



Oaks and Prairies Wildlifer

A newsletter for landowners in the Post Oak Savannah
and Coastal Prairies Regions of Texas

TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE

Winter 2020

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Our Wildlife Biologists

District Field Notes

BY DAVID FORRESTER

We experienced an above average harvest this year. Some outstanding bucks were harvested across the district. Overall harvest was up over previous years due to drier range conditions and deer more readily coming to feeders. The new “doe days” and reporting system went well. We’ve got some of the numbers in this newsletter. We are interested in seeing what our population counts look like this coming summer/fall. With harvest option or conservation option tags, doe harvest can go until the end of February. We **do not** recommend waiting that late to harvest your doe in this district, but it can legally be done. We recommend getting the doe harvest complete by mid-January at the latest. If you wait to harvest later than that, you can (in certain years) run the risk of harvesting an antlerless deer that is in fact a buck that has shed its antlers. Also, all doe are bred by now and waiting to harvest late just means you will be harvesting a heavy bred doe.

Biologists in the district did an outstanding job collecting Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) samples this year and are starting to shift priorities to other things as we start the new year. We want to thank the local sheriff’s departments, game wardens, TxDot, and animal control officers that notified us about road kills. Also, we want to thank the hunters that brought us deer. Finally, thanks to the processors and taxidermists that allowed us and helped us to collect samples. Although we are shifting focus a bit, we will still collect and submit samples if you have an animal you want tested. Unfortunately, we’ve detected another positive CWD case in Val Verde county, so another mandatory zone has been established in the area around Del Rio. You can find the latest information on CWD in Texas at this web site: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/wild/diseases/cwd/>.

The troops are shifting focus to conducting prescribed burns. They just recently burned on our Wildlife Management Area in Gonzales county (the M. O. Neasloney WMA) and had a very effective burn. Really cleaned up some mulched/chemically treated areas and actually set back some pretty large yaupon. Biologists have several properties that have prepared burn units and we are just waiting for the safe environmental conditions to conduct a prescribed burn.

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State of the District, continued

We should have some prescribed burn workshops listed in the upcoming events if this interests you.

Also, this time of year sees a lot of interest from folks in the wildlife valuation and switching their property valuations from ag to wildlife. Biologists have a few wildlife valuation workshops scheduled and these should also be listed in the upcoming events section. Here is a link to calendars page and brief descriptions of workshops: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/calendar/landowner-workshops-field-days>. Here is a link to registration page for the workshops: <https://tpwd.texas.gov/forms/wildlife/wildlife-tax-valuation-workshop-registration>.

Although it can get cold, this is a great time of year, so please get out and enjoy the wildlife and habitat on your piece of Texas.



Photo©Clinton Faas, TPWD



David Forrester is the District 7 Leader in La Grange. He has been with TPWD since 2001 when he started his career as the TPWD wildlife biologist for Fort Bend and Wharton counties. David has a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Economics and a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife and Fisheries Sciences, both from Texas A&M University, and a Master of Science in Range and Wildlife Management from Texas A&M University-Kingsville.

2019 Antlerless Harvest Results—District 7

WRITTEN BY BOBBY EICHLER

Some hunters across the Oaks and Prairies region had the opportunity to harvest antlerless deer during the new 4-day “doe days” during the Thanksgiving holidays. Due to mandatory reporting, biologists now have a good idea of the number of antlerless deer harvested during the archery season, October youth-only season, and the 4-day Thanksgiving period. While reporting may not have been 100%, the data gathered is valuable information that in the past was not available.

Season totals by county have been summarized in Table 1 with data through December 5th, 2019. January muzzleloader season and youth-only season harvest will be added later. Also, Table 1 does not include antlerless harvest for properties receiving Managed Lands Deer Permits (MLDP); this data will be compiled and summarized after the April 1 reporting deadline.

Overall, District biologists believe that the additional harvest to date by the newly implemented regulation and seasons is within what the white-tailed population can withstand. Biologists will continue to monitor population densities through annual surveys conducted from late July through September on a landscape basis throughout the region. As always, we also encourage Wildlife Management Associations to conduct annual population surveys to monitor county populations.

Table 1: Doe harvest by season for District 7 counties. Harvest numbers are only for hunters using hunting license tags, Managed Lands Deer Permit harvest not included.

County	Archery	Archery and Youth-Only	4 Doe Days	**General	Total
Austin	20	4	71	1	96
Bastrop	49	11	231	0	291
Caldwell	29	9	163	1	202
Colorado	52	15	176	0	243
Dewitt	54	13	369	1	437
Fayette	62	20	304	1	387
*Goliad	24	7	138	1	170
Gonzales	28	7	205	0	240
Guadalupe	34	7	164	1	206
*Jackson	19	4	31	0	54
Lavaca	74	15	196	3	288
Lee	63	17	206	0	286
*Victoria	8	3	87	1	99
Waller	7	3	18	0	28
Washington	24	8	133	0	165
*Wharton	10	3	25	0	38
Total	557	146	2517	10	3230

*Only includes harvest north of US HWY 59.

**Deer harvest in General Season outside the 4 doe days (illegal).



Bobby Eichler is the Technical Guidance Biologist for the Oak Prairie District. He has Bachelor and Master of Science degrees in Forestry both with emphasis in Game Management, from Stephen F. Austin State University. A native of Giddings, Bobby started his TPWD career in East Texas before moving to La Grange in 2007.

Prescribed Fire: A Management Tool & Resources for Landowners

WRITTEN BY MEAGAN LESAK

Historically, the post oak savannah was maintained by periodic fires that swept across the landscape. Brush species were controlled by fires, and the habitat was an open grassland with larger trees and limited brush scattered throughout. Many settlers and travelers through the area described it as being able to see for long distances. Nowadays, due to fire suppression that began during settlement, most of the post oak savannah region has been invaded with brush understory and more trees on the landscape. This has resulted in limited native grass and forb species due to lack of space and thus reduced ground nesting/fawning habitat for wildlife. Today, many wildlife agencies and landowners are using fire to manage habitat, much like the periodic wildfires accomplished years ago, but in a controlled manner known as prescribed fire.

Prescribed fire is one of the many tools for landowners that want to manage their properties for wildlife. Prescribed fire is the planned use of fire on the habitat which follows guidelines and protocols to insure the safest burn possible. Unlike wildfires, which are unplanned and often unpredictable, a prescribed fire will only be implemented when a plan is developed and followed to insure the safety of humans, structures and to obtain a result on the landscape that is desired. Prescribed fire can be used to regenerate growth of grasses and forbs and help to limit brush establishment in open areas.

Prescribed fire can be a great tool for managing the land, and when done in combination with other habitat management practices can help landowners reach their goals. If you are interested in using prescribed fire as a management tool, but are unsure how to use prescribed fire, I encourage you to contact your local Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) wildlife biologist. TPWD personnel are trained and available to use prescribed fire as a management practice. Depending on the weather, TPWD personnel help many landowners burn on their property each year and are available to anyone who would like to start using prescribed fire as a management tool. We can assist you in preparing your prescribed burn plan and conduct the first burn on your property.

The first step is to contact your local wildlife biologist to schedule a site visit to begin planning your burn. A Burn Plan will need to be written for each burn unit on your property, and your biologist can help develop your first plan for you. You and the biologist will look at your burn unit and determine if there is enough fuel for that year to burn, what wind direction will be needed to safely burn your unit, and other factors needed. Sometimes, reduced grazing pressure and even exclusion for a period of time will be needed in the burn unit to insure enough fuel is on the ground to carry a fire.



Top: A headfire moving away from a well prepared firebreak. Bottom : A strip headfire ran interior of the burn unit.
Photos©Bobby Eichler, TPWD

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Prescribed Fire: A Management Tool & Resources for Landowners, continued

Once the actual unit is determined, it is the landowner's responsibility to put in firebreaks around the unit. A firebreak is a perimeter around your burn unit that is disked to mineral soil. These breaks can vary in size depending on what your fuel load/type is. Your biologist can help you determine the needed width of your fire breaks. Firebreaks are very important and need to be properly created in order to insure the safest burn possible. Firebreaks need to be completely disked down to mineral soil with no litter left. If litter is left in the firebreak, the fire can creep across and ignite other portions that you are not wanting to burn, which could then cause a wildfire or unsafe fire. Often, landowner's fire breaks are not properly established, so be sure to have your biologist out to check on these breaks to determine if you are fire ready.

If this management technique interests you, call your local TPWD wildlife biologist. We can assist you in determining how to properly use prescribe fire on your property and if any other management techniques need to be used or reduced. We also help to educate you on all the requirements and safety protocols needed to conduct your own prescribed fires on your property. Contact information for your TPWD wildlife biologist is at the end of this newsletter.



*Left: Prescribed fire used to help setback and top-kill huische.
Right: Strip headfire. Photos©Bobby Eichler, TPWD*



Meagan Lesak is the wildlife biologist for DeWitt and Goliad Counties. She received her Bachelor of Science in Range & Wildlife Management and Master of Science in Animal Science from Texas A&M University-Kingsville. A Victoria County native, Meagan began her career with TPWD in January 2019.

Species Spotlight: Sandhill Crane

WRITTEN BY BRENT PIERCE

I remember years ago sitting in a deer stand early in the morning. The sun was just starting to peek out over the horizon onto the frost covered field below. It was quiet that morning, and I must have dozed off for a few minutes but was awakened by the sudden break in silence with a rattling Kar-r-r-o-o-o (<https://birdsna.org/Species-Account/bna/species/sanpra/introduction>) and the sound of rushing wind from the flapping of large wings. Needless to say, I spilled a little coffee that morning. My first thought once I identified them as sandhill cranes (*Grus canadensis*) was 'rib-eye of the sky' and wondered just how tasty these birds are, but unfortunately, I was in an area that was closed to crane hunting due to their protected cousin the whooping crane (*Grus americana*).



Sandhill crane. Photo©TPWD

Whoopers (as they are affectionately referred to) are known to migrate south with sandhills. Whooping cranes are much larger, standing 5-foot-tall with a wingspan over 7 feet. Sandhill cranes are smaller with an average standing height of 3-4 feet and a wingspan of 5 feet. Adult whooping cranes are solid white with black wing tips and a red forehead with black cheeks. Sandhills have a greyish plumage with dark wing-tips and a bright red forehead with white around the face and cheeks. Sandhills have a short dark bill and long black legs.

Sandhills begin migrating south in late August and can travel 200 miles a day moving at speeds of 30 miles per hour. They start arriving here in Texas around October. Sandhill cranes spend most of the winter foraging on agricultural fields of sorghum, corn, rice, and other grains. Shallow water wetlands and estuaries are the preferred roosting sites for sandhill cranes and can be a limiting factor in West Texas. As the days get longer during late February, they start migrating north back to their nesting sites, which expands from the northeastern United States through central Canada to Alaska and eastern Siberia; 75-90% of the Midcontinent population congregate on the Platte river in Nebraska during mid-March before heading off to their breeding grounds further north. It is truly a remarkable site, especially if you enjoy bird watching.

As sandhills find their way to the breeding sites, they go through their famous courtship dance routine to establish and or strengthen pair bonds. Once paired, usually by 8 years of age, they will mate for life. Sandhill cranes have a long-life span and have been documented living in the wild for more than 20 years. They begin nesting in April through mid-May and lay 2 eggs. Both parents take turns incubating the eggs for thirty days. After chicks hatch, they can leave the nest within twenty-four hours and can fly after seventy days. Young stay with their parents for 9-10 months, eventually leaving the parents and joining a non-breeding group to start the cycle all over again.

There are 9 different populations of Sandhill cranes. Three out of the 9 are non-migratory and can be found in Mississippi, Florida, and Cuba and are considered endangered. The 6 migratory populations are referred to by their migration routes; Eastern Flyway, MidContinent, Rocky Mountain, Lower Colorado River, Central Valley, and Pacific Flyway. The Midcontinent population, which is by far the largest population in North America with over 500,000 birds, can be divided into two subpopulations: the Lesser (*G. c. canadensis*) and Greater (*G. c. tabida*).

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Species Spotlight: Sandhill Crane, continued

The lesser subspecies is predominantly in the western part of Texas, and the greater subspecies is in the Gulf Coast region.

Before the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918, sandhill cranes were hunted for food and recreation. Due to changes in habitat and unregulated harvesting, sandhill crane populations declined. Hunting season was closed for 45 years and reopened in western Texas during 1961. There are 3 zones in Texas that have a hunting season on sandhill cranes. Zone A was the first area opened in Texas for hunting sandhills back in 1961. It covers the largest area and has the longest season (October 26, 2019 - January 26, 2020). It starts at the top of the Panhandle south to Laredo and west to El Paso. Zone B opened in 1968 and covers central Texas north of San Antonio to the Red River, and the season is from November 22, 2019 - January 26, 2020. Zone C was opened in 1983 and covers the gulf coast area except for a small buffer zone that protects the Aransas wildlife refuge and surrounding habitat for whooping cranes. While most people think they could never mistake a whooper for a sandhill crane, certain weather conditions like foggy mornings and itchy trigger fingers can lure hunters into making hasty decisions. Three different hunting zones have been created based on the sandhill and whooping cranes' migration time table, as well as the different population of subspecies within the different areas of our state. The area closed to crane hunting in Zone C runs from the Gulf of Mexico to Kingsville over to Victoria down to Port Lavaca and back out to the gulf. Hunting season for Zone C opens December 14, 2019, allowing time for the whoopers to migrate down, and then closes January 19, 2020. East Texas remains closed to crane hunting. So, plan accordingly and do your homework before running out and hunting these majestic birds.

If you are planning to hunt sandhills, make sure you have the required state hunting license, the migratory game bird endorsement, and a federal sandhill crane permit. The Federal Sandhill Crane Hunting Permit can be obtained in person at TPWD Headquarters, any Law Enforcement office, and through online purchase. Permittees should keep a record of hunting activities because 26% of crane hunters are chosen for a federal harvest survey. If you are considering hunting sandhill cranes you can find more information at the following link. <https://tpwd.texas.gov/regulations/outdoor-annual/regs/animals/sandhill-crane/#autotoc-item-autotoc-3>

Literature Cited:

Ballard, B.M, L.A. Brennan, S.J DeMaso, E.D Grahmann, W.P. Jr Kuvlesky, D.L Williford. 2017. The Upland and Webless Migratory Game Birds of Texas.



Brent Pierce is the wildlife biologist for Lavaca and Jackson County where he started in March 2016. He grew up in Galveston County in a town called Santa Fe, TX. He graduated from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science in Rangeland Ecology and Management with a wildlife emphasis. Brent comes to us from the private sector where he has worked on private ranches managing habitat for deer and other wildlife species, as well as, guiding hunters and managing populations.



Sandhill crane. Photo©TPWD

ATTENTION

Wildlife Management Association Members and Managed Lands Deer Permit Cooperators

In December, Managed Lands Deer Permit (MLDP) participants received an e-mail from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) soliciting public comment about a proposed fee for the MLDP program. Several inquiries have been made to our district biologists about the fee. Please understand that if your property is enrolled under the local Wildlife Management Association (WMA), the proposed fee for each property will be \$30, not \$300.

As an MLDP cooperator this new fee will be submitted through the Land Management Assistance system to TPWD to help administer the MLDP program. This new TPWD fee should not be confused with membership fees paid directly to your local WMA.

The Managed Lands Deer Permit Program

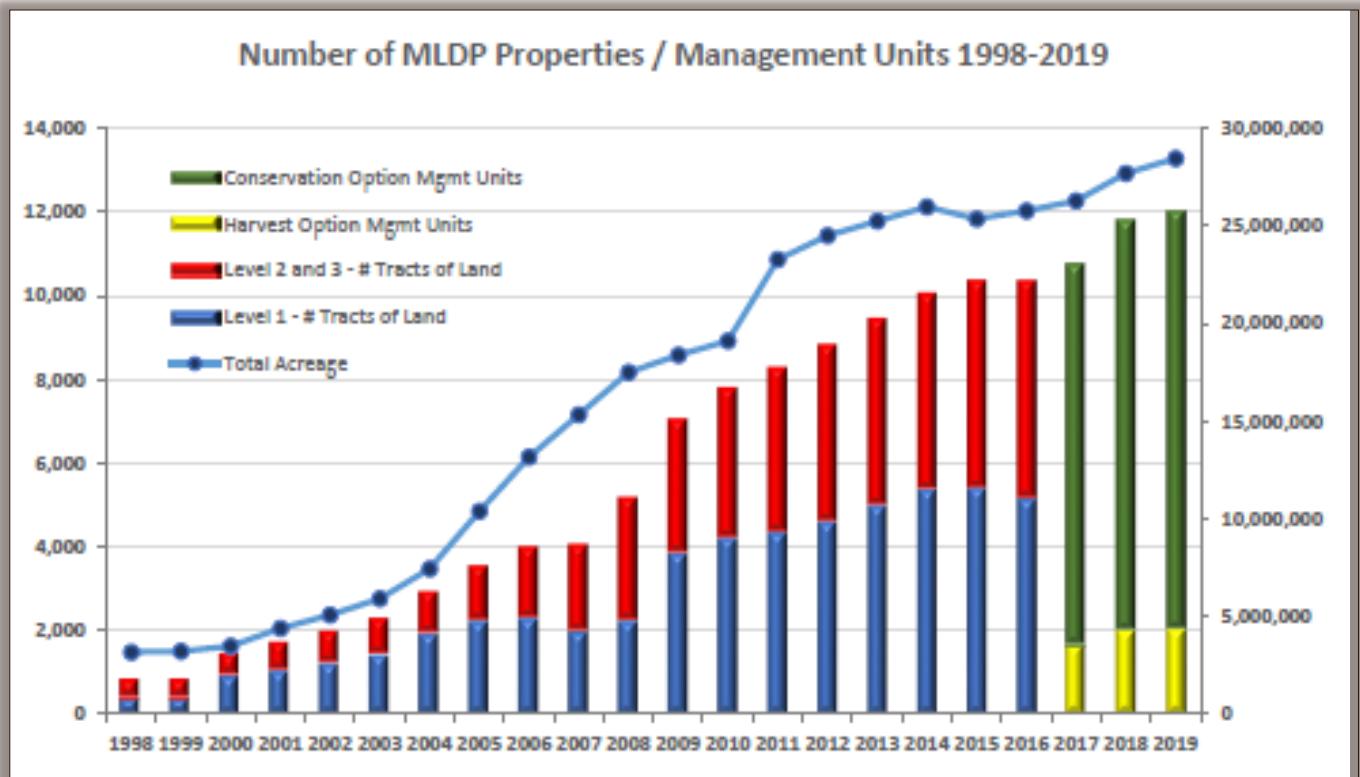
WRITTEN BY TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT

Why is a fee being proposed?

MLDP Background

The Managed Lands Deer Program (MLDP) is intended to foster and support sound management and stewardship of native wildlife and wildlife habitats on private lands in Texas. MLDP provides landowners and hunters flexibility to manage deer populations, improve habitats, and provide greater hunting opportunities through extended seasons and property-specific bag limits. The program is extremely popular across the state and has experienced a tenfold growth in terms of both number of participants and enrolled acreage since it began in 1996 (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1. MLDP participation over time.



Despite this growth, the number of TPWD biologists who administer the program has remained flat since 2000. The combination of program growth and static staffing levels has presented significant challenges for the department, primarily with respect to the allocation of staff resources to meaningfully engage with MLDP participants, meet technical guidance requests, and administer the MLDP. In response, the Texas Legislature earlier this year enacted Senate Bill 733, which explicitly authorizes the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission to establish a fee for participation in the MLDP. A proposed fee structure was presented to the Commission in November 2019.

Fee Description

The proposed MLDP fee is a license fee as defined in Chapter 53 (Recreational Hunting Licenses, Stamps, and Tags) of the Texas Administrative Code.

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The Managed Lands Deer Permit Program, continued

The tags that are provided through MLDP participation provide customers with an extended season length and the authority to harvest deer without a personal bag limit on the participating property. The fee structure is based on type of enrollment and respective benefits received (e.g., season, bag limit, method of take for sex of deer for which tags are issued, customize harvest recommendations, exemption from antler restrictions).

Fee Use

Revenue generated from the MLDP license fee will be allocated to a dedicated account, Fund 9, and will be ear-marked for use by the Wildlife Division. TPWD intends to use the revenue from MLDP fees to hire additional district biologists to increase TPWD's capacity to serve customers. A portion of that revenue will also be used to support the Land Management Assistance (LMA) online application. The LMA system manages all data related to MLDP including participation requirements, property records, validation and tag printing.

Fee Amount

The Wildlife Division's White-tailed Deer Technical Committee developed a proposed fee structure that takes into consideration feedback from advisory committees, stakeholder groups, and a past survey on MLDP fees conducted in 2007 by the Texas Wildlife Association. The proposed fee structure is as follows:

- Harvest Option (HO)
 - \$30 for each management unit of a property
 - \$30 for each aggregate
- Conservation Option (CO)
 - \$300 for the first management unit of a property, and
 - \$30 for each additional management unit of a property
 - \$300 for each aggregate
 - \$30 for each management unit of a wildlife management association or cooperative

When will the fee go into effect and what methods of payment will be accepted?

- The Department plans to begin collecting the MLDP fee for the 2021-22 hunting season. The ability to submit payment is expected to be made available during that season's enrollment period that opens in April 2021. Payment must be made online with a credit or debit card through a secure payment processing site accessed via the LMA system. The planned implementation schedule is contingent upon adoption of the proposed fee structure by the TPW Commission and the development of the LMA system to be able to process payments.

What are the benefits of a fee to me as an MLDP participant?

- All MLDP participants enjoy an extended season, property-specific bag limits, customized harvest recommendations, and other benefits depending on the enrollment option. These benefits provide much greater flexibility than afforded under the county deer harvest regulations. New positions funded by this fee will help TPWD address challenges of providing an appropriate level of support for all participants of this very popular program well into the future.
- The additional positions the Department intends to hire with the fee revenue will provide additional support and service to those areas of the state where MLDP demands are very high. TPWD acknowledges that not all MLDP participants will notice a change in customer service, but the fee is designed to help enhance staffing levels so that all MLDP participants across that state may receive similar levels of service, which is not currently feasible. The department's goal is to continue providing the best customer service possible in those areas of the state that do not receive additional staff, and existing staff capacity is expected to meet the needs of participants in those counties.

Youth Firearms and Safety Field Day: Lee and Washington Counties

WRITTEN BY LAURA SHERROD

TPWD Mission: To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Since 2005, Lee and Washington county biologists and wildlife management associations have collaborated annually to provide a unique opportunity to students that attend schools in the two counties. Wildlife professionals, wildlife association members, and other wildlife organizations join together to teach the students about firearm safety in a safe, hands-on environment. Many of the students are introduced to outdoor activities that they may never have had a chance to experience otherwise!

The event is held over two days each October at the Nails Creek Unit of the Somerville State Park. Students from Lee county attend one day, and students from Washington county attend the second day. Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) biologists from Lee and Washington counties invite schools to bring students, typically from ag or wildlife classes, each year. Students are transported from their schools to Rocky Point, a scenic open area surrounded by woodlands on the shore of Lake Somerville. Park staff closes the park for the day to the public, so students attending the event have a safe environment in the great outdoors for hands-on learning with various firearms. Students are divided into groups and rotate through stations. By the end of the day each student has had a chance to participate in each station. Lunch is also provided, compliments of the Lee County Wildlife Association and the Washington County Wildlife Society.

A typical day includes rotations through eight stations: shotguns, .22 pistols, .22 rifles, .223 rifles, muzzleloaders, archery, skills and safety trail, and skins/skulls/tracks station. For each of the six firearms stations, students are first given instructions on safety and proper handling of the equipment. Once safety instructions are given, students each have a chance to operate the equipment, whether guns or archery, with one-on-one guidance from the instructors volunteering at each station. At the skills and safety trail, students are first presented with hunter safety instructions, and each are asked to wear hunter orange safety vests and caps. They are then led through a trail and presented with different scenarios of "shoot or don't shoot." Instructors educate the students about hunter safety, ethical shooting, and game regulations at each of the scenarios and while walking down the trail. At the skins/skulls/tracks station, students are instructed on identifying characteristics and are then quizzed about what they learn at the end of the session. Depending on availability, there have been years where Game Wardens also attend and bring the Operation Game Thief trailer to educate the students. There is very high student participation in each of the stations, and students are encouraged to try each one. The students seem to be very excited and enjoy getting to shoot guns and learn more about hunting heritage!



Top: Hunter safety trail. Bottom: .22 rifle station. Photos©Laura Sherrod, TPWD

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Youth Firearms and Safety Field Day: Lee and Washington Counties, continued

This year we impacted 116 students at the Lee/Washington County Youth Firearms and Safety Field Day. This would not be possible without the wonderful volunteers and sponsors that help with the event! Sponsors include generous donations by Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Dime Box Sportsman's Club, Lee County Wildlife Association, and the Washington County Wildlife Society. This year we also received a generous donation of materials for a new heavy-duty backstop for the .223 station from Pumpco. The Texas Parks and Wildlife education program provides shotguns, clay throwers for the shotgun station, archery equipment, and the skills trail supplies. Other firearms were provided by the Lee County Wildlife Association and from the M.O. Neasloney Wildlife Management Area. Volunteers for the stations included all of the TPWD biologists from District 7, other TPWD staff, Lee County Wildlife Association and Washington County Wildlife Society members and directors, Texas Master Naturalists, and students from Blinn College. This event also would not be possible without the schools, teachers, and parents that allow the students to attend such a wonderful opportunity!

The opportunity of attending an event such as this really encompasses all aspects of our mission statement at Texas Parks and Wildlife. Not only does it teach students about managing and conserving the resources of the great outdoors, but this next generation is being taught about hunting heritage and the importance of passing that down to future generations. At the very least, what a great opportunity it is that these students have to experience such a unique event!



Top: Shotgun station. Bottom: Archery station.
Photos©Laura Sherrod, TPWD



Laura Sherrod is the Wildlife Biologist for Lee and Fayette counties. She grew up in Dripping Springs and graduated from Texas State University with a Bachelor of Arts in Wildlife Biology. Laura was hired by Texas Parks & Wildlife in 2008, where she worked with the Big Game Program until accepting her current biologist position in April 2014. Laura offices in Giddings, and she enjoys helping landowners and wildlife management associations achieve their habitat and wildlife management goals throughout Lee and Fayette counties.

Scientists Work To Boost the Population of the Beloved Texas Horned Lizard

WRITTEN BY RIAN ROLDAN, PUBLISHED BY AUSTIN AMERICAN STATESMAN ON OCTOBER 11, 2019

MASON — The local celebrities arrived at the Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area the night before, nestled in a cluster of plastic tubs secured in the back of Vicky Poole's SUV. She'd driven the Texas horned lizard hatchlings the four hours from the Fort Worth Zoo, where she helped breed them in captivity in her role as assistant curator of ectotherms. She checked on them at every stop.

On a cool morning at the wildlife management area last week, Poole and biologists from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department prepared the unknowing hatchlings for their release — the latest effort in a multiyear project to boost the population of the threatened species. Habitat loss and food shortages have decimated the reptile population for decades, and they've effectively disappeared from the eastern third of the state.

Poole and the biologists sat around a table and fitted 20 of the 37 hatchlings with radio transmitters — flimsy, filmstrip-like devices that stuck to the lizards' brown speckled backs. From a distance, it looked as if the team was sorting coins or candy — and not the iconic reptiles that have burrowed themselves into a particularly beloved nook of Texas lore.

They're like "little warm jelly beans," Poole said of the hatchlings. Ranging in age from just a week to a month old, the hatchlings won't grow the prominent horns that earn them their name until next spring.

The Texas horned lizard is the state's official reptile, the star of a daylong festival in the West Texas city of Eastland, and the stuff of urban legend. They're so embedded in childhood memories that people across swaths of the state have stories aplenty to share about their favorite "horny toad."

For the next few weeks, the biologists will track and monitor the hatchlings until the transmitters fall off. It's the latest phase in the project — one that focuses on learning more about how the young lizards fare in the wild.

"We don't know a lot about how the little guys live their life," said Nathan Rains, one of the biologists assisting with the release.

In previous years, biologists experimented with taking adult horned lizards from the wild and releasing them onto private property, as well as relocating them from West Texas to Central Texas.



Scientists tag 20 Texas horned lizards before releasing them at the Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area last Friday. A total of 37 hatchlings were released. They were raised at the Fort Worth Zoo. [ANA RAMIREZ/AMERICAN-STATESMAN]



Vicky Poole, assistant curator of ectotherms at the Fort Worth Zoo, and Spencer Wyatt, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department wildlife technician, release Texas horned lizards last Friday at the Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area. The lizards have been listed as a threatened species in Texas since 1977. [ANA RAMIREZ/AMERICAN-STATESMAN]

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Scientists Work To Boost the Population of the Beloved Texas Horned Lizard, continued

But working with the adults — which can grow to between about 3½ and 5 inches in length — proved both difficult and slow to yield results, so recent efforts have shifted to focus largely on the breeding and release of hatchlings.

"We can produce a whole lot more in captivity versus catching adults in the wild, which is really time consuming," Rains said.

The project still is largely in the research phase. The biologists haven't been able to identify proven techniques to restore the population long-term.



Jim Gallagher, natural resources specialist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, left, Nathan Rains, wildlife diversity biologist for the agency, back right, and Vicky Poole, assistant curator of ectotherms at the Fort Worth Zoo, glue harmonic radars on 20 Texas horned lizards last week. A total of 37 hatchlings were released at the Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area. The hatchlings also were photographed before being tagged. Each lizard has a unique spot pattern on their abdomen.
[ANA RAMIREZ/AMERICAN-STATESMAN]

"We just take our best guess and do something and hope it works," Rains said.

Lizard decline

Scientists don't know how much the species has declined — but they do know that the reptile's range has continued to shrink since 1977, when it was first listed as threatened in Texas. The lizards also have had a rough go of it outside of Texas, including in parts of eastern and central Oklahoma.

Loved as they are, Rains said they're "high-maintenance creatures." As far as their diets go, they can only stomach native harvester ants, which in recent years have been on the decline because of invasive fire ants. The lizards have serious mobility issues — their flat bodies and short legs make it difficult to flee quickly from predators — keeping their annual mortality rate at about 60% to 90% a year, according to Rains.

But part of their decline is blamed on humans and urbanization. The lizards thrive in open areas with sparse plant cover. When those habitats are converted to cropland, pastures, roads or housing, populations of the lizard can become isolated, making breeding difficult.

"There's not one single element," Rains said. "It's all that together."

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Scientists Work To Boost the Population of the Beloved Texas Horned Lizard, continued

The challenge, according to Jim Gallagher, a biologist at the wildlife management area, is proving that it's possible to regrow their populations. If it works at the wildlife management area, he said, it's possible the effort could be duplicated in other parts of the state.

"We need to fill those gaps," Gallagher said.

Federal help?

Several of the biologists are hopeful that a bill introduced in Congress earlier this year, known as the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, could provide funding that would allow them to scale up lizard conservation efforts.

The bill, which has 125 Democratic and Republican co-sponsors, would provide \$1.3 billion annually to state initiatives supporting at-risk fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. And Texas is home to more than 1,300 of the 12,000 species identified nationwide as having the greatest conservation need — including the Texas horned lizard. If the bill passed, the state would get about \$50 million per year for projects like this one.

"It's just a simple translation that you can do more with more money," Rains said.

Janice Bezanson, executive director of the Texas Conservation Alliance, said the bill would be a game-changer.

"There are so many on-the-ground projects that we need to be doing



A Texas horned lizard opens its mouth to cool down after being released last week at the Mason Mountain Wildlife Management Area. [ANA RAMIREZ/AMERICAN-STATESMAN]

but there isn't adequate funding for," Bezanson said. "At a time when we have rolled back some of our environmental protections it is particularly important to have an initiative that has broad based support from both parties."

Back at the wildlife management area, two hours northwest of Austin, in an open patch of grass by a nearby harvester ant pile, Poole and Gallagher kneeled on the ground, clutching the plastic tubs with the hatchlings inside. They placed the lizards on the ground one by one, and watched as some hatchlings scuttled away while others burrowed into the ground.

After a few minutes, they were gone — swallowed up by the low, wispy grass. Poole and the biologists stood nearby, quietly rooting for their survival.

How Texas Editors View Game and Fish Work

Regulated Closed Season

(From Abilene Reporter-News)

Of the many fish stories spawned by yesterday's wild rush at the opening of the bass and crappie season one datelined Dallas was especially significant. And the detail that was of most interest was not the traffic jam which accompanied the opening of a new fishing spot near Dallas and the 20,000 anglers who joined in that particular scramble, but a brief sentence in the midst of the general story. It said that most of the crappie were taken in shallow water, indicating that the spawning season is still in full blast.

That is a sad, and in time it may be a disastrous, state of affairs.

The Texas closed season on bass and crappie is inflexible; in other words, it closes on the last day of February and opens on the first day of May. It generally happens that the automatic open season begins long before the fish have finished spawning, which means that billions of potential skillet-fillers never have a chance in life. Being unacquainted with the laws of man and bound perforce to the wheel of Nature, the fish cannot regulate their spawning to fit the closed season. Often they spawn right up to the first of June, because of a late spring or other climatological conditions.

The Fish, Game and Oyster Commission has no discretion in the matter; the season opens by statute. The commission is one of the few in the country not endowed with regulatory powers. It should be, so endowed, by all means. It should be able to delay the opening until the fish are ready for it. In conjunction with local sportsmen and game wardens, it could fix the dates for opening and closing in accordance with the laws of Nature, not those of man, and regulate the season for each fishing spot to suit its condition.

Until that is done, Texas anglers will continue to enjoy short seasons—because of the shortage of fish.

To Teach the Game Laws

(From Dallas Times-Herald)

The special course to be offered students of the rural schools of Dallas County next year in the game laws of the state may equip the youngsters to go fishing and hunting without fear of arrest.

A similar course in the city schools might be useful and in the free night classes which are open to grownups. The game laws are far too complicated to be learned by casual reading.

It is not safe to go fishing these days without being accompanied by a lawyer or some other expert on the restrictions and limitations. The old rule that ignorance of the law is no excuse in court applies to the angler and hunter.

The day has passed when the country boy could turn old Dobbin into the pasture, retire to a creek or lake, and measure wits with the perch and catfish, with no

thought of legal complications. He must now take lessons in the game laws.

But regulations are necessary to protect the game of this state. Unrestricted hunting and fishing in past years have gone far toward depleting the wild life of Texas. And the modern Nimrods and Izaak Walton's are so proficient that many of them easily hook or kill more than their share of fish, birds and animals.

The first job of the teachers of this course will be to convince the youngsters that the game laws are essential. But the rural dwellers see this more clearly than urbanites. City hunters and fishermen are prone to take it for granted that the game supply is inexhaustible.

How Drownings Are Caused

(From San Antonio News)

Fishing, boating, and swimming season has returned. That means that drowning, which has figured increasingly in the accident fatalities during the past few years—having taken about 5,000 lives in 1939—soon will be in the news with distressing frequency. Yet, by exercising a little ordinary care, most deaths from that cause might be prevented. It is frequently said, with good reason, that every person should learn to swim—yet the greater number of drowning-victims are swimmers who overestimate their strength or otherwise take needless risks. Observe that at regular bathing-beaches where lifeguards are on duty, drownings are almost unknown. Indeed, the remarkable drop in the drowning-rate for the most part during the past 25 years is attributed mainly to the Red Cross swimming and life-saving courses.

The recent rise in the death-rate has come about because newly opened roads lead to out-of-the-way streams and lakes where inexperienced persons go bathing with not a lifeguard in sight. On the other hand, numerous accidents result from rocking the boat. For that reason, these cautions by the Texas Game, Fish and Oyster Commission are timely: If persons who go in small boats would avoid overloading them and not allow any occupant to stand up, many drownings could be prevented. No matter how small the boat, it should be equipped for emergencies—carry a lifebelt for each person, as well as lights, a fire-extinguisher and strong paddles. A motor that is either too large or too small for the boat may cause trouble. An outboard motor should be securely fastened with rope or chain to prevent it from sinking to the bottom should it come loose. Observe those simple precautions, says the Commission and drownings that result from fresh-water boating will be few and far between.

Artificial light is being used in some fish hatcheries to advance the time of trout spawning. As much as 2 months has been gained.

Fish called Labyrinth Bubble Nest Builders construct a floating nest of bubbles in which eggs, numbering from 100 to 500, are deposited, hatched and the young tended.

Try to Save Bighorns

(From Houston Chronicle)

The Texas Game Department is making a gallant fight to keep the Texas bighorn mountain sheep from becoming extinct. Only a few are left. It is estimated there are upwards of 300 of the sheep in the mountains of the Trans-Pecos. Probably many of them are in the Guadalupe Mountains within sight of El Captain, the state's highest peak. Others are in the Beach, Sierra and Diablo mountains.

When the Americans first came into Texas as there were thousands of the bighorns in the mountains of West Texas. They were killed off until the remaining few are to be found only in the most inaccessible places. The sheep have been protected by law for many years, but the places where hunters find the sheep are so isolated that the law has had little effect. Also the sheep have been driven to barren mountainsides where it is difficult for them to get enough to live on.

Now the state game department is about to set up a refuge for the bighorns somewhere in West Texas. A survey will be made first to determine the suitable site for the refuge.

The bighorn is one of Texas' most interesting mammals. The plan to give him a refuge is a worthy one. The game department officials believe with proper control of predators and protection for the sheep, their numbers can be increased appreciably.

Texas Mountain Sheep

(From Dallas Semi-Weekly Farm News)

In the mountains of the Trans-Pecos region, Texas still has about 300 bighorn sheep. Many sportsmen believe that, if properly protected and encouraged, these sheep might multiply to the extent that a short open season for hunting them would be justified. At any rate, it is essential to take protective steps to keep them from becoming extinct. Unless this is done, these sure-footed animals may soon vanish entirely from Texas.

The Texas Game Department, which is doing much to increase the state's supply of antelope, deer, turkey and quail, has plans for setting up a refuge for bighorn mountain sheep. But first, with federal aid, it will survey the mountainous areas of West Texas with this end in view. This study, to begin immediately, will be carried on mainly in the Beach and Sierra Diablo Mountains in Culberson and Hudspeth Counties.

This survey will seek data on the feeding and breeding habits of the bighorn sheep and the effect of predators such as eagles and mountain lions. As a result, the game department should be able to determine which section would be most desirable as a refuge for mountain sheep. These wary animals, that generally feed at higher altitudes than cattle, do not compete with any farming or livestock industry. As potential game animals, they are a valuable state asset worthy of vigorous conservation efforts.

HLSR Ranching & Wildlife Expo 2020

WRITTEN BY CLINT FAAS

With the New Year behind us and spring getting ever closer that can only mean one thing; it's almost Rodeo time in Houston! As part of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo (HLSR), the 14th Annual Ranching and Wildlife Expo is scheduled to take place on March 3-7, 2020 at NRG Center in Houston, Texas. This annual event is organized by the HLSR Ranching and Wildlife Committee and is designed to showcase the complementary and beneficial relationships that can exist between a successful ranching operation and a successful wildlife program.

The expo will start with 3 days of educational seminars beginning March 3-5. This year's topics aim to target a broader audience with daily themes of "Managing Cattle, Wildlife, and Rangeland," "Engaging in the Outdoors," and "Habitat Improvement Opportunities." The Expo also features commercial vendor booths throughout the week and a wildlife auction on March 6. Finally, the finalists from the youth wildlife video and poster board competition are invited back on March 7th for presentations and awards. In addition to these competitions, the Ranching and Wildlife Committee will host over 1000 competitors this year in the sporting clays, skeet, and archery competitions. With cash prizes and other awards offered the Expo is proudly giving back to the youth of Texas and helping to shape our next generation of outdoors men and women and the future stewards of our state's resources.

Seminar presentations will include:

Tuesday, March 3, 2020: Managing Cattle, Wildlife, and Rangeland

Cattle Market Report and Outlook for 2020 – HCalf: A Beef Cattle Production Educational Program — Animal Hauling Rules and Regs – A Comparison of Native and Introduced Pasture for Grazing and Wildlife

— Mechanics of Planting and Restoring Native Pastures — Brush Management Planning and Implementation

Wednesday, March 4, 2020: Engaging in the Outdoors

Learning Your Herps: Common Amphibians and Reptiles of Texas (With Live Animals) — Gearing Up for the Outdoors: Purchasing and Packing for Your Next Adventure – An Introduction to Fly Fishing

— Opportunities for Women in the Outdoors — Public Land Access and the Texas State Parks Ambassadors Program – Getting Outdoors with Nature Photography – There's an App for That: Exploring Nearby Nature with iNaturalist — Outdoor Cooking, with Demonstration

Thursday, March 5, 2020: Habitat Improvement Opportunities

Urban Wildlife and What to do if you Find Them (With Live Animals) – Mythical Creatures: Black Panthers, Chupacabras, and other Sightings — Waterfowl Habitat and Financial Assistance Programs — Quail Habitat and Financial Assistance Programs – Turkey Habitat and Financial Assistance Programs — "So You Want to Buy a Ranch?" - Tips/Helpful Hints on Making a Ranch Purchase, Ranch Financing Options and an Overview of Texas Land Markets Data — Wild Game Preparation: Game Birds

[For a complete schedule of topics and speakers visit the HLSR website:](#)

Admission to the seminars is free. [Pre-register today for a free gate and admission pass at:](#)

For more information contact the Clint Faas at 832-595-8999 or clinton.faas@tpwd.texas.gov.

Upcoming Events

JANUARY

<p>17 Washington County Wildlife Society Semi-Annual Meeting Washington County Fairgrounds Event Center 1305 E. Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, TX 77833 Begins at 5:30 p.m. Contact Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service at 979-277-6212 to RSVP.</p>	<p>25 Western DeWitt County Wildlife Management Association Buck Scoring Contest Lackey Ranch 9357 State HWY 119 N., Yorktown, TX 78164 From 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. Contact Meagan Lesak</p>
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FEBRUARY

<p>1 Western DeWitt County Wildlife Management Association Buck Contest Banquet 5D Steakhouse 632 West Main, Yorktown, TX 78164 Begins at 5:00 p.m. Contact Meagan Lesak</p>	<p>21 Washington County Wildlife Tax Valuation Workshop VIP Building at the Washington County Fairgrounds 1305 E. Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, TX 77833 RSVP required for meal, \$10 per person Program begins at 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Contact Stephanie Damron at 979-277-6297</p>
<p>7 Neasloney Annual Prescribed Burn Workshop M. O. Neasloney WMA 20700 State HWY 80 N., Gonzales, TX 78629 Begins at 8:30 a.m. Contact Trent Teinert at 830-203-0896.</p>	<p>29 Alum Creek Wildlife Management Association Meeting Bluebonnet Headquarters 155 Electric Ave., Bastrop, TX 78602 Begins at 3:00 p.m. Contact Robert Trudeau</p>
<p>7 Lee County Wildlife Association Annual Meeting The Silos on 77 1031 County Road 223, Giddings, TX 78942 Begins at 5:00 p.m. Contact Greg Sherrod at 512-431-3558 or Lee County Wildlife Association TPWD Workshop Calendar Registration link</p>	<p>29 Jackson County Wildlife Management Association Jackson County Service Center located at 411 N. Wells St., Edna, TX 77957 Begins at 4:00 p.m. Contact Jim Theiss at 713-253-1135 Jackson County Wildlife Management Association Facebook</p>
<p>16 Central DeWitt County Wildlife Management Association Awards Banquet VFW Hall 934 US HWY 183, Cuero, TX 77954 Doors open at 5:00 p.m. Contact Mary Keating</p>	

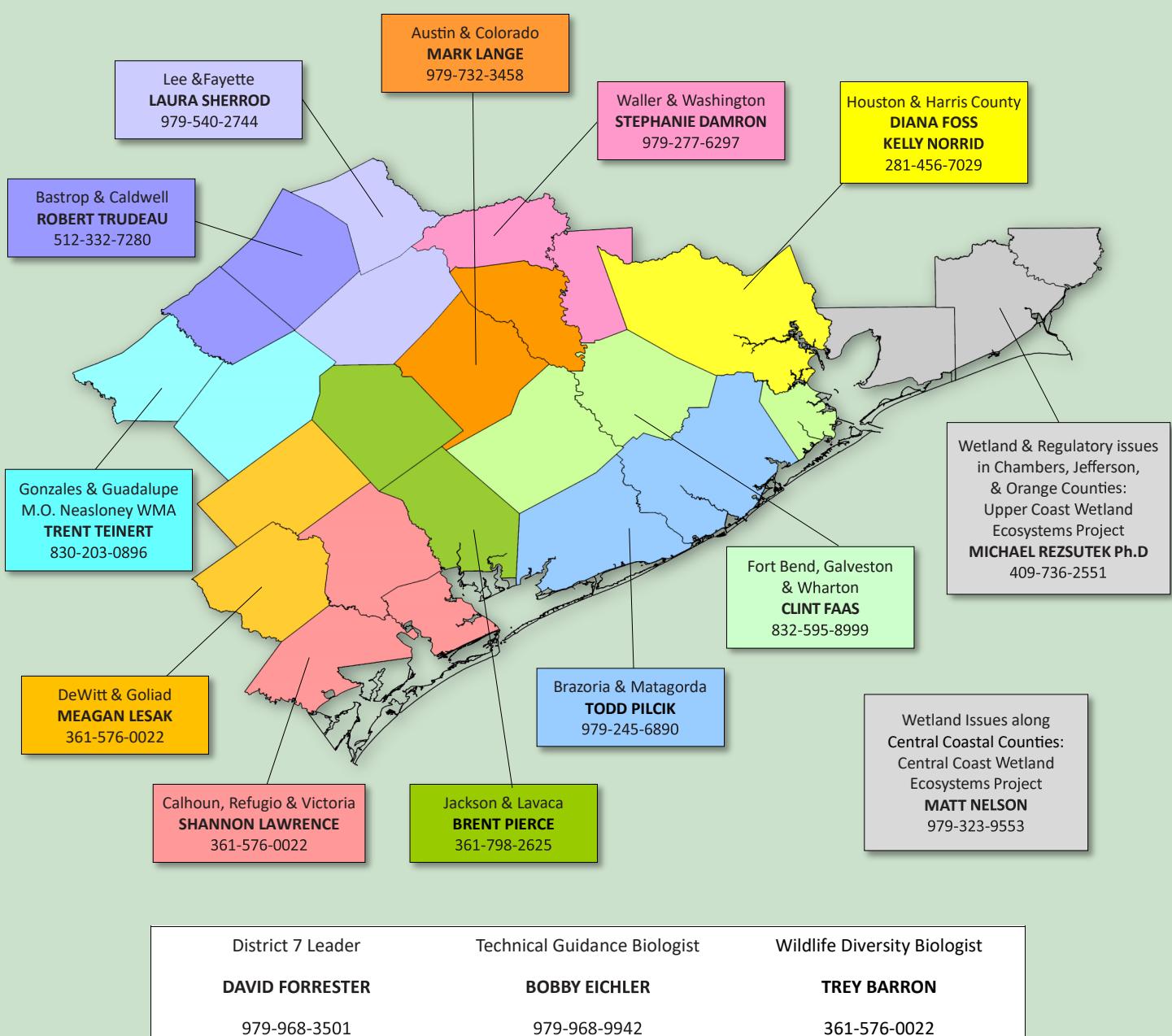
*Upcoming events, continued***MARCH**

<p>7 Wildlife Tax Valuation Workshop San Antonio Phil Hardberger Park Urban Ecology Center 8400 NW Military HWY, San Antonio, TX 78231 Begins at 8:00 a.m. Registration required. Contact Jessica Alderson at 210-309-2416 TPWD Workshop Calendar Registration link</p> <p>13 Columbus Wildlife Tax Valuation Workshop Colorado County EMS Building 305 Radio Ln., Columbus, TX 78934 Begins at 8:00 a.m. Registration required. Contact Mark Lange at TPWD Workshop Calendar Registration link</p> <p>20 Fort Bend County Tax Valuation Workshop Fort Bend County AgriLife Conference Room, 1402 Band Rd., Rosenberg, TX 77471 Begins at 9:00 a.m., Limited to 35 seats. Registration required. Contact Clinton Faas at 832-595-8999 TPWD Workshop Calendar Registration link</p> <p>21 Colorado County Wildlife Management Association Spring Banquet Columbus Hall 3845 I-10 Columbus, TX 78934 Begins at 4:00 p.m. Contact Chad Emmel at 979-732-1399</p> <p>23 Meyersville Wildlife Management Association Spring Meeting 13052 South US HWY 183, Yorktown, TX 78164 Begins at 5:30 p.m. Contact Hank Chinnery</p>	<p>27 Guadalupe County Wildlife Management Association Big Red Barn Located at the intersection of HWY 123 and Cordova Rd. Seguin, TX 78155 Begins at 6:00 p.m. Contact Trent Teinert at 830-203-0896</p> <p>27 La Grange Wildlife Tax Valuation Workshop Fayette County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Office 255 Svoboda Ln., La Grange, TX 78945 Begins at 8:00 a.m. Registration required. Contact Laura Sherrod at 979-540-2744 TPWD Workshop Calendar Registration link</p>
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*Upcoming events, continued***APRIL**

<p>3 Bastrop County Wildlife Tax Valuation Workshop First National Bank 489 TX-71, Bastrop, TX 78602 Registration required. Contact Robert Trudeau TPWD Workshop Calendar Registration link</p> <p>6 Lee County Wildlife Tax Valuation Workshop Lee County Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Office 310 South Grimes, Giddings, TX 78942 Registration begins at 12:30 p.m. Contact Laura Sherrod at 979-540-2744 Contact Geri Kline at 979-542-2753. TPWD Workshop Calendar Registration link</p> <p>7 Tri Community Wildlife Management Association Meeting McMahan Community Center 6022 FM 713, McMahan, TX 78616 Begins at 12:00 p.m. Contact Robert Trudeau at</p>	<p>11 Red Rock Wildlife Management Association Meeting Red Rock Community Center 114 Red Rock Rd., Red Rock, TX 78602 Begins at 6:30 p.m. Contact Robert Trudeau</p> <p>18 Turkey Workshop JWMH Building of the Goliad Co. Fair Grounds 925 US-183, Goliad, TX 77963 Begins at 8:00 a.m. Contact Alethea Albrecht at 361-645-8204 No RSVP necessary, coffee and donuts, Open to the public.</p>
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Our Wildlife Biologists



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FOR MORE INFORMATION

All inquiries: Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 4200 Smith School Rd., Austin, TX 78744, telephone (800) 792-1112 toll free, or (512) 389-4800 or visit our website for detailed information about TPWD programs:

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