Region IV Wildlifer

A newsletter for landowners that fall within the 33 counties of Region IV, covering portions of Central and Coastal Texas

October 2025

District 8 Field Notes

BY DERRICK WOLTER

Each year, the arrival of white-tailed deer hunting season brings a surge of excitement for hunters across Texas. It's more than just a tradition—it's a time-honored ritual that connects people with the outdoors and bonds families and friends through shared experience. The crisp morning air, the rustle of leaves underfoot, and the anticipation of tagging a deer all combine to create an atmosphere charged with adrenaline and focus. For many, it's not just about hunting, but the preparation, the stories around the campfire, and the memories made. It's important to note, however, that a successful hunt does result in some hearty, home-cooked meals!

While drought stress may temper antler quality expectations in the southern part of the district, the overall whitetail population is holding steady, with good carryover from prior years helping maintain hunter opportunity.

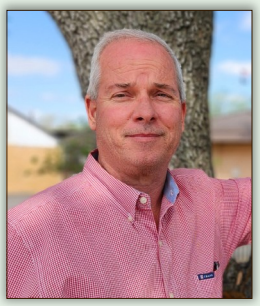
Biologists play a vital role in deer management by working closely with landowners to develop data-driven harvest recommendations. Through site visits, population surveys, and habitat assessments, our biologists gather and interpret data to understand the unique dynamics of deer herds in an area. Staff use this information to create tailored management plans that balance deer populations, habitat health, and landowner goals—whether focused on improving herd quality, maintaining ecological balance, or enhancing hunting opportunities. This collaborative approach supports responsible stewardship of the land and helps ensure long-term success in managing healthy, productive deer populations on private lands across Texas.

There have been no recent staff changes in the district, bringing a sense of stability and continuity to the team. This fall and winter, biologists are focused on disease surveillance, collecting data from harvested deer, and helping landowners. In fact, staff are taking this opportunity to build relationships with cooperators, listening closely and offering technical guidance to help meet landowner goals. Our staff truly appreciates your commitment to

Derrick Wolter began his career with TPWD in 2000 working as a wildlife biologist within the Upper Coast Wetlands Ecosystem Project, where he worked with wetlands, waterfowl, and on several Wildlife Management Areas. In 2004, Derrick moved to Central Texas to serve as a district biologist for Bell, Coryell, Lampasas, and Williamson Counties. In 2020, he became the Senior Wildlife Biologist for the Hill Country District. In November 2023, Derrick became the Wildlife District 8 Leader. He received a Bachelor of Science in Wildlife Science and a Master of Science in Wildlife Ecology from Texas A&M University.

District Field Notes, continued

wildlife and habitat management and the important role you play in conserving the natural resources of Texas. Expect to hear from your local TPWD biologist soon, as he or she looks forward to working with you to support your land management goals. Staff are also planning several workshops and field days for the coming months, so keep an eye out for those opportunities. Happy hunting!



District 9 Field Notes

BY BOBBY EICHLER

Folks, looking back over the last few newsletters and the district notes, it seems our weather pattern has been all over the place. Late winter and early spring were exceptionally dry considering spring usually has decent rainfall. Then comes late May through early July where we had good rainfall through most of the district and things were looking more positive, knowing that the rainfall over that period would likely have to hold us through late July and August. Normally, we could expect some type of rainfall in September to help going through the fall, but that did not happen. Conditions across most of District 9 now fall into the moderate to severe drought rating put out by the U.S. Drought Monitor. The drought outlook issued September 30 indicates the drought will persist through October, I imagine the late October outlook won't look much better.

I have noticed lots of hay bales moving through and to the area stocking up for the drought and the winter. While I am no rancher, cattle prices are high, but I guess that's a double-edged sword if you want to build up your herd. Assuming some folks will hold on to their heifers particularly, range conditions have been bad and will only get worse for the foreseeable future. I have heard though, and seen, that the acorn crop may be average to above average. Post oaks and live oaks have decent numbers of average sized acorns. While this may hinder hunting and the acorns may be on the ground for a while since it is dry, at least it will help the deer maintain their body conditions.

Hunting conditions have been spotty over the district. Dove season was probably average at best. Reports from teal hunting has been days of 'hit and miss', with mostly misses. A mild winter will keep the ducks north of us, so here is to hoping we get some good cold fronts early. Archery deer hunting has produced a handful of really good bucks. Fayette County and Colorado County have both produced a 160+ B&C archery harvested buck from low fence properties. While you can't say this is 'statistically significant', you can hope that means there are more good bucks out there that will pop up once the rut really kicks in.

As always, we do ask for your support in helping our staff with CWD samples from harvested deer. If you harvest a deer, all we need is the head portion. Very little neck is actually needed and even cutting off at the base of the skull will give us what we need, the lymph nodes from the throat area. After harvest, just contact your local biologist for sample collection. If it buys some time, you can freeze the head. We do have a voluntary check station in Washington County set up in the parking lot of the fairgrounds. This is the same location as in the past few years. While we have not detected CWD in the free-ranging herd in Washington County, we still want to monitor closely due to a detection a few years back at a facility. To see where the detections have been across the state, check here: Historical/Positive | Chronic Wasting Disease ExB

As always, if you need anything wildlife or habitat related, give us a call and we will try to assist you. Stay safe this hunting season and best of luck.

Bobby Eichler is the District 9 leader for the Oak Savannah and Prairies 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.

A Deep Dive Into Waterfowl-Wading Through the Numbers

WRITTEN BY BLAKE HENDON

Start of the Season

Teal hunting season in Texas kicked off on September 20th and ran through the 28th as a shortened nine-day statewide 2025 early teal season. The shortened season was in response to a 13 percent population decline from the long-term average and the lowest population estimates in two decades.

"Blue-winged teal, the second most abundant duck in North America and the primary species targeted during Texas's early teal season, have faced tough conditions on their northern breeding grounds. Prolonged drought in key areas of Canada and the Dakotas has reduced habitat quality and nesting success, leading to population declines…While it's disappointing to see the decreased hunting season, teal remain an important and resilient species," said Kevin Kraai, Waterfowl Program Leader for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). "Hunters can still expect fair opportunity this September, especially where wet conditions earlier in the summer have provided good habitat locally." – TPWD News Release.

Coordinated Effort

State game agencies collaborate with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) to manage migratory waterfowl through various administrative Flyways across North America. These Flyways include the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific, each with its own Council and technical committees. The Councils are composed of representatives from state, provincial, and territorial agencies, and they work with the USFWS to develop management recommendations and share information on migratory bird conservation. The Flyway Representatives and assistant USFWS personnel assist in sharing information and developing management recommendations within each flyway. This collaborative effort ensures effective and responsive management of migratory birds and their habitats, addressing population and habitat information to make informed decisions for conservation.


Photo©TPWD

TPWD and the USFWS work closely together to manage migratory waterfowl through a combination of research, habitat management, regulation, and public engagement.

Coordinated Monitoring and Research

- Aerial and Ground Surveys: TPWD biologists often participate in coordinated surveys with USFWS to monitor waterfowl populations during migration and breeding seasons (mid-winter surveys also conducted in Texas).
- Banding Programs: Both agencies support waterfowl banding efforts to track migration patterns, survival rates, and harvest data.

Continued on page 4

A Deep Dive Into Waterfowl-Wading Through the Numbers, continued

Regulation and Policy Alignment

- Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA): USFWS sets the framework for migratory bird hunting regulations under the MBTA, and TPWD adopts and enforces those regulations at the state level.
- Hunting Seasons and Bag Limits: TPWD works within the federal guidelines set by USFWS to establish hunting seasons and bag limits that reflect regional population data and habitat conditions.

Public Engagement and Education

- Hunter Education & Outreach: TPWD and USFWS often collaborate on outreach programs to educate hunters about regulations, conservation, and ethical hunting practices.
- Grants and Funding: Through programs like the Pittman-Robertson Act and North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA), TPWD receives federal funding to support waterfowl conservation projects.

2025 WATERFOWL POPULATION STATUS

SPECIES	2025	2024	% CHANGE from 2024	% CHANGE from LTA*
MALLARD	6,554	6,609	(-1)	(-17)
GADWALL	2,414	2,284	(+6)	(+17)
AMERICAN WIGEON	3,191	2,922	(+9)	(+22)
GREEN-WINGED TEAL	2,550	3,005	(-15)	(+16)
BLUE-WINGED TEAL	4,432	4,599	(-4)	(-13)
NORTHERN SHOVELER	2,758	2,646	(+4)	(+4)
NORTHERN PINTAIL	2,239	1,975	(+13)	(-41)
REDHEAD	918	782	(+17)	(+25)
CANVASBACK	690	566	(+22)	(+17)
SCAUP	3,675	4,069	(-10)	(-25)
Total Ducks (Numbers in Thousands)	33,980	33,988	0	(-4)
May Ponds (U.S. & Canada)	4,180	5,159	(-19)	(-20)

*LONG-TERM AVERAGE (LTA) FOR REGIONS IN TRADITIONAL SURVEY AREA, 1955-2024

Continued on page 5

A Deep Dive Into Waterfowl-Wading Through the Numbers, continued

Flyway Council Participation

- Texas is part of the Central Flyway Council, which includes representatives from TPWD and USFWS. This council helps coordinate waterfowl management across multiple states and provinces.

Diving into the numbers

Interested in diving into the data? You can access the most recent population status report, hunting activity and harvest report, and the adaptive harvest management report through the USFWS (Migratory Bird Annual Status Report) web page.

Migratory Bird Annual Status Reports – USFWS

https://www.fws.gov/story/migratory-bird-annual-status-reports

- 2025 Waterfowl Population Status Report
- Migratory Bird Hunting Activity & Harvest Report (2024-2025)
- Adaptive Harvest Management Reports

Migratory bird hunters are reminded to make sure they are Harvest Information Program (HIP) certified and confirm the HIP questions are answered correctly. HIP surveys allow biologists to get an accurate sample of migratory game bird hunters so the USFWS can deliver harvest surveys to selected participants later in the year.

Citation for quoted statements on teal season opening.

"Teal Season Opens in Texas Sept. 20" – TPWD News Release (Sept 2, 2025)

Citation for waterfowl graphic:

2025 Waterfowl Population Status Report infographic, Brima Battle/USFWS, Public Domain, https://www.fws.gov/media/2025-waterfowl-population-status-report-infographic

Blake Hendon is the Senior Wildlife Biologist for District 8. Previously, he was the Natural Resource Specialist for Hays and Travis Counties. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in Wildlife Ecology and a Master of Science degree in Rangeland Ecology and Management, both from Texas A&M University. A native of the Pineywoods of Northeast Texas, Blake started his TPWD career in central Texas in 2007.

Species Spotlight: Eastern Screech Owls in Central Texas

WRITTEN BY BRITTANY PERRY

Eastern screech owl camouflaged against a tree trunk. Photo©Chase Fountain, TPWD

The eastern screech owl (*Megascops asio*) is a small, nocturnal raptor that thrives throughout the eastern and central United States, including the oak woodlands and mixed forests of Central Texas. Despite their miniature size, typically only 6 to 8 inches tall, these owls are formidable hunters and highly adaptable residents of both wild and urbanized landscapes. Surprisingly, screech owls do not screech. Their haunting, tremolo, and whinny calls can often be heard during Texas nights, especially during the breeding season, though their excellent camouflage makes them a challenge to spot in person.

One of the more fascinating features of the eastern screech owl is its color morphs, which are not related to age, sex, or season, but are instead genetically inherited traits. In Central Texas, you can encounter individuals with either a gray morph or a red (rufous) morph, though the gray morph tends to be more common. Gray morph owls blend perfectly with tree bark, moss, and lichen-covered branches, while red morphs stand out with rich chestnut or rust-colored plumage. Both types have the same feather pattern, fine streaking, and mottling that help them disappear into tree trunks during daylight roosting. These color differences provide varying degrees of camouflage depending on the local habitat and lighting, which contributes to their survival.

Eastern screech owl on alert. Photo©Chase Fountain, TPWD

Eastern screech owls prefer habitats that offer a mix of cover and hunting grounds, such as river corridors, wooded suburban parks, and edges of farmland. In Central Texas, they often nest in old woodpecker holes, natural tree cavities, or man-made nest boxes. Mature live oaks and pecans are especially valuable to them for roosting and nesting. Even in well-developed neighborhoods, screech owls will take up residence if there are sufficient trees and a steady food source.

Their diet is impressively varied, making them successful generalist predators. Insects such as moths, beetles, and katydids form a significant part of their diet in warmer months. In cooler seasons, they shift to small mammals like mice and voles, as well as lizards, frogs, and even small birds. With their silent flight and excellent hearing, eastern screech owls can detect and capture prey in the darkness. This adaptability in both diet and hunting technique helps them thrive across a wide range of environments in Central Texas.

Continued on page 7

Species Spotlight: Eastern Screech Owls in Central Texas, continued

Breeding season begins as early as late January or February in this region. Males use their eerie calls to claim territory and attract a mate. Once paired, the female lays a clutch of 2 to 6 eggs in a tree cavity, which she incubates while the male brings food. After hatching, the young owls fledge in about four weeks, though they often remain in the area for several more weeks, learning to hunt and navigate the world. Homeowners who install nest boxes and keep their yards wildlife-friendly may be rewarded with generations of screech owls returning year after year.

Despite their adaptability, eastern screech owls face threats such as habitat fragmentation, vehicle collisions, and exposure to pesticides. Free-roaming cats and larger raptors, such as great horned owls, are also common predators. As more people learn to recognize their trills and whistles echoing through the night, these small owls continue to enchant and inspire a growing base of local naturalists and birdwatchers.

Eastern screech owl using nest box. Photo©Steve Bontempo, TPWD

Brittany Perry is the Wildlife Biologist for Burleson, Milam and Falls counties. She is from Lafayette, Louisiana and graduated from LSU. Brittany has worked in conservation through the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, National Wild Turkey Federation, and environmental consulting projects throughout the US. She joined TPWD in 2023 and offices in Rockdale, TX.

Inviting New Hunters into Connection with Land, Wildlife, and Tradition

WRITTEN BY OLIVIA KOST

Think back to the first time you went hunting.

The smell of the morning air, the stillness before the shot, the pride mixed with reverence as you prepared the game. When I think back to my first harvest, it is not the animal itself I remember most, but the feeling of connection. I was suddenly aware of how the land, the animal, and my mentor were all part of the same moment. It was humbling and grounding, and it reshaped how I understood my place outdoors. That single experience became a doorway into a tradition that connects us to food, to the land we live on, and to a human heritage that continues to shape us today.

Hunting Is About Connection

At its heart, hunting is about connection. It is about belonging to the natural world, participating in the cycle of life, and recognizing the responsibility that comes with it. Experiences like sitting quietly in a blind at dawn or cooking a meal from your own harvest create bonds rarely replicated elsewhere in our daily lives.

Aldo Leopold once wrote, *"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."* Hunting teaches this truth in a way few other activities can. When you belong to the land community, you begin to care for it because connection naturally leads to respect and stewardship.

Why It Matters That Others Care

If hunting has taught us to care for the land, it stands to reason that we should want others to care as well. Yet many Texans today do not inherit hunting traditions. They may not have had the blessing of a mentor who took them hunting, or they grew up in an area where access to such a sport was limited.

Mentored hunt at the Chaparral Wildlife Management Area. Photo©TPWD

Continued on page 9

Inviting New Hunters into Connection with Land, Wildlife, and Tradition, continued

Still, their reasons for seeking out hunting are powerful:

- To provide healthy food for their families.
- To become more self-reliant.
- To connect more deeply with nature.
- To join a legacy they may have been cut off from.

Engaging these new adult hunters matters for conservation. As Texas cities expand, rural lands face pressures from fragmentation, rising land costs, and conversion to non-working uses. If more Texans from urban backgrounds form a bond with the land through hunting, they bring not only new conservation dollars but also new voices. These are voters and advocates who understand the value of working lands and will support policies that protect them.

Teaching new hunters how to care for and process their hard-earned meat is an important step in making hunting more accessible and cost-effective. Photo©TPWD

What Keeps People Away?

- If we want these new hunters to join us, we must understand the barriers that stand in their way, many of which may not be obvious to seasoned hunters.
- Access to Land: Many newcomers do not know where to hunt.
- Cost of Entry: Licenses, gear, and travel can seem out of reach.
- Cultural Intimidation: Some worry they will not fit in or will be judged.
- Information Overload: Competing advice and jargon overwhelm beginners.
- Fear of Mistakes: Concerns about safety or embarrassment hold people back.

These barriers are surmountable, but we must remember that the reasons behind hunting traditions are not always obvious to beginners. What feels like second nature to a seasoned hunter can seem like a maze of unspoken rules to someone new. By creating a safe environment where every question is welcomed (no matter how basic), we build trust and confidence.

Continued on page 10

Inviting New Hunters into Connection with Land, Wildlife, and Tradition, continued

Patience, openness, and a willingness to explain the "why" behind our actions are what transform newcomers into lifelong hunters and stewards of the land that care about issues surrounding open space and working land.

How You Can Help

This is where you, the reader, come in. Every person has a role to play in lowering barriers and welcoming others into the tradition:

- **Landowners** can open their gates by hosting mentored hunts through the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) or the Texas Wildlife Association (TWA). Your land becomes the classroom where new hunters learn to belong to the land community.
- **Hunters with Skills** can train to be a Huntmaster through TPWD, volunteer with TWA's Hunting Heritage Program, or assist with Texas A&M AgriLife's field-to-table classes. Connecting with new hunters through sharing your passion and knowledge will have a large impact.
- **New and Curious Adults** can take part in programs designed specifically for them, gaining safe, supportive entry points into the tradition. Many hunts now include cooking demonstrations and food-focused components that highlight how wild game connects to daily life.

When we lower barriers and create pathways for connection, we invite more Texans to join us in safeguarding the land, the wildlife, and the hunting heritage that define who we are. Learn more about how you can take part through Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Wildlife Association, and AgriLife Extension.

Texas Youth Hunting Program
https://tyhp.org/
Texas Mentored Hunt Workshops
https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/public/mentored_hunting_workshops/
Texas Wildlife Association
https://www.texas-wildlife.org/

Olivia Kost currently serves as the TPWD biologist for Bexar, Comal, and Guadalupe counties, having transitioned to the San Antonio position in April 2024. She began her career with TPWD in 2018 as the biologist for Brown and Mills counties. Olivia holds a bachelor's degree from Texas A&M University and a master's degree from Texas Tech University. Passionate about landscape-scale conservation, she actively engages with wildlife management associations and cooperatives. Additionally, she enjoys guiding new landowners in her area as they embark on their land stewardship journeys.

Fragrant Sumac: A Native Gem for Texas Wildlife

WRITTEN BY MATTHEW JOHNSON

Fragrant sumac (*Rhus aromatica*), a hardy, deciduous shrub native to Texas and much of the central and western United States, is an invaluable plant for supporting native wildlife. Growing in a variety of soil types and tolerating both drought and heat, this resilient plant is commonly found in prairies, woodlands, and rocky hillsides. With its trifoliate leaves, small yellow flowers in early spring, and red-orange fruit in late summer and fall, fragrant sumac offers year-round value to the ecosystem.

Fragrant sumac. Photo©TAMU Agrilife https://rangeplants.tamu.edu/plant/skunkbush-sumac-fragrant-sumac/

For native Texas wildlife, fragrant sumac is more than just a landscape element—it's a vital resource. Its fruits, technically known as drupes, are rich in carbohydrates and are eaten by a wide variety of birds and mammals, including wild turkeys, quail, and small rodents. The dense branching structure of the shrub also provides essential cover and nesting habitat, helping protect these animals from predators and extreme weather.

Among its most notable wildlife beneficiaries is the white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). Fragrant sumac is highly palatable to deer, especially in the fall and winter months when other forage becomes scarce. The leaves and twigs are browsed heavily, providing both nutrition and a reliable food source during tough seasonal transitions. Its browse quality is considered good to excellent, making it a favored component in deer habitat restoration and range improvement efforts.

Beyond its direct nutritional value, fragrant sumac contributes to overall habitat quality. Its ability to stabilize soil and reduce erosion makes it an ideal species for revegetation projects in disturbed areas. This, in turn, supports healthier plant communities, which form the foundation of a robust and diverse wildlife ecosystem. As native vegetation is lost to urban development and invasive species, the role of resilient natives such as fragrant sumac becomes even more critical.

Fragrant sumac leaves and fruits. Photo©TAMU Agrilife

Fragrant sumac can sometimes be confused with poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), but can be distinguished by looking at leaves and general characteristics of the plants themselves. For starters, poison ivy is a woody vine with a middle leaflet that has a long stem, whereas fragrant sumac is a shrub with a middle leaflet attached at the same point as side leaflets.

Continued on page 12

Fragrant sumac: A Native Gem for Texas Wildlife, continued

Poison ivy also has a fruit with a waxy berry that is white when ripe, whereas fragrant sumac has fruit that is fuzzy and red when ripe.

For landowners and wildlife managers interested in supporting native species, incorporating fragrant sumac into rangeland or habitat restoration plans offers a low-maintenance, ecologically significant choice. Its benefits extend from providing browse and shelter to improving soil health and biodiversity, making it a cornerstone plant in any Texas wildlife management strategy.

Top: Poison ivy leaf. Bottom: Fragrant sumac. Photos©TPWD

References

Everitt, J.H., Drawe, D.L., & Lonard, R.I. (1999). Trees, Shrubs, and Cacti of South Texas. Texas Tech University Press.

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension. (n.d.). Skunkbush Sumac. https://rangeplants.tamu.edu/plant/skunkbush-sumac/

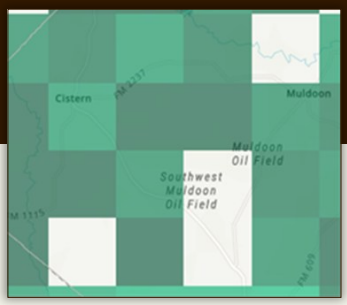
USDA NRCS. (2006). Plant Guide: Rhus aromatica. https://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs_rhar4.pdf

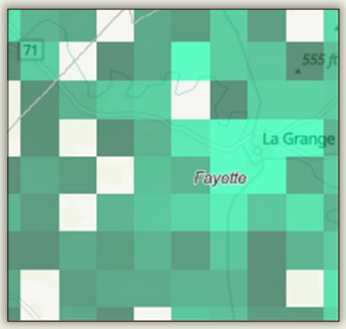
Fulbright, T.E., & Ortega-Santos, J.A. (2013). White-tailed Deer Habitat: Ecology and Management on Rangelands. Texas A&M University Press.

Matthew Johnson is a district biologist for Austin and Fort Bend Counties. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in 2021 from Texas State University and shortly after obtained his Associate Wildlife Biologist Certification through the Wildlife Society. Matthew enjoys working with private landowners to fulfill their habitat management goals, especially when it comes to gamebird and non-gamebird habitat management. While his primary focus is on working with game species, Matthew has a passion for working with non-game and species of conservation need as well as education/outreach efforts.

Chronic Wasting Disease Dashboard

WRITTEN BY MARK LANGE

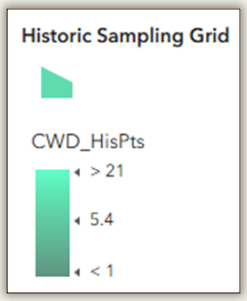




Images from CWD dashboard

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) was first documented in Texas in 2012, in a West Texas mule deer. Three years later in 2015, the first CWD confirmation in whitetail occurred in a Medina County breeding facility. Prior to these detections, and since, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) wildlife biologists have dedicated much effort and resources into early detection to minimize the spread of CWD in Texas.

Knowing where CWD is and is not found is critical to help manage our native deer population. Currently, the most reliable method of detection has been through tissue sampling of hunter harvested deer and roadkill. For hunter harvested deer, biologists rely on the cooperation of Texans who are passionate about the health of the Texas deer herd. If you are one of these passionate Texans and previously provided your harvested deer for testing, we applaud your cooperation and ask that you keep providing your harvest for tissue testing in the future.



One of the most common questions staff hear from hunters during the sample collection process is “do we have it here”. While we try to relay the most current CWD news through newsletters, various public meetings, emails, and workshops, much of the public is unaware of current testing efforts and locations of positive deer. In an effort to have that information available at the click of a mouse, TPWD has created a CWD dashboard for all Texans to monitor CWD testing efforts and positive locations.

When viewing the dashboard, the state of Texas is broken into numerous grids each being approximately 2.6 miles squared and covering just over 4,300 acres. Each grid shows the intensity of CWD testing over several years as well as a total number of tests. While we hope you continue to provide samples as in the past, we would also like for the public to see where we are lacking samples. If you harvest a deer in one of these priority areas, or grids, we would like to hear from you. Call your local biologist and if possible, keep the deer’s head on ice or cool until you can schedule a time for tissue collection.

When viewing the historical sampling density and positive sampling location section of the CWD dashboard, light green areas are areas that have had higher numbers of deer tested in the past while white areas are where no deer have been tested. While testing from all areas is important, dark green or white areas would be considered higher priority areas.

We are hopeful this tool will keep the most current CWD information available to all interested Texans. The ultimate goal is to minimize the spread of the disease in Texas so we ensure all Texans have the ability to enjoy and pursue deer in Texas for many generations to come.

To access the dashboard click the link below:

CWD Map Viewers and Occurrence Metrics

For more information on CWD click the link below:

Chronic Wasting Disease - Diseases - Wildlife - TPWD

Mark Lange was the wildlife biologist for Colorado/Austin Counties where he started in June 2012 and is now the District 9 Senior Biologist. He grew up in the Texas panhandle in the small town of Nazareth. He attended West Texas A&M University where he completed his Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology/ Wildlife Science in 2006 and his Masters of Science Degree in Biology in 2011. Mark offices out of the Columbus field office. Mark has diverse interests and enjoys working with landowners towards their management goals.

Post Oak Savannah Prescribed Burn Association

WRITTEN BY CALAN COLEMAN

Prescribed fire boosts grassland productivity, improves forage quality, reduces woody encroachment, manages parasite loads, and mitigates wildfire risks. Fire is an essential tool for resilient land management. A successful burn takes more than just lighting a match- it requires preparation, experience, and the right tools.

That's where a Prescribed Burn Association (PBA) can help. A PBA is a nonprofit group of private landowners pooling equipment, hands-on support, and expertise to safely implement prescribed fire. Essentially, neighbors helping neighbors use fire as a land management tool.

The **Post Oak Savannah PBA** was established in August of 2023 with the express purpose of helping landowners, producers and interested parties plan and execute prescribed burns while promoting fire education and outreach in Caldwell, **Gonzales**, **Guadalupe**, and **Wilson** Counties.

Pre-burn briefing and breakout. Photo©Connie Clark. POS PBA Treasurer

What exactly does a PBA have to offer to an individual that is interested in getting some fire on their property?

Not only does the Post Oak Savannah PBA offer members help on burn day by bringing like-minded folks together to help implement fire on each other's property, but it also offers help with the extensive planning that goes into a successful burn day. For landowners who may not have a good understanding of fire implementation, guidance from more experienced members on fire line construction, weather interpretation, choosing a good burn day and other risk mitigation techniques the PBA can be hugely helpful, taking much of the guesswork out of Rx fire.

Before a landowner ever hooks up a disc or mower to start putting in fire lines, the PBA can offer guidance in grazing management and other aspects of site preparation to help a landowner meet their own specific management goals.

The Post Oak Savannah PBA also manages a cache of equipment housed in a "burn trailer" for use by members. Some of the equipment includes drip torches, road signs, a host of hand tools, water pumpers meant to be operated from the back of a UTV and a water transfer pump for refilling water resources in the field. This is a massive cost savings for folks who are not in the business of Rx fire and adds significant value to membership.

POS PBA burn trailer. Photo©Connie Clark. POS PBA Treasurer

For many landowners and producers, fire continues to be employed as an **opportunistic tool**. Every year is predicted to be a good rainfall year, every acre is grazed the same, and the only time to burn is in the winter following heavy rainfall. By incorporating fire as a planned management tool, a landowner can effectively add resilience and maximize the production of their grasslands by increasing forage quality and diversity, reducing vegetation thatch, decreasing woody species encroachment, managing parasite loads and reducing the impacts of wildfire.

Continued on page 15

Post Oak Savannah Prescribed Burn Association, continued

Photos©Connie Clark. POS PBA Treasurer

Helping to set realistic goals for a fire regime on a property is the first step in the planning process. Without an understanding of the resources, timelines, and work involved in meeting a specific habitat goal it will never be more than a plan.

What can we impact as an organization of like-minded landowners?

Beyond the obvious answer, helping each other implement good fire on our property and building partnerships and relationships with neighbors and partner organizations, the ecological and economic impacts of more fire understanding by the public is huge.

A PBA is an important tool in the public perception and education of prescribed fire, wildfire mitigation, and building a fire-aware community.

The POS PBA works to help implement annual Rx fire workshops and training opportunities with more across the whole of the PBA planned. The PBA also sends representatives to Wildlife Management Association meetings to discuss implementing prescribed fire and similar topics.

County Officials

A PBA gives a unified voice to help public officials understand what it is that their constituents are interested in seeing from them. For most county officials and decision-makers, prescribed fire is not at the top of their list of concerns. By offering a unified voice, we can work to impact how burn bans are implemented, how officials view fire culture, and ultimately how the public perceives the use of fire as a land management tool.

Neighbors

Membership and participation in a PBA are a fantastic way for folks to meet folks that have many of the same management goals for their properties and cross- pollinate! Not only does membership allow for the sharing of ideas but helps to build great relationships among neighbors.

Is there anything that the PBA can't do for me?

Yes! The PBA is not able to burn for you. It is important to remember that all participation is voluntary, and all participating members can do is help you to implement fire on your property. There is no contract for service or exchange of funds.

The PBA is not able to absolve the landowner of any responsibility or liability. That is all solely on the landowner. Texas law states that volunteers helping on a Rx fire are absolved of liability unless there is evidence of gross negligence. However, we can help a landowner to minimize exposure to risk by taking all necessary steps to ensure that due diligence is met throughout the process.

For more information, please visit our website at www.pospba.org.

If you are not located within the four-county area of the Post Oak Savannah PBA, you can find which PBA may service your area and most anything else prescribed fire related at the Prescribed Burn Alliance of Texas website at www.pbatexas.org.

Calan Coleman has a Bachelor of Science in range and wildlife management and a minor in biology from Texas A&M- Kingsville. He started his career with The Nature Conservancy in 2016 at the Clive Runnel's Mad Island Marsh Preserve near Collegeport, Texas as a preserve technician. He is now officed in Victoria as the Texas Coastal Grasslands Steward, working with private landowners and partner organizations to facilitate Rx fire and implement conservation work in their land management.

2025 White-tailed Deer Population Survey Results

WRITTEN BY MARK LANGE

Every summer, Wildlife Management Association (WMA) members and Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) staff work together on collecting deer survey data. This effort starts late in July and continues through August. Results of this effort provide the data needed to issue the Managed Land for Deer (MLD) permits every year for all WMA members. If you are one of those members who volunteer their time to assist with spotlight surveys, we want to say thank you very much, and we also appreciate all member contributions to the incidental observation daylight counts! A complete summary of the 2025 results is included in the following pages, with a few key points listed below.

- During the summer of 2025 collection period, a minimum of 63 spotlight routes were sampled, some ran 2-3 times each.
- This resulted in 2,238 miles or spotlight surveys with just under 172,000 acres being sampled.
- Incidental observations collected by WMA members resulted in just over 250,000 deer seen, which helps determine the buck:doe ratio and fawn survival each year.
- Spotlight surveys are most important when analyzed across the long term and as trend data. While the survey gives us an idea of deer densities, it is obviously not 100% accurate (we can't even count human populations accurately). Individual line data for one year should always be viewed in the context of the 'big picture' and in conjunction with several years of data.
- While some areas received more than others, this past summer was an above-average year for rainfall, so vegetation was taller than in years past. Most lines do not collect 'visibility' readings annually.
- Deer densities vary by habitat suitability. It is meaningless to compare your part of the county with other areas in hopes of obtaining higher densities. Different areas across the landscape have different carrying capacities, and we manage to keep populations within that capacity.
- Fawn survival statewide will average between 35%-45% annually, depending on range conditions. This year, the region showed an average of 37% compared to 40% in 2024 and 34% in 2023.

Your participation in helping your WMA collect this data is again greatly appreciated. Working together as a team is the only way to effectively manage the deer herd on a landscape level in small-acreage counties. Having a good understanding of densities and ratios of the herd is obviously the first step in properly managing it, and thanks to members who have contributed for some now many years, we have a solid data set to help make those important management decisions.

Mark Lange was the wildlife biologist for Colorado/Austin Counties where he started in June 2012 and is now the District 9 Senior Biologist. He grew up in the Texas panhandle in the small town of Nazareth. He attended West Texas A&M University where he completed his Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology/Wildlife Science in 2006 and his Masters of Science Degree in Biology in 2011. Mark offices out of the Columbus field office. Mark has diverse interests and enjoys working with landowners towards their management goals.

Continued on page 17

2025 White-tailed Deer Population Survey Results, continued

2025

Wildlife Management Association or TPWD Deer Management Unit Survey	County	Spotlight Surveys				Incidental Observations		
		Miles of Survey	Acres of Visibility	# Deer Seen	Acres Per Deer	# Deer Identified	Doe per Buck	Fawn Survival
Austin County WMA /Bellville	Austin	16.0	1,224	44	28	6,883	2.2	29%
Austin County WMA (Welcome)	Austin	23.0	1,102	150	7			
Austin County WMA (Cat Spring)	Austin	10.4	402	67	6			
Pin Oak Creek WMA	Bastrop	45.0	2,250	103	21	974	3.8	35%
Red Rock WMA	Bastrop	61.2	1,983	365	5	2,755	1.8	25%
Clear Fork Creek WMA	Caldwell	33.0	2,373	190	12	5,047	1.7	29%
Tri-Community WMA	Caldwell	45.0	4,155	617	7	4,709	2.0	34%
Harvey Creek WMA	Colorado	24.6	1,960	199	10	5,904	1.9	42%
Sandy Creek WMA	Colorado	28.4	1,550	178	9	9,866	2.3	36%
Central WMA	Colorado	29.0	1,762	178	10	2,157	2.1	39%
Colorado River WMA	Colorado	13.6	1,174	202	6	3,880	2.1	31%
North East WMA	Colorado	24.2	1,128	129	9	8,143	2.4	34%
Oakridge WMA	Colorado	25.2	1,132	416	3	6,051	1.8	50%
Central DeWitt WMA-	DeWitt	42.0	2,736	230	12	2,288	2.0	40%
Central DeWitt-WMA Friar	DeWitt	40.5	2,688	121	22	7,208	1.7	34%
Central DeWitt- WMA Sandies Clear Creek	DeWitt	24.3	2,076	436	5	2,913	2.7	35%
Central DeWitt WMA- Edgar Stratton	DeWitt	50.4	2,787	325	9	7,542	2.8	34%
Meyersville WMA	DeWitt	41.4	2,946	284	10	7,044	2.4	36%
Western DeWitt WMA- Howard Kulawik	DeWitt	**	**	**	**	2,629	1.7	54%
Western DeWitt WMA - Nordheim	DeWitt	37.5	2,178	154	10	4,992	2.2	31%
Western DeWitt WMA - Cotton Patch	DeWitt	39.9	4,824	327	15	2,264	2.0	44%
Western DeWitt-Kubala	DeWitt	**	**	**	**	760	1.4	32%
Western DeWitt WMA - Garfield	DeWitt	**	**	**	**	1,389	1.4	48%
Buckners Creek	Fayette	86.1	7,707	322	22	5,916	2.1	36%
Colorado River	Fayette	**	**	**	**	4,001	2.5	50%
Cummins Creek	Fayette	25.8	2,770	196	14	1,396	3.7	32%
East Navidad	Fayette	45.0	4,848	293	17	2,427	2.1	25%

Continued on page 18

2025 White-tailed Deer Population Survey Results, continued

2025

Wildlife Management Association or TPWD Deer Management Unit Survey	County	Spotlight Surveys				Incidental Observations		
		Miles of Survey	Acres of Visibility	# Deer Seen	Acres Per Deer	# Deer Identified	Doe per Buck	Fawn Survival
North Central Fayette	Fayette	15.0	1,530	162	9	2,218	1.6	32%
Rabbs Creek	Fayette	68.4	6,573	784	8	4,186	2.6	47%
West Navidad	Fayette	**	**	**	**	1,262	2.0	29%
Thompsons Bottom WMA	Fort Bend	67.5	4,233	706	6	627	1.6	42%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills West*	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	637	4.2	36%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills Nockenut	Guadalupe	45.0	1,746	287	6	1,428	2.8	25%
Guadalupe County WMA Darst Field*	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	3,424	2.3	35%
Guadalupe County WMA Blacklands*	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	1,231	2.0	66%
Guadalupe County WMA Marion*	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	255	1.5	45%
Guadalupe County WMA River Bottom*	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	3,563	2.5	29%
Guadalupe County WMA Sandhills East*	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	916	3.2	33%
Sandhills Sawlog Youth Haven*	Guadalupe	*	*	*	*	237	4.9	41%
Goliad WMA-Ander	Goliad	23.1	1,845	221	8	4,690	2.6	33%
Goliad WMA-Bego	Goliad	41.1	3,270	381	8	9,929	3.1	29%
Goliad WMA-Berclair/Riverdale	Goliad	31.5	1,398	147	10	2,801	2.5	32%
Goliad WMA-Cabeza	Goliad	15.3	1,302	204	6	2,697	2.2	34%
Goliad WMA-NorthCentral	Goliad	36.3	2,901	249	12	13,347	2.4	29%
Goliad WMA-San Antonio River	Goliad	42.0	2,832	348	8	3,746	2.0	27%
Hamon River Bottom	Gonzales	18.6	1,266	72	18	1,433	2.9	25%
Belmont	Gonzales	10.8	828	95	9	825	2.0	23%
Salt Flat	Gonzales	40.2	2,277	146	16	2,253	1.6	26%
Northeast Gonzales	Gonzales	38.1	3,384	110	31	1,829	2.2	23%
San Marcos*	Gonzales	*	*	122	*	862	2.8	30%
Sandies Creek	Gonzales	27.0	1,620	128	13	420	1.6	16%
JCWMA Sandy Creek	Jackson	35.0	4,840	363	13	5,956	2.2	37%

Continued on page 19

2025 White-tailed Deer Population Survey Results, continued

2025

Wildlife Management Association or TPWD Deer Management Unit Survey	County	Spotlight Surveys				Incidental Observations		
		Miles of Survey	Acres of Visibility	# Deer Seen	Acres Per Deer	# Deer Identified	Doe per Buck	Fawn Survival
JCWMA Lavaca River	Jackson	25.0	3,018	246	12	3,777	2.4	37%
KCWMA-East	Karnes	56.1	5,226	407	13	407	2.5	31%
KCWMA-West	Karnes	45.9	2,988	75	40	75	2.1	38%
LCWMA West Lavaca	Lavaca	47.0	4,334	277	16	4,933	2.6	42%
LCWMA Honey Creek	Lavaca	24.0	1,802	93	19	3,301	2.4	38%
LCWMA West Sandy Creek	Lavaca	41.0	1,931	224	9	3,824	2.6	46%
LCWMA Vienna	Lavaca	28.0	1,340	168	8	8,610	1.7	46%
LCWMA South Central	Lavaca	30.0	2,606	122	21	10,290	1.8	47%
Blue Branch WMA	Lee	31.8	2,406	145	17	355	1.9	43%
East Yegua WMA	Lee	47.7	3,819	361	11	1,745	2.4	27%
South Lee WMA	Lee	25.0	2,274	198	12	1,386	1.5	64%
Two Creeks WMA	Lee	23.4	1,362	64	21	1,677	2.9	43%
West Yegua WMA	Lee	32.4	3,132	215	15	4,358	2.5	45%
Guadalupe River North WMA	Victoria	36.0	2,310	376	6	14,492	2.0	39%
Southwest Victoria WMA	Victoria	23.0	2,094	251	8	4,469	2.3	44%
Victoria Prairie WMA	Victoria	56.2	6,342	244	26	1,624	3.3	43%
Post Oak WMA	Washington	15.7	1,194	54	22	656	6.2	32%
Mount Vernon WMA	Washington	14.9	1,191	53	23	268	8.4	48%
Greenvine DMU	Washington	16.8	859	88	10	858	4.6	48%
Rocky DMU	Washington	14.8	805	112	7	4,194	2.0	38%
Sun Oil WMA	Washington	12.2	493	112	4	1,793	4.0	35%
Sandtown WMA	Washington	13.3	736	46	16	241	9.2	28%
New Years Creek WMA	Washington	13.7	1,194	72	17	2,377	5.5	27%
Lost Prong WMA	Wharton	123.0	12,879	608	21	3,632	3.6	52%
Egypt WMA	Wharton	18.0	1,546	193	8	1,510	1.8	52%
WCWMA-Region 1	Wilson	31.8	2,457	45	55	45	2.1	40%
WCWMA-Region 2	Wilson	27.9	2,268	34	67	34	2.1	37%
WCWMA-Region 3	Wilson	19.4	692	287	2	242	2.7	41%

**Guadalupe and Gonzales Counties - Due to urbanization some of the WMA lines are no longer conducive due to housing developments and heavy traffic. Alternative methods by members are used to estimate population densities.*

***Spotlight route not run.*

Safeguarding Land and Legacy: How Regional Partnerships Support Conservation and Land Stewardship

WRITTEN BY KATIE SIERRA

James Blackwell's 304-acre property in Matagorda County offers a pristine glimpse into the ecological diversity of Texas's Gulf Coast. The land features 175 acres of mature woodlands, expansive coastal prairie, and two water impoundments built on historic rice fields—providing vital habitat for a wide variety of native plants and wildlife. For James and his family, the ranch is more than a place for recreation and family connection; it is a landscape they are deeply committed to stewarding.

"I have two sons and five grandchildren, and they all love to hunt and fish here," James shares. But beyond personal enjoyment, he and his wife recognized the property's ecological importance and sought to ensure its protection and resilience for future generations. This commitment led them to partner with the Coastal Prairie Conservancy (CPC) to place a conservation easement on the land.

A Trusted Partner in Land Protection

Based in Houston, the Coastal Prairie Conservancy is a nationally accredited nonprofit land trust that has worked since 1992 to conserve the vanishing coastal prairie region. CPC protects more than 33,600 acres of habitat across nine counties in southeast Texas through land ownership and voluntary conservation agreements with private landowners.

These conservation easements are voluntary, legally binding agreements between a landowner and a qualified land trust that limit certain types of development to preserve natural or agricultural values. Each agreement is permanent but flexible, tailored to meet the landowner's goals while ensuring conservation forever. The land remains privately owned and can still be used for farming, grazing, hunting, and recreation.

Taking the First Step: Inspired by a Neighbor

James was inspired to explore a conservation easement after hearing about his neighbor's experience with a CPC-held easement on adjacent land. "We had previously done a conservation easement on a different property in Uvalde County, so we were familiar with the concept," he explains. "When my neighbor told us about his easement, it sparked our interest in protecting this unique coastal prairie."

Blackwell Ranch. Photo©James Blackwell

Making Conservation Possible: A Collaborative and Flexible Effort

The Blackwells' easement was made possible through private donations, their own contribution, and federal support from the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). James values the flexibility the easement provides for ongoing land management, allowing decisions to be made in real time—such as flooding wetland areas for waterfowl habitat or planting native mixes based on weather and conditions.

Continued on page 21

Safeguarding Land and Legacy: How Regional Partnerships Support Conservation and Land Stewardship, continued

"That control gives me peace of mind," he says. "Conservation doesn't mean losing the ability to care for your land your way. It means managing it responsibly to protect habitat and wildlife."

Sharing Knowledge and Encouraging Others

James is a strong advocate for conservation easements and welcomes conversations with other landowners. "I would be happy to talk with anyone interested in learning more," he says. "The process requires patience and persistence, but it's incredibly rewarding to know you're protecting land and wildlife for the future."

The Blackwell family hunting on their ranch. Photo©James Blackwell

Looking Ahead: Celebrating Nature and Conservation Success

Asked about his favorite time on the property, James doesn't hesitate: "January is the most exciting time, when the migratory birds arrive." This season highlights the profound rewards of conservation—thousands of pintails, cranes, and other species making their way to a restored refuge, thanks to one family's commitment and the power of partnership.

Interested in Learning More?

If you're interested in learning more or would like to speak with someone from the Coastal Prairie Conservancy—or be put in contact with James Blackwell—please reach out at info@coastalprairieconservancy.org or call 713-523-6135. We'd be happy to connect and explore how we can support your conservation goals.

Sandhill cranes at Blackwell Ranch. Photo©James Blackwell

Katie Sierra is the Development and Communications Associate at the Coastal Prairie Conservancy, where she leads communications and supports fundraising to advance the organization's mission. She is passionate about telling compelling conservation stories that connect people to the land and inspire lasting support for the conservation of wide-open spaces in Southeast Texas.

Upcoming Events

OCTOBER

22-23 Buck Fever
Seguin Events Center
950 S. Austin St. Seguin, Texas
Begins at 5:30p.m.
buckfeverseguintx@gmail.com
https://buckfever.org/

24 Guadalupe County Landowner Workshop-TWA
Irma Lewis Outdoor Learning Center
1865 E U.S. Hwy 90, Seguin, TX 78155
Begins at 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
Contact Megan Pineda at
mpineda@texas-wildlife.org

25 Cummins Creek WMA Fall Meeting
509 FM 389 Harmonie Hall, Shelby TX
Begins at 5:00 p.m.
Contact Cary Halamicek at 979-249-7523

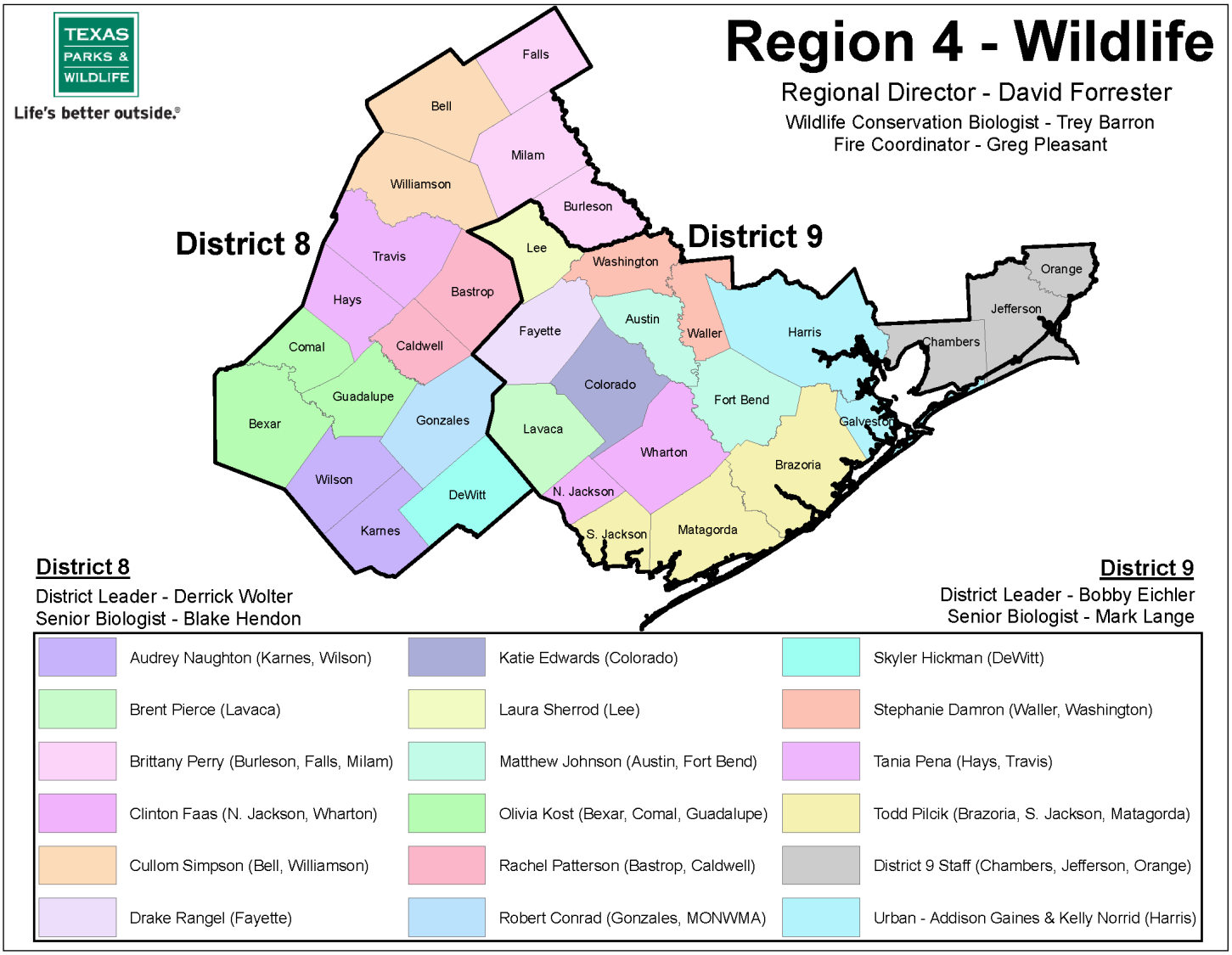
JANUARY

23 Washington County Wildlife Society Semi-Annual Banquet
Washington County Expo Event Center
1305 E. Blue Bell Rd., Brenham, TX 77833
Begins at 5:00 p.m.
Contact Stephanie Damron at 979-277-6297

Youth shooting event hosted on October 16, 2025 at the M.O. Neasloney Wildlife Management Area. Photos©Clinton Faas, TPWD

Our Wildlife Biologists

Click on the map for your biologists contact information



Click on the map for your biologists contact information

Executive Director
David Yoskowitz, Ph.D

Editors
David Forrester
Bobby Eichler
Mark Lange
Stephanie Damron

TEXAS PARKS & WILDLIFE
Life's better outside.®

COMMISSION
Paul L. Foster-Chairman
El Paso
Oliver J. Bell, Vice-Chairman
Cleveland
Wm. Leslie Doggett-Houston
Anna B. Galo-Laredo
John A. McCall, Jr., O.D.-Grapeland
Robert L. "Bobby" Patton, Jr.-
Fort Worth
Travis B. "Blake" Rowling-Dallas
Dick Scott-Wimberley
Timothy "Tim" Timmerman-Austin
Lee M. Bass, Chairman-Emeritus
Fort Worth
T. Dan Friedkin, Chairman-Emeritus
Houston

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT MISSION STATEMENT
"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."

You may view this publication, as well as other newsletters created by the department, through the TPWD website. Please visit www.tpwd.texas.gov/newsletters/ for more information.

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:

www.tpwd.texas.gov

PWD LF W7000-2068 (10/25)