (TPWD 2002). There are 22 major river basins in the state that all eventually flow into the nine major bays and estuaries along the Texas coast. Texas also shares a border and ultimately a portion of its landscape with Mexico. In addition, the Gulf of Mexico lines 367 mi. of the Texas coast and provides important habitat for a variety of fish, invertebrates, birds and mammals.

Landscape: More than 94% of Texas is privately owned, making it critical for

private landowners to be partners in all aspects of conservation from land acquisition to land management and restoration. It is also important that Texas appropriately manage lands that are owned or maintained by Texas Parks and Wildlife. With 51 wildlife management areas and about 80 state parks, Texas has over one



Ocelot/Houston Zoo

million acres of land to manage and in many cases to restore. Being a good partner is the only way to ensure healthy ecosystems in Texas.

Wildlife: Texas has tens of thousands of species that fall under the loose-fitting title "nongame". These species are vital to the ecology of Texas. Texas species are as diverse as the Texas landscape. There are 5,500 species of plant in Texas, and greater than 425 of those species are endemics. There have been over 600 bird species identified within the borders of Texas and 184 known mammal species,

"This [State Wildlife Grants] money is important to Texas and will help a number of species and habitats stay healthy and prosper in the future. Collecting information and doing good wildlife management cost money with hopeful results always pending. Texas Parks & Wildlife Department is proud to invest this new source of money in the future of Texas wildlife and reverse the downward trend of so many species. This is an investment in the wildlife, no doubt, but it is also an investment in the children and grandchildren of all Texas citizens. Used wisely it is a powerful investment in the future. It is important to remember that we only get one opportunity to fail but we have vast opportunities to succeed. Texas intends to succeed."

*– Robert L. Cook
Executive Director,
Texas Parks & Wildlife
Department*



Houston Toad/Houston Zoo

including marine species that inhabit Texas' coastal waters (Schmidly 2004). It is estimated that there are approximately 29,000 insect species in Texas that take up residence in every conceivable habitat, including rocky outcroppings, pitcher plant bogs and on individual species of plants (Riley in publication).

One example of a Texas native is the Louisiana black bear, which is on the verge of making a comeback in east Texas. This species, along with several other species, relies on the east Texas woods for survival. Habitat loss has been one of the main reasons for the bear's decline. Reservoir construction has flooded many miles of former bottomland hardwood habitat. In addition, many bottomlands forests have been cut and converted to agricultural areas or housing developments. Another species attempting to reestablish itself in Texas is the Ocelot. Historical records indicate that the Ocelot once occurred throughout south Texas, the southern Edwards

Plateau, and along the Coastal Plain. Today, its range is limited to the south Texas brush country and lower Rio Grande valley. Only about 30 to 35 Ocelots live in the shrublands remaining at or near the Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge near Brownsville, Texas. In 1995 it was estimated that 80 to 120 individuals lived in Texas. Like the Louisiana black bear, the ocelot shares its critical habitat with numerous other species that rely on the remaining south Texas brushlands for survival. These are just two examples of native Texas species that help comprise the second highest level of biodiversity in the country. This level of biodiversity creates a great deal of responsibility for stewardship. Texas Parks and Wildlife shares this responsibility with other state agencies and conservation NGOs, and



McKinney Falls State Park/Eric Martinson

Wildlife	Total number of species	Species of conservation concern*	Threatened/endangered listed species
Mussels	52	21	1
Snails	±78	11	0
Crayfish	36	11	0
Insects	~29,950	272	20
Fish**	808	104	59
Amphibians	71	15	13
Reptiles	149	19	25
Birds	629***	163	32
Mammals	184	53	34
Totals		669	184

*The category of Species of Conservation Concern was derived from the development process. Species working groups were developed and each group put together a prioritized list of species including some T and E species. The number of Species of Conservation Concern is the number of species on the CWCS species list, minus all of the species on the list that are listed as threatened or endangered.

**Includes salt water species, freshwater species and estuarine species

***Includes all species of birds documented in Texas including those considered as "vagrants."

Wildlife highlights

Highlight habitats	Wildlife (examples)	Issue (examples)	Action (examples)
Blackland Prairie Ownership: Mostly Private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cassin's Sparrow • River otter • Box turtles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline determination and monitoring. • Identify, map and ground truth locations and conditions of habitats. • Restoration of native prairie.
East Texas hardwood forest bottomlands Ownership: Some public, mostly private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Louisiana black bear • Red-cockaded Woodpecker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat loss due to multiple factors including reservoir construction and fragmentation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all remaining bottomland hardwood areas and manage intensely. • Educate the citizenry on the affects of traditional forestry practices and promote or develop sustainable forestry practices • Work to minimize the affects of reservoir construction or avoid construction if possible.
Galveston Bay System		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suburban and industrial development; chemical spills; dredging; bycatch 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to monitor the bay for species as well as water quality. • Minimize impacts of dredging and spoil removal. • Reduce excess commercial fishing impacts.

Recommended actions to conserve Texas' wildlife

together these groups are making great strides towards protecting Texas' array of animal species.

Texas' planning approach

Texas' planning approach was developed around current and potential partnerships with multiple organizations. From local area governments and landowners to state agencies to conservation NGOs, the only viable option Texas habitats and species have is the work that is done through partnerships. These partnerships must accomplish management on the land, in the fresh water environs and in the bays and estuaries along the coast. While the coastal waters of Texas are monitored consistently, the terrestrial habitats and inland waterways are in need of inventory and eventually monitoring. Once this information is gathered, Texas biologists will be able to make informed, directed decisions. The Texas Action plan incorporated documents such as the Land and Water Resources Conservation and Recreation Plan (Land and Water Plan), The Texas Shrimp Fishery (2002) report to the Governor and the Texas Wetlands Plan.

All of these documents were developed to facilitate the alignment of conservation of resources and initiatives for Texas. By using these documents as guideposts there is an increased likelihood that the outlined initiatives will be followed.

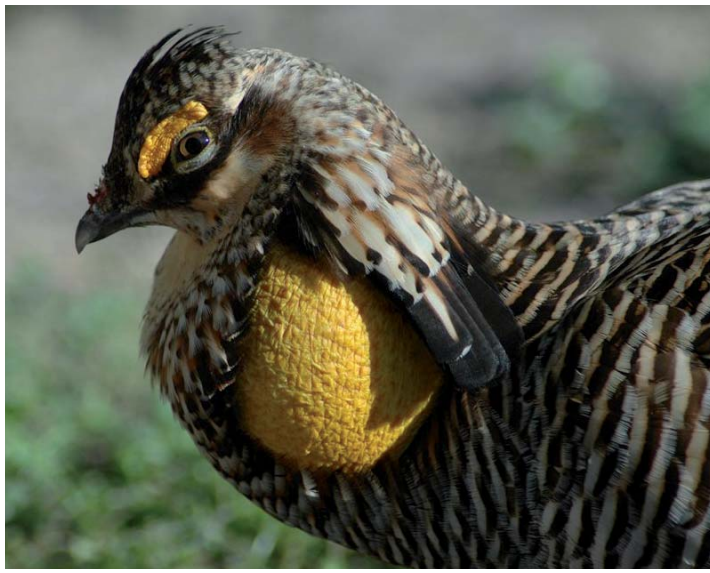
Primary challenges to conserving wildlife in Texas

Texas' biggest challenge is the size of the state and the immense variety of ecological habitats it encompasses. It the second largest state in the Union and the largest of the lower 48 states. With diversity (and size) come great challenges. These challenges are rooted in the bureaucracy of monitoring an entire State as well as the specific



Black Bear/TPWD

conservation actions that must be enacted to ensure the stability and improvement of habitat for native species. The immense size and diversity, combined with the preponderance of private landownership, make it very difficult to manage wildlife resources effectively with the financial assets available. As Texas is a state largely owned by private individuals, it is critical that programs aimed at conservation on private lands be



Attwater Prairie Chicken/Houston Zoo

maximized in order to effectively implement conservation. Programs such as the Landowner Incentive Plan and farm bill programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentive Program and the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program act as effective tools for planning and implementing the goals of the Texas Wildlife Action Plan with regard to conservation on private lands.

Working together for Texas' wildlife

The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department started the stakeholder process with a Wildlife Diversity Conference in San Marcos, TX in August of 2004. Approximately 150 professional biologists attended and spoke at the conference. The conference also served as a vehicle for the development of species-based working groups that were used to gather information and

debate issues associated with habitat and species as well as discuss the Action Plan itself. The working groups spent 6 months developing information for the Action Plan, with the next six months being spent developing the final draft version. Once the draft was complete the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department took the strategy to the public through two vital and interacting operations. The draft version of the strategy was maintained on the TPWD website in multiple pieces for easy download. The draft was available to both the public and professionals. In addition, feedback forms were also available in the form of a portable document file (pdf). These documents were easy to fill out and return via e-mail. In addition to web-based comment, TPWD created a program that was transported to 11 major venues throughout Texas. The locations were mostly AZA accredited zoos or aquaria with one TPWD-owned historic site and a children's museum. The public was invited by means of press releases news articles, television interviews and radio interviews. Overall, three weeks were spent touring the state and taking this presentation to constituents and stakeholders. The website was also used to collect information from the tour by using the pdf comment forms.

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