

# AN OPEN LETTER TO THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE

January 15, 2015

Dear Texas Senators and Representatives,

We represent the many natural and recreational assets of the Greater Houston Region. The recreational green space in our Region contributes significantly to the region's economy and its economic development. We strongly support state budget appropriations maximizing the use of revenue from the existing sporting goods sales tax by *ensuring* that the sporting goods sales tax revenues are used for Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (TPWD) budgetary expenses, as was originally intended by the legislature.

## **Unmet Park & Open Space Needs for the Greater Houston Region**

In 1993, businesses and citizens supported a "self-tax" on all sporting goods to fund the TPWD. But for many years, TPWD has only received approximately 33.5% of all the collections on the sporting goods sales tax. The sporting goods sales tax is the chosen funding source precisely because Texas's state parks have not been able to keep up with Texas's growth and use of these invaluable Texas resources. Texans, as many have said, love our state parks to death. And by extension, our need for local parks and local programming has increased.

The Houston-Galveston region is particularly concerned with fully funding TPWD because our Region desperately needs more recreational space as we double in population over this decade. On most weekends, Houstonians and others from this Region cannot find camping at area state parks like Huntsville, Brazos Bend, or Galveston because they quickly fill up. An opportunity for the addition of *Davis Hill* State Park in our area is critically needed but the park land has gone undeveloped for more than two decades due to lack of funding.

## **Local Parks Grant Program is Part of Solution**

By fully providing the fully-dedicated sporting goods sales tax to TPWD, the state has the opportunity to meet TPWD's mission "to manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations." By fully providing the sporting goods sales tax to TPWD, and thus, fully funding the local parks grant program, the state also has the opportunity to leverage public dollars with local public/private dollars and maximize outdoor opportunities in both urban and rural communities.

## **We Need Your Support**

We ask for your support this session for more transparency and full allocation of the sporting goods sales tax to TPWD – through direct legislation or a constitutional amendment requiring the same. TPWD needs more funding for maintenance, park development and additional land acquisition so that all Texans have access to wild spaces.

Please note that ensuring that the dedicated sporting goods sales tax goes to TPWD's budget does not mean that the funds from entrance fees or other accounts disappear. Instead, it means that the Texas parks system is funded at a viable level and can regain a stronger foothold in protecting the best of what the Texas land has to offer.

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Please ensure that the sporting goods sales tax is fully allocated to TPWD as it was originally intended. For questions or to request additional information, please contact Houston Wilderness at [deborah@houstonwilderness.org](mailto:deborah@houstonwilderness.org) or any of the other organizations below.

Sincerely,

*County Judge Jimmy Sylvia*  
**Chambers County (Texas)**

*Tom Kartrude*  
**Armand Bayou Nature Center**

*Jennifer Lorenz*  
**Bayou Land Conservancy**

*Kathy Lord*  
**Bayou Preservation Association**

*Bruce Walker*  
**Big Thicket Association**

*Anne Olson*  
**Buffalo Bayou Partnership**

*Rachel Powers*  
**Citizens' Environmental Coalition**

*Rev. Peter Conaty*  
**Cradle of Texas Conservancy**

*Dan Neale*  
**Cullinan Park Conservancy**

*Richard D. Smith*  
**Cypress Creek Flood Control Coalition**

*Glenn R Buckley*  
**East1488 Community Association**  
**Keep Montgomery County Beautiful**  
**Lake Creek Greenway Partnership**

*John Van De Wiele*  
**Fort Bend Green**

*John E. Kemp*  
**Friends of Anahuac Refuge**

*Ron Jones*  
**Friends of Attwater Prairie Chicken Refuge**

*Clifford Muehe*  
**Friends of Galveston State Park**

*Della Barbato*  
**Friends of the National Forests and  
Grasslands of Texas**

*Bob Stokes*  
**Galveston Bay Foundation**

*Diane Olsen*  
**Galveston Island Nature Tourism Council**

*Sanford W. Criner, Jr*  
**GetOutHereHouston.org**

*Jill Boullion*  
**Greens Bayou Corridor Coalition**

*Cecilia M. Riley*  
**Gulf Coast Bird Observatory**

*Doreen Stoller*  
**Hermann Park Conservancy**

*Jim Lester*  
**Houston Advanced Research Center (HARC)**

*Debbie Markey*  
**Houston Arboretum and Nature Center**

*Helen Drummond*  
**Houston Audubon**

*Roksan Okan-Vick*  
**Houston Parks Board**

*Deborah January-Bevers*  
**Houston Wilderness**

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*Mary Anne Piacentini*  
**Katy Prairie Conservancy**

*Martin Reiner*  
**Nature Discovery Center**

*Linda R. Shead*  
**Shead Conservation Solutions**

*Peter E. Price*  
**TerraView**

*John Jacob*  
**Texas Coastal Watershed Program**

**Texas A&M AgiLife Extension Service and  
Texas Sea Grant**

*Steve Rosencranz*  
**The Woods Project**

*Cynthia Cook*  
**Trinity Waters**

*Ernest Cook*  
**Trust for Public Land**

*Joanie Steinhaus*  
**Turtle Island Restoration Network**

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cc: Brazoria County Commissioners  
Chambers County Commissioners  
Fort Bend County Commissioners  
Galveston County Commissioners  
Harris County Commissioners  
Liberty County Commissioners  
Montgomery County Commissioners  
Polk County Commissioners  
Waller County Commissioners  
City of Houston Mayor  
City of Sugar Land Mayor  
Houston Chronicle Editorial Board