

Talkin' Turkey



**Healthy
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Harvests.™**

Winter 2023
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txnwtf.org



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A few words from Tony.

Happy New Year NWTF Texas!

I hope all had a very Merry Christmas and the New Year started right for you. Its hard to believe that it is 2023 already.

As we begin 2023, we will start off the year with our Volunteer Appreciation and Awards dinner in Bryan, TX January 14th. As NWTF Members this is our time to get together and enjoy fellowship with like-minded turkey enthusiasts, as well as recognizing the outstanding work our Chapters and Volunteers have put forth in 2022.

As most of you are aware of, 2023 is a very special year for both the NWTF and NWTF Texas, NWTF will be celebrating its 50th Anniversary and we here in Texas are celebrating our 25th. We have so much to be proud of during these times, so much has been accomplished both nationally and here in our state for the conservation of the Wild Turkey, its habitat, and our Hunting Heritage.

Each of our members past and present should be proud of your time, effort and dedication to our mission.

As we celebrate our many accomplishments over the last 50 years, we must begin thinking about how we move into our next 50 years and continue efforts making an impact equal to or better than we already have. At the National Level, we have the National Convention coming up in Nashville February 15-19, 2023. This will be the big celebration for our 50th Anniversary, but you can expect many smaller ones across the nation throughout the year.

A National Leadership Conference is being planned for 2023, stay tuned for upcoming details.

Here in Texas we continued to fund habitat restoration with our Superfund dollars with several worthy projects across the state. We continue to fund the restoration of the Eastern Wild Turkey in our Eastern Region of the state. We have partnered with Texas Wildlife Association and the Texas Youth Hunting Program to help fund youth hunts as well as a new Adult Mentored hunt program, and funds that are directed to the much needed Wild Turkey research here in the state.

In closing, I can't emphasis enough the appreciation for our Local Chapters, Banquet Committees, Sponsors, Donors, and our entire Membership for your continued support. Without each one of you, your hard work, support and dedication to the Mission, our accomplishments over the last 25 years here in Texas would not have happened.

Again, Thank You All.

Respectfully,

Tony Hawley
President
NWTF Texas Chapter



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Many thanks to all our contributing writers!





E D U C A T I O N

Providing opportunities for kids, adults and veterans.



Kim Potts, Outdoor Education Coordinator
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Photos courtesy of Kim Potts.

Another year has come and gone!

2022 certainly provided me with many blessings and I want to share a few of those with you. I have mentioned many times that my kiddos and myself are big hunters, as well as their spouses.

With that being said, I would like to announce another addition to the NWTF family. Levi Mathew Ragan won't be ready to participate in the spring turkey season for 2023, but he is already being groomed for hunting and camo is definitely his color. I love the fact that conversations about hunting, along with conservation of land and deer management, are topics where my entire family can find common ground. My daughter is an Inland Fisheries Biologist for Texas Parks and Wildlife and her job is to manage Texas Lakes so conversations about conservation in our family reaches far beyond the woods.

Say that really fast three times!

In early October my daughter and I, along with a dear friend of hers, took a road trip to some of the northern states such as Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. I have not had the opportunity to travel much so this trip was a big treat for me. The timing was perfect for us to see the fall colors coming to life as we made our way to the coastline of Bar Harbor Maine. I would recommend this trip for anyone who favors fall as their favorite season. God was definitely showing off His creation because the trees were on fire in New Hampshire and the wildlife was plentiful and on the move. Niki and I constantly scanned the terrain in hopes of spotting a moose and never saw one, however, I have never seen so many turkeys in my life! I saw turkeys in all three states and they were so close, but yet so far as the old saying goes. I don't know why the residents of those little towns we stopped in didn't understand or share my excitement.

I have always wanted to tour a lighthouse so one of the items on our road trip bucket list was to visit 2 light houses. One of them provided me with a memorable experience and conversation, not to mention a few new friends. While I was waiting for our tour to start, I decided to sample some of the local cuisine from one of the food trucks. As I was waiting on my Lobster Bisque and Lobster Grilled Cheese (doesn't that sound amazing), I looked toward the lighthouse and saw an older gentleman standing there wearing a black hoodie with the NWTF logo proudly displayed. I took a road trip to see the fall colors and soon realized that I was surrounded by turkeys and fellow NWTF members!

In early November I was asked to speak at the SHAPE Conference at Arkansas Tech University. They wanted me to share details about the different organizations that I am involved with in Texas that can provide outdoor opportunities and experiences for their public and private education students and teachers across the state of Arkansas. Of course, I pointed them in the direction of their Arkansas Game and Fish Department as a substitution for our wonderful Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, but I was very excited to get to share with them how they can reach out to their local NWTF chapters and I provided them with information on how to find those chapters and get involved.

I never meet a stranger, but being able to share my love of the outdoors and the NWTF with others gives me great pleasure and 2022 provided me with some wonderful experiences across multiple states and I will always treasure those memories and hope to make many more in 2023.

The National Wild Turkey Federation and Texas Parks and Wildlife work hand-in-hand to provide opportunities for kids, adults and veterans to participate in mentored hunts at little or no cost. You can reach out to your local NWTF chapter to learn more about these opportunities or visit our website at Programs — NWTF TEXAS Join Us! (txnwtf.org) to learn more about these hunts and our other programs and how to get involved in those.

If you would like to learn how to get one or all of these programs started, please do not hesitate to call me at 903-348-1845. I would love to share more about what the National Wild Turkey Federation can offer your area. Also, because of my involvement in public education, I can point you in the direction of federal grants and organizations that will help provide curriculum, training, and funding for Outdoor Education programs for your schools.



Fall landscape in New Hampshire



Lighthouse in Maine

Save the Hunt!

Tim Webster, Wheelin' Sportsmen Coordinator/save the Hunt Coordinator
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In my many years of hunting I've experienced God's creations interacting in amazing ways. Raccoons chasing deer, hawks swooping in for a rabbit, to a mountain lion grabbing a wounded turkey with my arrow in it. These are just a few experiences in the woods on my list.

Of all these sightings, none have moved me as much as taking a first-time hunter to the woods. Sharing their experience of harvesting one of God's renewable resources. Sitting next to them, you can feel their heart beating and the emotions with them.

Then the smiles and confidence that success brings. For some, this may be the only time they get to do this. But hopefully, it is the first of a lifetime spent exercising their right to hunt and sharing with others.

As hunters it is our responsibility to cultivate the future of our hunting heritage and take someone new whenever possible. **SAVE THE HUNT!**



NWTF APRIL AWOL CHAPTER



WIN A 2023 JEEP RUBICON!

**ONLY 1000 CHANCES TO WIN. TICKETS ARE \$100 EACH.
BUY YOUR RAFFLE TICKET TODAY AND LET
THE ADVENTURE BEGIN!**

DRAWING TO BE HELD ON MARCH 10, 2023 AT THE APRIL AWOL HUNTING HERITAGE BANQUET IN NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS. PRIZE IS A 2023 JEEP WRANGLER RUBICON OR A \$50,000 CREDIT TOWARDS A VEHICLE PURCHASE AT MIKE PERRY DODGE/JEEP OF NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS. WINNER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ALL TAXES, REGISTRATION AND TITLE PREPARATION FEES.

MANY THANKS TO OUR SPONSOR: MIKE PERRY DODGE/JEEP, NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS.

GET YOUR TICKETS BY CONTACTING:

- **DON IRWIN AT (936) 552-4690**
- **CHIP HOLT AT (936) 558-3478, OR**
- **CRAIG WHITE AT (936) 552-1942**



**NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION
50TH ANNIVERSARY**





G O V E R N M E N T

Texas looking to limit who can possess firearms.



Mike Shouse - Government Affairs Liaison
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Photo courtesy of Guide of the World

Texas Legislative 88th session to kickoff in January

Texas lawmakers won't gavel in for the new legislative session until January, but they got their first chance to file bills a few weeks ago. Texas legislators filed more than 800 bills pertaining to an array of matters, according to the Texas Tribune.

Thousands of pieces of legislation are filed each session, but most never make it into law. The first day of bill filing, though, can shed light on legislators' priorities and what battles could be shaping up in Austin next year.

When the 88th legislative session convenes, the state is expected to have an unprecedented amount of funds at its disposal. The state comptroller forecast that there will be at least an extra \$27 billion in the two-year budget compared with the last regular legislative session.

Lawmakers will also see an increase in their savings account, also known as the rainy day fund.

Filing early means bills will typically get a low number. But the lowest numbers are reserved for the highest-priority bills set by the House speaker and lieutenant governor. House Speaker Dade Phelan and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick have yet to announce what their priorities are.

Here's a look at some of the notable bills that may impact our fund raising filed as of Monday December 12, with many more coming:

Following the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas legislators filed a flurry of bills aimed at limiting who can possess firearms, where they can be purchased and increasing accountability around gun purchases.

Rep. Joe Moody, D-El Paso, and Rep. Diego Bernal, D-San Antonio, filed similar bills that would require sales

of multiple firearms to be reported to law enforcement agencies. Moody's bill, which includes the sale of multiple magazines, would require the Texas Department of Public Safety to inform the sheriff where the purchaser resides. Sen. Roland Gutierrez, D-Uvalde, has also introduced Senate Bill 145 to raise the minimum age to purchase some weapons. Additionally, there are several bills filed to limit the transfer of weapons between individuals, mostly focusing on semi-automatic rifles.

The TPWD has not yet released an update as to its 2023 report requesting approval of recommendations of spending, but is expected to do so in upcoming weeks. Here are some of the current bills filed so far relating to wildlife, hunting and fishing to be considered in the 2023 session:

- HB 293 - Relating to waivers for state park entrance fees and hunting and fishing license fees for certain resident first responders.
- HB 641 - Relating to a fishing license fee waiver for certain residents.
- SB 155 - Relating to benefits for certain members of the Texas military forces and survivors of members of the Texas military forces.
- HB 570 - Relating to a study by the Texas Division of Emergency Management of the potential effects of droughts and wildfires in this state.
- HB 555 - Relating to the duration of a special open hunting season for game animals and certain game birds taken by persons under 17 years of age.

You can stay updated on current filings by searching the legislative website at

<https://capitol.texas.gov/Search/TextSearch.aspx>



WHEELIN' SPORTSMEN/JAKES

Outreach
programs
designed
to provide
opportunities
for everyone.



Tim Webster, Wheelin' Sportsmen Coordinator/Save the Hunt Coordinator
Timw_@live.com

Photo courtesy of NWTF

Wheelin' Sportsmen

The NWTF Outreach Programs are designed to give opportunities for "anyone" to participate in outdoor activities. One such program is the Wheelin' Sportsmen. This program is set up to take folks with disabilities into the great outdoors.

Each year in Texas, several different unique hunts present themselves. I am honored to be a part of one hunt in partnership with 3 North Texas Chapters of NWTF, the United States Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) and Texas Hunt for the Cure. We team up to bring disabled youth to take part in herd management as the property is closed to hunting. Deer have few predators in Texas and the population runs too high for the habitat to support a healthy herd, if not managed properly.

It comes our disabled youth tasked with overcoming troubles life has given them and challenging them with helping to reduce herd population.

You start with shy, timid kids and after Safety Training, Target Practice and Hunt opportunities; you end up being shown how overcoming anything is possible. It turns out, the kids aren't the only ones who learn from this and being part of it is most rewarding.

Congratulations for this year's hunt of a lifetime!!

- Kaufman County Double Beards Chapter
- Cottonwood Creek Chapter
- Cross Timbers Chapter

Houston Chapter also had their first partnership hunt with USACE this year. I am super excited to see this mission grow! Anyone wishing to get involved, feel free to reach out to me for more information. Keep up the great work!!



Emma Mays on Army Corp of Engineers land



Will Ragland - Army Corp of Engineers land





The 2023 Convention will be a Celebration of the NWTF's **50th** Anniversary!

Join us **Feb. 15-19, 2023** at the **Gaylord Opryland Resort & Convention Center** in **Nashville** as we gather to celebrate 50 years of conservation successes. Also, we will look to the next 50 years and the great things still to come for the NWTF and its dedicated members, volunteers and partners.

The Convention kicks off Wednesday, Feb. 15, and will conclude on Sunday, Feb. 19. The exhibit hall is open Thursday, Feb. 16 through Saturday, Feb. 18, 2023.

To relive the 2022 convention, make sure to read up on those dedicated volunteers and partners recognized by the NWTF during Convention and Sport Show festivities!

New to the Sport Show for 2023 – The Family Adventure Trail, sponsored by Mossy Oak, Official NWTF 2023 Convention Sponsor

Enjoy the “Agents of Discovery” Scavenger Hunt, brought to you by the Wonders of Wildlife Museum and the NWTF. Follow along as you are guided to various Gobble Stops where challenges await. Complete them all and return to the Wonders of Wildlife Museum booth to claim your prize (while supplies last). Educational exhibitors along the Family Adventure Trail include:

- Wonders of Wildlife Museum
- Daisy: Inflatable BB Gun Range
- Natural Resources Conservation Service: Soil tunnel
- Tennessee 4-H
- Tennessee Fur Harvester: various pelts
- Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency
- US Army Corp of Engineers
- US Forest Service Fire & Wildlife Education: Fire truck with fire helmet/jacket where kids can dress up and have their picture taken
- US Forest Service Land Between the Lakes

<https://www.nwtf.org/get-involved/nwtf-convention>





H A R V E S T

Mandatory harvest reporting continues in Central Texas.



Jason Hardin , TPWD Wild Turkey Program Leader
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Photo courtesy of Jamie Linder.

Texas observed very low nest success and poult survival across most of the Rio Grande.

Texas observed very low nest success and poult survival across most of the Rio Grande wild turkey range in 2022. Texas Parks and Wildlife staff recorded only 0.68 poults-per-hen and just under 3 poults-per-brood statewide this past summer. This same survey reported 1.99 poults-per-hen in 2021 and just over 4 poults-per-brood. This adds up to a fair number of 2-year-old gobblers this coming spring, but very few Jakes and Jennies. The impact of this most recent nesting season will be more impactful during the 2024 season. Fortunately, Texas has a very low harvest rate at the ecoregion scale and older gobblers (3+ years) are harvested each year.

Good turkey numbers don't always equate to good hunting. The 2022 spring season is a good example. The drought conditions across Texas reduced reproductive behavior in wild turkeys. Much of Texas did not green up until much later in the spring. Each year, the timing of winter and spring rainfall can have a large influence on the physical condition of individual hens, which in turn influences when hens become receptive to males. Late winter and early spring rains play a role on when hen turkeys become receptive to males, and how gobblers respond to hunters. These same weather patterns can drive wildflowers. If you are seeing a lot of bluebonnets on your way to hunt wild turkeys you are probably in for a good hunt.

Texas provides an early season opener relative to many states and a long season. Hunters can begin chasing spring Rio Grande wild turkeys in south Texas the Saturday closest to March 18th and can wrap up in north or east Texas in mid-May.

Daily gobbling behavior can be weather driven. Windy and rain tends to reduce gobbling behavior, but days following wind and rain can be excellent with gobblers ready to get back to the action.

Texas hosted approximately 81,000 turkey hunters during the 2021-22 hunting season and harvested about just under 32,000 birds. The majority of Texas turkey hunting and harvest occurs during the spring season. The Hill Country has long supported the highest density of turkey hunters (39%) and harvest (41%) followed by South Texas (21% hunters/25% harvest), Rolling Plains (17% hunters/16% harvest), and the Cross Timbers (14% hunters/13% harvest). Hunters should focus on major riparian corridors and those secondary streams that feed them when looking for hunting grounds across the central portions of Texas.

Eastern turkey harvest reporting experienced a +33% bump in 2022 over the 2021 season. This past spring was up +8% above the 3-year-mean. TPWD reminds eastern turkey hunters to report all harvested birds using the My Hunt Harvest App available at the App Store or Google Play or online at www.tpwd.texas.gov/turkey.

Harvest reporting is mandatory in east Texas and is one of the only means for TPWD to track turkey populations. Hunters are required by law to report their wild turkey harvest within 24 hours of the time the bird was taken in Bowie, Cass, Fannin, Grayson, Jasper, Lamar, Marion, Nacogdoches, Newton, Polk, Red River, and Sabine Counties. TPWD also now requires all wild turkeys harvested in Bastrop, Caldwell, Colorado, Fayette, Jackson, Lavaca, Lee, Matagorda, Milam, and Wharton Counties to also be reported within 24-hours of harvest.

There is not much to report for new wild turkey regulations for the 2022-23 hunting season. The TPWD Commission has approved closing eastern Ellis County east of Interstate 35 to protect wild turkeys as part of an ongoing restocking effort along the Trinity River watershed. Fortunately, most if not all huntable turkey populations in Ellis County are found west of the I-35 corridor and the new regulation should have little to no impact on hunters.

Texas Parks and Wildlife, with assistance from NWTF, restocked 56 eastern wild turkeys at two sites in Angelina and Franklin Counties this past winter. The Franklin County site is located along White Oak Creek and was a continuation of restocking efforts initiated in 2020.



The Dr. Sam McManus Award

Stuart McManus, Houston Chapter

East Texas Volunteer of the Year

Don Irwin, April AWOL Chapter

West Texas Volunteer of the Year

Richard Sewall, Blackland Prairie Chapter

North Texas Volunteer of the Year

Jordan Jayson, Fort Worth Chapter

South Texas Volunteer of the Year

Ray Fitch, Houston Chapter

NWTF Officer of the Year

Daron Blackerby

Outstanding WITO Event

Houston WITO Chapter

Tri County WITO Chapter

Rising Star

Dillion Santelli, Henderson County Chapter

Outstanding Wheelin Event

Kaufman County/Cottonwood Creek/Cross Timbers
Houston Chapter

Outstanding Jakes Event

1st Houston Chapter

2nd Blackland Prairie Chapter

3rd Kaufmann County Chapter

Highest Net Income

1st April AWOL Chapter

2nd Pineywoods Chapter

3rd Highland Lakes Chapter

Highest Net to Gross

1st Northeast Texas Chapter

1st Henderson County Chapter

2nd Tri County Longbeards

3rd Panola County Chapter

2022 NWTF Texas Volunteer Appreciation Banquet

This year's Volunteer Appreciation Banquet was held in Bryan College Station on January 14th, 2023. This was a fun time to celebrate all the great volunteers around the state. Our Texas volunteers are some of the best in the country.



Texas State Chapter Board of Directors



Highest Net - April AWOL Chapter



NWTF Retirement - Shawn Roberts



Dr. Sam McManus - Stuart McManus



Rising Star Award - Dillion Santelli



Jakes Event - Houston Chapter



WITO Event - Tri County & Houston WITO Chapters



Game Warden of the Year Daron Blackerby





CONGRATS!

Texas
Wildlife
Officer
of the
Year

DARON BLACKERBY

Texas Game Warden Daron Blackerby

“It’s my honor and privilege to nominate Daron Blackerby for the NWTF Officer of the Year. Daron has served Texas Parks and Wildlife for over 15 years and is currently stationed in Grayson County. Daron has made a vital impact everywhere he has patrolled in the great state of Texas. He is viewed as a leader, not only with TPWD, but within his community also. On more than one occasion, I have received lavish compliments from hunters, anglers, constituents and even violators about Daron Blackerby and his outstanding conservation work and his positive impact for the State of Texas. I sincerely hope NWTF will recognize his exceptional work as well.”

Steve Stapleton, Texas Game Warden Captain

PUBLIC RELATIONS / SUPPORTS HUNTING

HERITAGE – From youth hunts, kid fish events or just talking to a landowner at the cafe, Daron Blackerby strives to promote the positive Texas Game Warden image to all he encounters. Daron excels in outstanding communication and outreach with people of all ages and backgrounds. Daron serves as the Public Information Officer for the district and region. This past year, Daron initiated several media outreach events on TV, social media and print mediums covering topics from water safety to upcoming hunting seasons. One notable outreach project Daron facilitated was a water safety segment “Whether Water or Land - How to Stay Safe” for 4th of July on Lake Texoma which ran on local media markets as a public service announcement. I recently

received a very complementary email on Warden Blackerby from a neighboring Captain, thanking Daron for driving into another district to cover a kid fish event the local wardens could not. I often receive calls and emails like this regarding Daron’s personality and outstanding demeanor.

CASE INVOLVEMENT / INVESTIGATIVE SKILLS –

Daron is known as “The Game Warden’s Game Warden.” He very simply makes everyone better by being involved in whatever situation you and he are faced with. From routine patrol, high profile poaching cases or training, Daron excels at everything he attempts. Daron leads the district in most categories where numbers are involved, from miles patrolled, boat hours and citations. However, Daron also possesses the unique intangibles you can’t quantify; like going the extra mile to befriend a neighborhood kid, who wants to be a game warden. Daron takes immense personal pride and dedication in his work and cases. He files quality cases over a broad spectrum, including BWI’s, Water Safety, Fishing, Hunting and Penal Code violations. This past year alone, Daron filed a diverse case load ranging from: numerous illegal hunting cases, a particular outstanding waterfowl baiting case and several narcotic arrests.

ATTITUDE / ENTHUSIASM – If Daron Blackerby is known for anything, it’s his positive attitude. Daron exhibits a “can do” attitude in all situations and environments. From training to special details, Daron represents the very best in an upbeat, optimistic personality that is contagious to fellow wardens and the public alike. This past year Warden Blackerby personally volunteered for numerous events past his regular duties in Grayson County. A few of the assignments and operations Daron undertook and participated in this past year include:

- Peer Coach 2022 TGW Leadership Program
- Graduate the 2021 TGW Leadership Program
- SFST Instructor, TCOLE & Firearms Instructor for Region 2
- Operation Lone Star: Multiple Tours
- Operation Pescado: Fishing Saturation Patrol of Lake Texoma
- Operation Firecracker: BWI Saturation Patrol of Lake Texoma
- Operation Sponge Bob: Multistate Saturation of Lake Texoma
- Cadet Training: Instruction of Cadets at TGWA

PROFESSIONALISM/ DEPENDABILITY – Daron works well with a variety of local, state and federal partners, on a daily basis. This past year, he has demonstrated an exceptional ability at interagency cooperation, and with other branches of Texas Parks and Wildlife, including sister divisions, such as inland fisheries, wildlife biologists and state parks on many important projects. Daron has also worked enforcement operations in conjunction with Oklahoma Fish and Game, Oklahoma Highway Patrol Marine Enforcement, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, Texas Department of Public Safety, U.S. Border Patrol, and Corps of Engineers to name a few. One outstanding example of Daron’s teamwork was seen when he recently volunteered to team up with our Marine Theft Investigation Unit for three days to assist in the location and seizure of several stolen boats, motors and trailers in the DFW area.

OUTSTANDING ACTIVITIES – Daron demonstrates excellence in leadership and professionalism in all areas. His dedication and commitment to the mission of TPWD is evident in his cases, contacts and outreach. I have never seen, when given any challenge, Daron not rise to the occasion. Daron not only leads with his actions, but also by his words. In a recent self-evaluation, Daron took the time to write

the following, “I strive to be the best game warden I can for my county and attempt to be a leader in my district and division and hopefully as supervisor one day.” Daron’s work ethic is unequalled in the district, and yet he strikes a great balance between family and career. Routinely Daron demonstrates the willingness to go beyond the call of duty by doing more than others expect. Daron practices “community policing” and is active at many levels in his community, including civic and community athletic programs.



New Chapter!

Golden Crescent

Please welcome our newest member of the Texas flock. They're the Golden Crescent of Texas Chapter, out of Victoria.

Local chapters are the life force of the National Wild Turkey Federation in Texas.

We appreciate all you do.



Healthy Habitats. Healthy Harvests.

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We recruit all kinds of hunters through our hunter education programs and mentored hunts.

We support public hunting access through lease programs.

We embrace all outdoor enthusiasts of any age and encourage anyone to become a member of our growing family.

We believe the outdoors is for everyone to enjoy.



Healthy
Habitats.
Healthy
Harvests.™



txnwtf.org