



Region IV Wildlifer

TEXAS
PARKS &
WILDLIFE

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

April 2026



District 8 Field Notes

BY DERRICK WOLTER

I hope this newsletter finds you safely indoors as clouds above provide beneficial spring rain across your land. Like last year, the transition from winter to spring was dry. However, rainfall has picked up markedly across the district more recently. Let's hope we are blessed with more of it as we head further into the growing season. To quote a country song, "rain is a good thing." I think it's even better after a prairie planting or prescribed fire.

Over the past few months, biologists have implemented cool-season prescribed fire on both private and public lands, taking advantage of every safe opportunity to restore and improve habitat conditions. Suitable weather conditions are the number one driver of prescribed fires, so getting fire on the ground means flexibility and constant monitoring of forecasts. When it's finally "go time" other activities must be rescheduled by participating staff at short notice.

Fire days can be long and demanding, especially when travel is involved, with staff leaving before daylight, coordinating crews and equipment, and returning late after ensuring each burn unit is secure and objectives are met. Special thanks go out to Greg Pleasant, our Region 4 Fire Coordinator, as well as our other burn bosses and all the staff who put fire on the ground throughout the year.

The district turkey restoration project, which started in 2024 in Bell, Milam, and Williamson Counties, is still going strong. Biologists released 61 Rio Grande turkeys this past winter to supplement prior transplants and young birds produced over the past couple of nesting seasons. I'm optimistic that turkeys in the area experience another good year of environmental conditions and poult production. Landowners in the tri-county area continue to play an important role by regularly reporting turkey observations and sharing game camera photos with local biologists. We appreciate it, so thank you!

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.

Page 4

Houston Toads Return to Bastrop State Park

Page 6

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza: What you Need to Know

Page 8

Expansion of "Doe-Days" In 21 Counties

Page 12

Plant Profile: Texas Redbud

Page 13

The Role of Hunters in Wildlife Conservation

Page 15

BRINGING TEXAS PRAIRIES BACK TO LIFE: Exciting Prairie Restoration News!

Page 17

Texas Migratory Game Bird Seasons and Limits

Page 21

Upcoming Events

Page 22

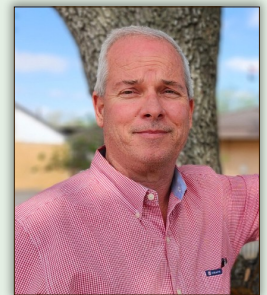
Our Wildlife Biologists

District Field Notes, continued

Turkey season is currently open in counties with a spring season. As a reminder, it is required to report a harvested turkey either online (<https://tpwd.texas.gov/huntwild/hunt/>) or on the Texas Hunt and Fish app within 24 hours of harvest. Reporting of harvested turkeys aids biologists in management decisions for this popular game species.

The past few months in the district have been business as usual, so to speak. Biologists met with cooperators in late winter to conduct browse surveys to guide landowner deer habitat and management decisions. For those interested in how this survey works, staff use a stem count index and evaluate browse plants common to the ecoregion. In addition, district biologists hosted multiple workshops related to woodlands management, the use of prescribed fire, and wildlife tax valuation for maintaining agricultural appraisal.

The 2025-26 Managed Lands Deer Program (MLDP) year ended with the deadline on April 1, and a new year is currently underway. Conservation Option enrollment runs from April 2 through June 15, while the Harvest Option enrollment runs from May 1 through September 1. Please contact your local biologists if you have questions or need assistance. In other big game related news, the number of “doe days” will expand in 21 counties within the Post Oak Savannah ecoregion for white-tailed deer. The special 4-day antlerless only season started in 2019 and will be expanded to 16-days for the 2026-27 hunting season. Additional information is available in this issue’s dedicated article on the subject. Until next time, Texas Forever!



District 9 Field Notes

BY BOBBY EICHLER

District 9 staff have made it through the fall and winter calendar, and duties have changed heavily towards outreach, landowner visits, and training. During the first week of March, staff attended the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, Ranching and Wildlife Expo. During this event, staff oversaw the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) booth and facilitated presentations for attendees. This year, the overall attendance was good and the presentations were top-notch. We have been a partner with the HLSR for almost 20 years now.

Staff have been busy scheduling and visiting landowner meetings mainly centered around either wildlife valuations for property tax purposes or our Managed Lands Deer Program (MLDP) cooperators. Ideally, we visit our MLDP cooperators on a 12-to-18-month schedule. The intent here is to provide timely habitat and population management recommendations as well as continue to build relationships with the landowner.

Across much of our district, the rainfall has been very limited; much like last spring. At the time of writing this article, most of the district received various amounts of rainfall over the last few days. Seems areas received anywhere from a few tenths of an inch to upwards of 6-7 inches in some areas. Hopefully the heavier rainfall areas had enough runoff to help on refilling surface water. Early word is that El Nino is just around the corner, let’s hope so because we do not need another year of severe drought.

Continued on page 3

District Field Notes, continued

As for hunting and regulation changes, the TPWD Commission adopted the 16-day antlerless season across much of the district with the start date being the second Saturday of the general season. Within this newsletter, there is an article specifically on the expanded antlerless season. Additionally, the season for wild turkey hunting was closed in Matagorda and Wharton counties due to population declines in those counties; the past few seasons have had minimal, if any, turkeys harvested. With the closing of the season, hopefully there will be opportunity for restocking areas that may have suitable habitat. Both counties have limited habitat and is mostly concentrated along drainages and a few areas that still have larger blocks of woods. Finding suitable release sites and associated habitat will be the key to restocking possibilities. Lastly, for the dove hunters, the south zone will now start on September 1 like the rest of the state and run through October 25th. The second split will be December 18, 2026, through January 21, 2027.

Until next time, enjoy the spring and early summer.



Photo@TPWD

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.

Houston Toads Return to Bastrop State Park

WRITTEN BY RACHEL PATTERSON

Deep in the Lost Pines and the surrounding Post Oak Savannah, an elusive amphibian may be found swimming in ephemeral pools, hunting for insects in the undergrowth, or burrowed in the sands. First discovered near Houston in 1953, the Houston toad is an endangered species that is currently only found in Bastrop, Lee, Milam, Robertson, Burleson, and Leon Counties. This species is classified as a “habitat specialist,” as it appears to exclusively inhabit oak and pine savannahs and open woodlands with deep sandy soils. The sands are a critical habitat component for Houston toads, as burrowing provides an escape from the worst of the summer heat.



Adult Houston toad. Photo©Chase Fountain, TPWD

Houston toads are small, green-brown toads with speckled underbellies and warty skin. Mature males feature a blue-black throat, which distends when they make a distinctive high-pitched trill to attract females during the breeding season. These toads employ a reproductive strategy known as “explosive breeding,” as their breeding activities occur over just a few nights each year. Typically following a good rain, large groups of males will gather in ephemeral ponds, drainages, and large puddles to chorus together overnight to entice female toads. The larger the chorus, the better their chances of attracting willing mates.

Like other amphibians, Houston toads are particularly vulnerable to predation in the early stages of their life cycle. Eggs are particularly tasty morsels for hungry water-dwellers, so the adult females lay 3,000 – 14,000 eggs per egg strand to maximize the probability of some offspring reaching adulthood. Despite their vulnerability, past reintroduction efforts have shown that releasing Houston toad eggs has a greater chance of success than releasing already hatched tadpoles or juvenile toadlets.

Houston toad eggs in stages 10-12 of development. Photo©Zach Truelock, Amphibian & Reptile Conservancy



The Gosner (1960) Staging System for Anurans

| | | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|----------------------|------------|
| EMBRYOS | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | Fertilization | Gray Crescent | 2-Cell | 4-Cell | 8-Cell |
| | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| | 16-Cell | 32-Cell | Midcleavage | Late Cleavage | Dorsal Lip |
| | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 |
| Yolk Plug | Late Gastrula | Neural Plate | Neural Folds | Elongation, Rotation | |
| 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | | |
| Neural Tube, Gill Plates | Tail Bud Adhesive Gland | Muscular Response Olfactory Pits | Heart Beat Gill Buds | | |
| HATCHLINGS | 20 | 21 | 22 | | |
| | Gill Circulation, Tail Elongation | Cornea Transparent, Mouth Opens | Tail Fins Transparent, Fin Circulation | | |
| | Operculum, Oral Disc, and Pigmentation | | | | |
| 23 | 24 | 25 | | | |
| Labia and Teeth Differentiate Operculum Covers Gill Bases | External Gills Atrophy Operculum Closes on Right | Mouthparts Obvious Spiracle Forms on Left | | | |

Continued on page 5

Houston Toads Return to Bastrop State Park, continued

The Houston Zoo’s assurance colony breeding program, founded in 2007 after only an estimated 250 Houston toads were detected in the wild, initially involved releasing Houston toad tadpoles into suitable ponds in their current habitat range. But following the devastating Bastrop County Complex Fire in 2011, which burned over 32,000 acres, the program switched to releasing Houston toad eggs instead, hoping to rebuild the wild population. Not only is this reintroduction method more effective, but it is also less expensive long-term.

To protect the eggs until they hatch, they are contained within mesh bags for the first 4-6 days of introduction to suitable ponds. First, plastic bags full of eggs are each examined using the Gosner (1960) Staging System for Anurans to mark which stage(s) of egg development they are presently in. The egg bags are then placed within the pond shallows so they can acclimate to the change in water temperature. Additionally, pond water is slowly scooped into the plastic bags a few times to allow the eggs to adjust to the pond’s water chemistry. After several minutes of acclimation, the eggs are carefully poured into the mesh bags to continue development. A few days later, the hatched tadpoles will be released from the mesh bags so they can continue their growth freely in the pond.



*Top: Mesh bags lined up in the shallows of a pond at Bastrop State Park.
Bottom: Bags of Houston toad eggs acclimating to the pond’s water temperature. .
Photos©Rachel Patterson, TPWD*

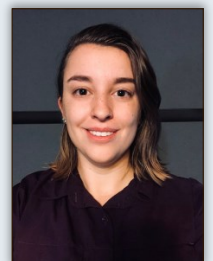


*Photographing and examining the development stage of Houston toad eggs.
Photo©Rachel Patterson, TPWD*

After hatching, the tadpoles will take approximately 60 days to fully metamorphose into juvenile toads. They then disperse into the surrounding environment, hunting nutritious insects to further their body growth. Sexually mature toads will return to available ponds and drainages to begin the breeding cycle anew, typically at 1 to 2 years of age for males and females, respectively. To ensure the program’s success, the released Houston toads will be monitored at every stage of development so adjustments to the reintroduction methods can be made as needed.

Starting in March 2026, the Houston Zoo, Texas Parks & Wildlife Department, and Amphibian & Reptile Conservancy are collaborating to reintroduce Houston toads to Bastrop State Park. Reintroduction efforts will be carried out over the next five years, releasing 1 million eggs from the Houston Zoo’s assurance colony annually. This will be the first sustained reintroduction effort since the species was extirpated from the park in 2016.

Rachel Patterson is the wildlife biologist for Bastrop and Caldwell counties. She grew up in Conroe and graduated from Texas A&M University in 2022 with a B.S. in Wildlife & Fisheries Sciences. Following graduation, she interned with TPWD at the J. D. Murphree Wildlife Management Area, then worked two other seasonal positions with the East Foundation and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources before accepting her current position in August 2023. Rachel enjoys helping landowners manage habitat for a variety of native wildlife, and has a passion for rare, threatened, and endangered species conservation .



Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza: What you Need to Know

WRITTEN BY TANIA PENA

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) is an infectious disease caused by influenza A viruses that can significantly impact both wild and domestic animal populations. These viruses exist in many different strains with variations of severity and are generally categorized into two groups: low pathogenic influenza (LPAI) and highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI). LPAI generally produces mild symptoms and is commonly found in wild migratory birds. In contrast, HPAI spreads quickly among birds and is associated with high mortality rates. Wild migratory waterfowl and other aquatic birds act as the primary natural carriers of the virus, particularly when they gather in large groups at seasonal wintering locations.

Species Affected

The species most vulnerable to HPAI infection include waterfowl, shorebirds, raptors, and scavenging species. Among these, ducks, geese, gulls, wading and shorebirds, hawks, eagles, and vultures are at the highest risk. Although occasional cases have been identified in land fowl such as turkeys and pheasants, and songbirds, these species have experienced far lower levels of illness and death compared with other bird groups. In addition to birds, several mammal species are particularly susceptible to infection with HPAI, including skunks, foxes, raccoons, bobcats, mountain lions, and black bears. Domestic animals, such as dairy cows and poultry, can also be significantly affected by HPAI outbreaks. Currently, the risk of avian influenza spreading from infected animals to humans is considered low. However, individuals should still follow basic safety precautions if they must come into contact with wild animals.

Transmission and Symptoms

Common signs of HPAI include lethargy, difficulty walking or maintaining balance, abnormal twisting of the neck, trembling, seizures, sneezing, coughing, lack of fear of people, and sudden death. HPAI spreads among birds through respiratory droplets and secretions, contact with fecal matter, and exposure to infected carcasses. Some birds, however, may carry the virus without appearing sick. Additionally, avian influenza viruses may persist in the

environment for extended periods, particularly in colder temperatures, which can also lead to indirect transmission.

Waterfowl are recognized as the traditional hosts of avian influenza viruses and can travel long distances, which contributes to the spread of the disease. Shorebirds frequently inhabit the same environment as waterfowl, increasing their likelihood of exposure. In birds of prey, bird scavengers, and mammals, the primary route of infection is believed to be the consumption of carcasses from infected animals.



Turkey vulture (bottom) and black vulture (top), two species at highest risk for Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). Photo©Dawn Beattie

Continued on page 7

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza: What You Need to Know, continued

Prevention

The most important precaution for the public is to avoid handling sick or dead wildlife and not to consume animals found dead in the wild. These actions help reduce the risk of human exposure and limit the spread of HPAI in the environment. People should also minimize unnecessary interactions with wild birds. This includes avoiding activities that cause birds—particularly waterfowl—to gather in large numbers, such as feeding them in parks or other public areas. Although passerines, or songbirds, are generally considered low risk for HPAI, bird feeders and bird baths can still encourage birds to congregate and potentially transmit diseases. For this reason, it is recommended that feeders and baths be temporarily removed or disinfected regularly by cleaning them with a 10% bleach solution at least once every two weeks. Anyone who observes potentially infected wildlife should report their concerns to their local wildlife biologist.



Parks with water features, like the one above, where waterfowl species congregate can be hotspots for HPAI. Photo©Michael Salazar

Hunters who pursue game birds should also take appropriate precautions. These include disposing of carcasses properly, wearing gloves while handling or processing birds, avoiding birds that appear sick, disinfecting equipment between animals, and ensuring that all harvested meat is cooked thoroughly to safe temperatures. Poultry owners should keep domestic birds separated from wild birds, especially waterfowl, to reduce disease risk. Avoid visiting other poultry facilities, and if travel is necessary, shower and change into clean clothing and footwear beforehand. Early detection is critical so birds should be monitored regularly for signs such as nasal discharge, quiet behavior, reduced feed and water intake, decreased egg production, and increased or unusual deaths. If many birds in your flock appear sick or experience increased mortality, contact your local veterinarian.

Additional Resources and References:

- [Center for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#)
- [Texas Animal Health Commission- Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza](#)
- [United States Department of Agriculture - Avian Influenza](#)
- [Hunters - Protect Your Poultry and Pet Birds](#)
- [Manage Wildlife to Prevent Avian Influenza](#)
- [Avian Influenza - American Veterinary Medical Association](#)

Tania is currently serving as the TPWD Wildlife Biologist for Hays and Travis counties. She earned a B.S. in Wildlife Biology and an M.S. in Wildlife Ecology from Texas State University. Although a native to north Texas, she now calls the Hill Country her home. Tania is deeply committed to helping local landowners achieve their land management goals to support native wildlife, particularly birds, as she is an avid birding enthusiast and a dedicated advocate for bird conservation.



Expansion of “Doe-Days” In 21 Counties

WRITTEN BY BOBBY EICHLER

On March 26, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission adopted a proposal to expand “Doe-Days” across twenty-one counties from the current 4 days that occur over Thanksgiving, to a 16-day season. The antlerless season in these counties will now start the second Saturday of general season and close the Sunday immediately following Thanksgiving. The current bag limit of 2 antlerless deer, as well as mandatory antlerless harvest reporting will remain in place. The counties involved include the entire counties of Austin, Bastrop, Caldwell, Colorado, DeWitt, Fayette, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Karnes, Lavaca, Lee, Waller, Washington and Wilson. Additionally, areas east of IH-35 in Comal, Hays, and Travis Counties and areas north of US Highway 59 in Goliad, Jackson, Victoria, and Wharton Counties (*Figure 1*).

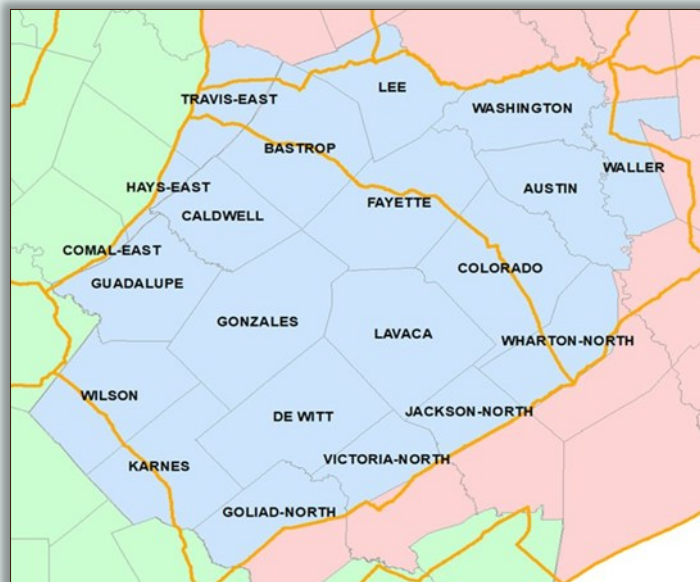


Figure 1: Counties in blue indicate the counties expanding to 16 antlerless days.

Scoping meetings were held in sixteen of the twenty-one counties by Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) biologists this past December and January. Survey results from these meetings showed approval for the expansion at just over 75%. At the January TPWD Commission meeting the Commission was briefed on the results and the decision was made to publish the proposed rules in the Texas Register for public comment. During the public comment period, 533 comments were recorded, with 501 in favor of expanding to 16 doe days (94%). Interestingly, some of the commenters in disagreement with the proposal stated that 16 days were not long enough.

History of the 4-day antlerless season

The 4-day antlerless season over Thanksgiving was implemented during the 2019-2020 season and this past season marked the seventh season of doe days in these 21 counties. When the season was implemented in 2019, mandatory reporting for antlerless harvest was also implemented. Mandatory reporting is an important management tool that was promoted by landowners and hunters within these counties as a better way to monitor the harvest of antlerless deer. Mandatory reporting is still heavily favored within these counties. During the most recent scoping meetings, 93% of the participants favored continuing mandatory reporting of antlerless harvest.

Continued on page 9

Expansion of “Doe-Days” In 21 Counties, continued

The first two seasons with 4 doe days recorded the highest harvest. Since then, overall harvest has stabilized and is fairly consistent each season. It appears that during years following drought and lower fawn crops, hunters do not harvest as many does, as they’re cognizant of population dips and thus decrease harvest. The same can be said for better habitat years where the population and harvest may increase slightly.

Is there a biological reason to increase the season?

Texas is divided into Deer Management Units (DMU’s), which TPWD uses to estimate deer populations, deer harvest, and to recommend regulations. DMU’s are areas of similar habitat types, deer population characteristics, and land uses, and individual DMU’s can cover several counties across the landscape. DMU’s 11 and 12 encompass most of these 21 counties (Figure 2).

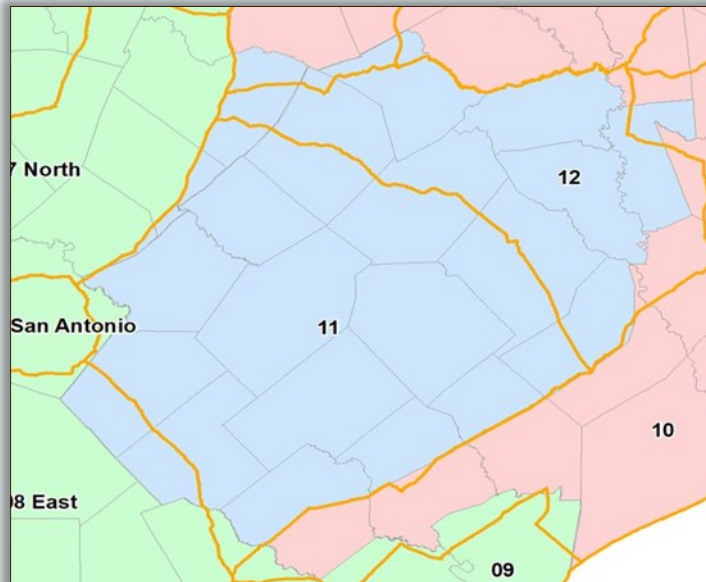


Figure 2: DMU 11 covers most of the western counties and DMU 12 covers the eastern 1/3 of the affected counties.

Since the beginning of doe days in 2019, the deer population has been stable to increasing in the majority of the counties, and the sex ratio has also remained skewed towards does (Chart 1). DMU 11 has ranged between 3.5 to just over 4 does per buck since 2019 and DMU 12 has ranged between 4-6 does per buck during this same period. The skewed sex ratio can mostly be attributed to a skewed harvest. Over the past 6 seasons, doe harvest has accounted for 40-45% of the overall harvest in these 21 counties, meaning that every season more bucks are being harvested than does. Over the course of several seasons, the ratios become more skewed towards doe.

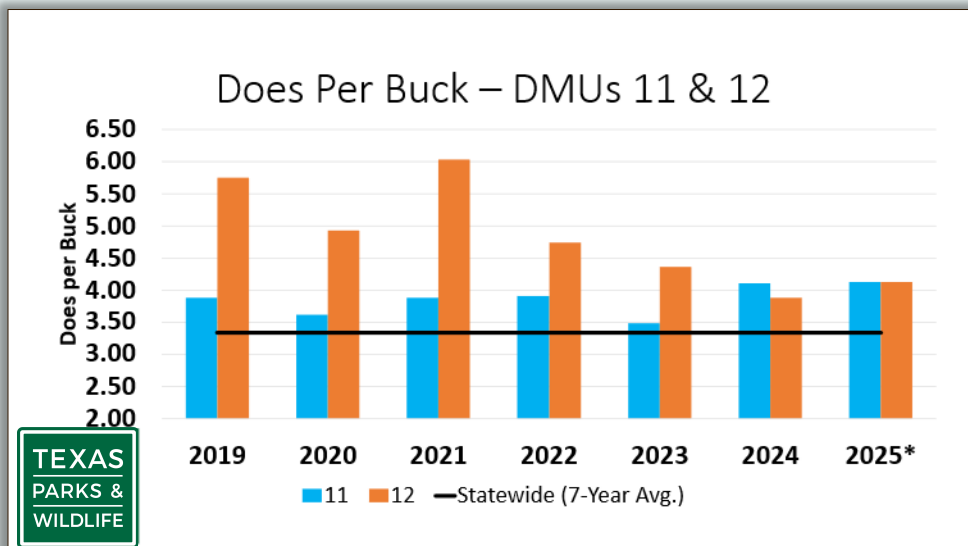


Chart 1: Does per buck for Deer Management Units 11 and 12.

Continued on page 10

Expansion of “Doe-Days” In 21 Counties, continued

As mentioned previously, deer densities have remained stable to slightly increasing since the early 2000’s across DMU’s 11 and 12, as well as much of the rest of the state. Since 2008, DMU 11 deer densities have increased from 18-20 acres per deer to now closer to 15 acres per deer (*Chart 2*). DMU 12 has remained somewhat more stable near 20 acres per deer (*Chart 3*).

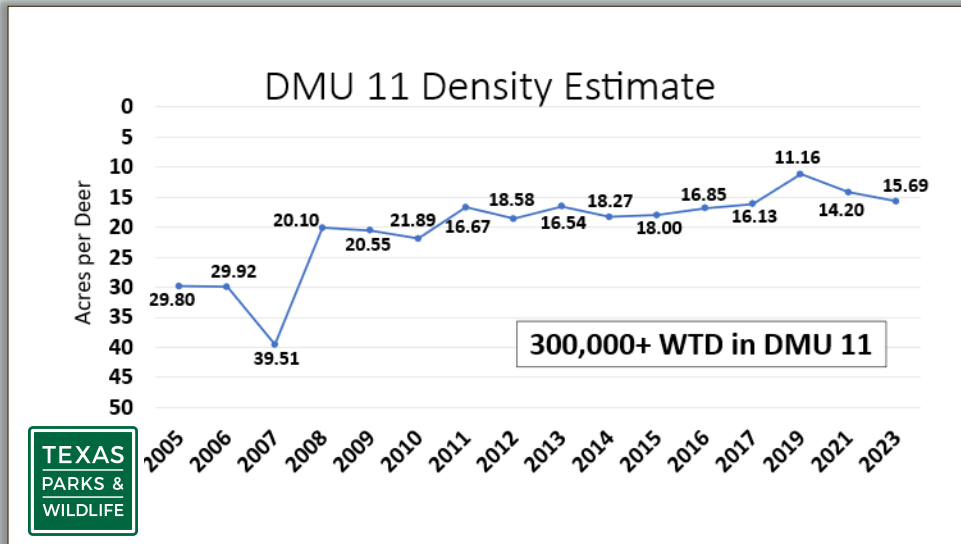


Chart 2: Deer densities within DMU 11 from 2005 – 2023.

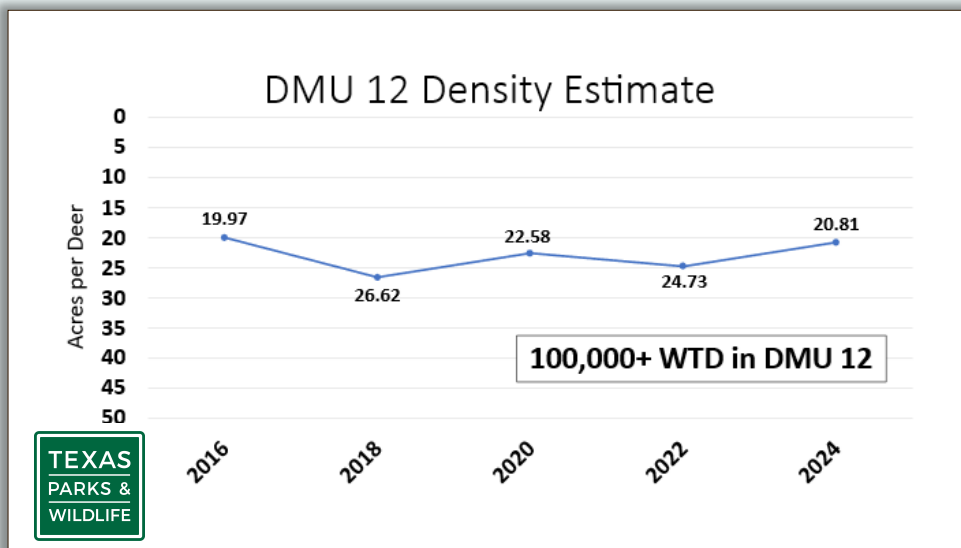


Chart 3: Deer densities within DMU 12 from 2016 – 2024.

Expected benefits of increased antlerless season

Several benefits occur when the sex ratio becomes less skewed. By slightly tightening the sex ratio, more does will be bred during their first estrus cycle, normally October – November for our part of Texas. This will result in more fawns being born during the optimum spring and early-summer habitat conditions. If a doe is not bred during her first estrus cycle, she will enter estrus again 28 days later, and perhaps even again 28 days later. Hunters will often note a “second rut” in which unbred does enter estrus again, but for each cycle that is missed, fawning dates will fall behind 28 days and will occur in less optimal habitat conditions as the summer heat sets in.

Continued on page 11

Expansion of “Doe-Days” In 21 Counties, continued

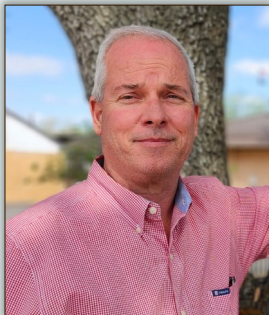
Additionally, because a tighter sex ratio will lead to tighter breeding season, bucks will come out of the breeding season in better nutritional shape and will have lower post-rut mortality. A skewed sex ratio leads to does entering estrus multiple times and results in prolonged rutting behavior in which bucks will lose even more of their body reserves chasing does over an extended time. As a result, bucks will come out of the season in poor body condition and have an increased risk of post-rut mortality. The continued increased levels of testosterone in bucks due to a prolonged rut also suppresses their immune system and makes them more susceptible to infections from



a simple illness or injury that they may otherwise be able to overcome. The increased amount of weight loss in bucks from a prolonged rut will cause them to have to “catch-up” with their body condition later in the spring and can result in lesser antler production than if they came out of the season in better overall health.

From a hunter’s standpoint, more opportunity for venison from the antlerless portion of the population allows hunters to pass on younger bucks that need another year to make a significant jump in antler quality. Hunters that simply wanted to harvest a deer to fill the freezer with venison were previously restricted to a 4-day antlerless season and likely resorted to harvesting a buck later in the season if they could not harvest a doe during the 4-doe days. This expansion of doe days gives hunters more flexibility to make management decisions.

On a closing note, be on the lookout in our October newsletter for an article explaining how bucks and does partition in their habitats and home ranges. One thing we heard quite a bit during scoping meetings were hunters and landowners saying, “I have about 7-8 does on my property and rarely see a buck.” Then the next person who lives ½ mile down the road would say “I have 2-3 bucks on my property and don’t see many does.” Landowners need to be cognizant in fragmented small-acreage landscapes with exactly what you are seeing and determine your harvest on a landscape basis. More to come in future newsletters.



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.

Plant Profile: Texas Redbud (*Cercis canadensis var. texensis*)

WRITTEN BY LAURA SHERROD

One of the earliest signs of spring in Texas is the Texas redbud tree, a native variety of the eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*). Known for its vivid spring display and toughness in heat and drought, this species brings both beauty and ecological value to any landscape.

The Texas redbud typically grows 15 to 20 feet tall, forming a rounded canopy with a graceful branching structure. Unlike its eastern relatives, it has thicker and glossier leaves, an adaptation to the region's harsher climate. These heart-shaped leaves emerge reddish-purple before maturing to deep green, and finally turn a rich yellow in fall.



Texas redbud. Photo@Laura Sherrod, TPWD

One of the more interesting traits of the Texas redbud is its cauliflorous flowering habit. While most trees have blossoms at the end of branches, Texas redbuds have blossoms that emerge directly from the trunk, older branches, and even thick twigs. In early spring, before any leaves appear, the tree suddenly bursts into masses of magenta-pink flowers, each about half an inch wide. This unique pattern covers every surface, making the dark bark appear draped in clusters of color.

This bloom-on-the-bark phenomenon not only enhances the tree's visual impact but also plays a role in its ecology. By producing flowers directly on sturdy wood, the tree makes nectar more accessible to bees and early-season pollinators that prefer perching on solid surfaces rather than delicate twigs. The tree is also a significant host plant and a vital food source for the larvae of Henry's elfin butterfly. Not only does the tree provide food for pollinators and shelter for other wildlife, but indigenous people and early settlers also valued the tree. Young flowers were sometimes added to salads for their tangy flavor, and the wood was used in small crafts.

Unlike its eastern cousin, the Texas variety has evolved to thrive in hotter, drier climates. Texas redbuds thrive naturally on rocky limestone hills, dry streambeds, and well-drained prairies, showing remarkable tolerance for drought, wind, and alkaline soils. It grows best in full sun to partial shade and requires little supplemental water once established. Texas redbuds have become popular in urban landscapes that prefer it for its low maintenance needs.

The Texas redbud perfectly embodies the spirit of its home state—tough, beautiful, and enduring. Whether out in the wild or planted in a garden or on a roadside, it brings great beauty and ecological value to our Texas landscape.



Laura Sherrod is the Wildlife Biologist for Lee county. 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 County.

The Role of Hunters in Wildlife Conservation

WRITTEN BY MARK LANGE

As an employee for the State of Texas, when I ask folks where they think the money comes from to pay our salaries, pay for the trucks we drive, and all the other equipment needed to do our jobs effectively, the answer is typically “I don’t know” or “from the state”. While “from the state” is obviously correct, that money must come from somewhere, and as a taxpayer, I am sure you understand that. However, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is not funded solely by any “general everyday tax”. The TPWD mission statement is “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.” From that statement, it should be understood that hunters, fisherman, as well as many forms of outdoor recreation are who we work directly for and what largely funds TPWD.



Photo©TPWD

Texas is not unique in the way the state wildlife agency is funded. While there may be minor differences in the way other states fund their state wildlife agencies, the bulk of funding for them comes from the people they work directly for, and that is the people who get out and enjoy the outdoors and state resources. Outdoorsmen purchase annual permits/licenses that make up a considerable portion of the funding for wildlife agencies, but they also purchase equipment. The Pittman Robertson Act (hunting equipment) was passed in 1937, and the Dingell-Johnson Act (fishing equipment) was passed in 1950. Those acts allowed a federal excise tax on guns, ammunition, archery equipment, fishing tackle, as well as other outdoor recreation equipment, and a portion of that money is directed back to the states annually from the federal government. These funds are often referred to as ‘PR Funds’ and are allocated to the states by two factors: 1) total land mass of the state (acres), and 2) number of hunting and fishing licenses sold. These funds are matched by the federal government at a 3:1 rate, so for approved PR projects, for every \$1 the state spends, the federal government matches \$3. One kicker though, that the states must spend the money upfront; they are then reimbursed.

It's important to understand that the money generated from all these sources goes into the conservation of wildlife and fisheries. Wildlife populations face ever-increasing challenges. While the amount of land will never increase, the demand for using it is constantly increasing. Land is used for a variety of purposes, but unfortunately, unless the landowner prioritizes wildlife habitat, the use of the land is often not supportive of healthy wildlife habitat. The list of threats to wildlife habitat is lengthy, but the more common issues we see locally are fragmentation, urban development, the spread of invasive plants and animals, and conversion to various other practices (wind and solar farms, large scale agriculture, etc). TPWD staff spend much of their time educating private landowners on how to maximize wildlife benefits on their properties to meet their goals and ultimately add or sustain quality habitat to the landscape. With hunter dollars, many game species that are common now in many areas of the state have rebounded over decades from very low or extirpated populations including but not limited to white-tailed deer, wild turkey, pronghorn, and desert bighorn sheep. While most landowners have an interest in game species and much of TPWD staff time is spent on those species, it is important to understand that sportsman dollars also help restore habitat for non-game species. It is also important to realize that the habitats needed for many game species are the same habitats needed by many non-game species.

Continued on page 14

The Role of Hunters in Wildlife Conservation, continued

The most iconic bird in the United States, the bald eagle, is one of the species that was brought back from near extinction, and that nationwide effort would not be possible without sportsman-backed funding. At the federal level, money from the purchase of waterfowl stamps funds National Wildlife Refuges across the nation that are critical habitats for species, including a couple we see locally which are whooping cranes and Attwater prairie chickens.



Hunting is part of the culture of rural Texas, and our beloved state is known worldwide for its hunting opportunities. With over a million licensed hunters annually, Texas leads the nation in both license sales and Pittman-Robertson funds received. While that sounds good and we are certainly proud to own that title, the population of Texas is growing quickly, but the number of hunting licenses sold isn't.

So, while you yourself may have little to no interest in the take of game species, understand how the investment in wildlife conservation is backed in large part by those who do. As the interest in outdoor recreation shifts with the interest of the public, consider ways you could be a part of the effort in contributing to the cause, even if it doesn't include the harvest of an animal. Visit a state park, take up target shooting, or buy a hunting/fishing license, even if you have no interest in using it. With the access to hunting and fishing opportunities being limited in a state that is largely privately owned and increasingly developed, it will become increasingly important that rural lands provide quality habitat for wildlife species, and the only way to make that possible is to have the backing of sportsmen.



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.

BRINGING TEXAS PRAIRIES BACK TO LIFE

Exciting Prairie Restoration News!

SUBMITTED BY MARVELYN GRANGER, NPAT FAYETTE PRAIRIE CHAPTER



Imagine 3,000 acres of vibrant native prairie, alive with monarch butterflies, buzzing bees, singing songbirds, and vibrant wildflowers, where limited diversity and life once stood. Our **NPAT Fayette Prairie Chapter** is partnering to turn this vision into reality through a powerful collaboration with the **Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD)**!



This team effort is part of the **TPWD Pastures for Upland Birds (PUB) Program**, an ambitious plan to turn former single-species management, such as retired crop fields and single-species non-native pasture, back into the rich, diverse native grasslands that once thrived across Texas.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

- At minimum, **3,000 acres** will be transformed into native prairie habitat, providing vital shelter and food sources for monarch butterflies, songbirds, and grassland wildlife.
- Volunteers will collect and plant native milkweed seeds, a crucial lifeline for monarch conservation.
- Expanded community events, outreach efforts, and workshops will be conducted, inspiring more people and making our community a champion of prairie conservation.

THE POWER OF TEAMWORK!

- Our Chapter has **pledged \$100,000** to help cover seed and herbicide costs, helping increase the pace of restoration projects in our area over the next two years.
- **TPWD** is providing **\$75,000** from conservation license plate sales, plus additional supplies and support in site preparation and planting valued at over **\$270,000**.
- The **National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF)**, through private donations, has provided **\$300,000** in support for seeds and herbicides.
- **Landowners** are contributing labor and equipment for site preparation and planting valued at over **\$450,000!**

Continued on page 16

BRINGING TEXAS PRAIRIES BACK TO LIFE: Exciting Prairie Restoration News!, continued

This remarkable collaboration has already sparked a **doubling** of prairie restoration acres in our chapter area for the coming year. Accelerating the return of native landscapes and creating a ripple effect of habitat recovery will benefit wildlife and our local communities for years to come.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

This project not only restores land at a lower cost through the power of bulk-purchasing discounts but also supports local native plant industries by creating demand for locally adapted species that are perfect for our region.

LOOKING AHEAD

This current funding runs from January 1, 2026, through December 31, 2027. If these efforts are successful, there are opportunities for us to expand or extend these efforts into the future with additional collaborations.

**Thanks to strong partnerships,
we're helping to Keep Texas Prairie!**

Locate and contact your TPWD Wildlife Biologist for FREE expert guidance at
<https://tpwd.texas.gov/landwater/habitat-management/find-a-wildlife-biologist/>

Learn more about NPAT: texasprairie.org

Follow our chapter and join the newsletter: <https://texasprairie.org/fayette-prairie-chapter/>

Become an NPAT member and join our chapter: <https://texasprairie.org/join/>

Learn more about SARP and consider if your project may qualify: <https://texasprairie.org/sarp/>

Contact us for sponsorship opportunities to support this important work: fayette@texasprairie.org

Texas Migratory Game Bird Seasons, Limits & Zones (2026–27)

Dove Seasons (2026–27) (by Zone)

Daily Bag: 15 (no more than 2 white-tipped / white-fronted doves)

Possession: 3x daily bag limit

| Zone | Season Dates |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| North Zone | Sep. 1 – Nov. 8 & Dec. 18 – Jan. 7 |
| Central Zone | Sep. 1 – Oct. 25 & Dec. 11 – Jan. 14 |
| South Zone (Sep 1 frameworks) | Sep. 1 – Oct. 25 & Dec. 18 – Jan. 21 |

Sandhill Crane Seasons (2026–27) (by Zone)

Possession: 3x daily bag limit

| Zone | Season Dates | Daily Bag |
|--------|-------------------|-----------|
| Zone A | Oct. 31 – Jan. 31 | 3 |
| Zone B | Nov. 27 – Jan. 31 | 3 |
| Zone C | Dec. 12 – Jan. 17 | 2 |

American Woodcock (2026–27) (Statewide)

Season: Dec. 18 – Jan. 31

Daily Bag: 3

Possession: 3x daily bag limit

Wilson’s Snipe (2026–27) (Statewide)

Season: Nov. 7 – Feb. 21

Daily Bag: 8

Possession: 3x daily bag limit

Rails / Gallinule / Moorhen (2026–27) (Statewide)

Sep. 19 – Sep. 27 & Nov. 7 – Jan. 6

- King & Clapper Rails: Daily Bag 15
- Sora & Virginia Rails: Daily Bag 25
- Common Moorhen (Common Gallinule) & Purple Gallinule: Daily Bag 15

Possession: 3x daily bag limit

Duck Seasons (2026–27)

Early Teal (Statewide)

Sept. 19 – Sept. 27

Daily Bag: 6 teal

Regular Duck Season (by Zone)

| Zone | Regular Duck Season | Youth/Veterans (includes geese) | Dusky Duck Opener |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|
| High Plains Mallard Mgmt. Unit | Oct. 24–25 & Oct. 30 – Jan. 31 | Oct. 17–18 | Oct. 31 |
| North Zone | Nov. 14–29 & Dec. 5 – Jan. 31 | Nov. 7–8 | Nov. 19 |
| South Zone | Nov. 7–29 & Dec. 12 – Jan. 31 | Oct. 31 – Nov. 1 | Nov. 12 |

Duck Daily Bag (Regular Season)

Daily Bag: 6 ducks total, including no more than:

- 5 mallards (only 2 may be hens)
- 3 wood ducks
- 3 pintails
- 2 canvasbacks
- 2 redheads
- 1 scaup
- 1 mottled duck
- All others not listed (including mergansers): up to the 6-duck limit

Goose Seasons (2026–27) (by Zone)

Zones / Species / Dates

| Zone | Species | Dates |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| East Zone | Early Canada goose only | Sept. 12 – Sept. 27 |
| East Zone | Light & Dark Geese | Nov. 7 – Jan. 31 |
| East Zone | Light Goose (late) | Feb. 1 – Feb. 19 |
| West Zone | Light & Dark Geese | Nov. 7 – Feb. 7 |

Daily Bag Limits

| Zone | Light Geese | Dark Geese |
|-----------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| West Zone | 5 (aggregate) | 5 (aggregate) |
| East Zone | 5 (aggregate) | 5 (no more than 2 white-fronts) |

Falconry Seasons (2026–27)

Possession: 3x daily bag limit

| Season / Species | Dates | Daily Bag |
|--|-------------------|-----------|
| Statewide (Doves) | Nov. 13 – Nov. 29 | 3 |
| Statewide (Woodcock, Rail, Gallinule, Moorhen) | Feb. 1 – Feb. 21 | 3 |
| North & South Duck Zone (Ducks) | Feb. 1 – Feb. 21 | 3 |





DEER MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

July 24, 2026
1:00p-5:00p

Immaculate Conception Hall
15994 TX-159, Industry, TX 78944



Topics of Discussion

- Habitat Management -
- Supplemental Feeding -
- Genetics & Nutrition -
- Wildlife Diseases -
- Cost-Share Programs -



AUSTIN COUNTY
WILDLIFEMANAGEMENT
ASSOCIATION

RSVP: Matthew Johnson | 832-595-8999 | matthew.johnson2@tpwd.texas.gov



Annual Fundraiser

RED ROCK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

Sat. May 2, 2026

5:00 to 10:00 p.m.

SACRED HEART CATHOLIC CHURCH HOLTMAN HALL

FM 535 – ROCKNE, TEXAS

Catered by AL BAUER

SERVING A PORK CUTLET DINNER FROM 5:00 UNTIL GONE

**PLATES – ADULTS \$15.00
CHILDREN 12 & UNDER \$8.00**

LIVE AUCTION

7:00 - 9:00 P.M.

MELISSA VOIGT– AUCTIONEER



- ***Silent Auction • Games for the Kids***
- ***Door Prizes throughout the Evening***

OFFICERS:

President – Jim Russel 512-575-5056

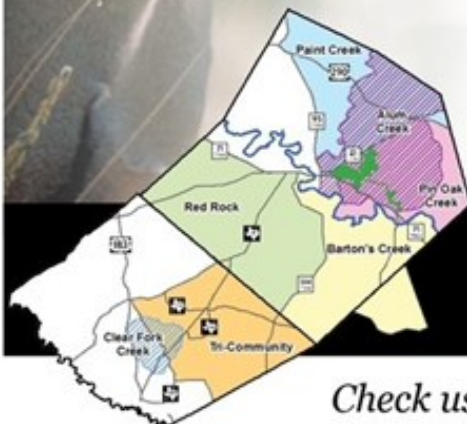
Secretary/Treasurer – Christiane Delbar 512-203-9031

**TO DONATE ITEMS FOR AUCTION CONTACT
Kay Lynch 210-268-3557 or klynch@gvtc.com**

WE NOW ACCEPT:

Visa, Master Card, Discover & American Express

Donations & funds raised help in maintaining and improving the habitat for all wildlife in the RRWMA area



Check us out on **www.RRWMA.org**

Upcoming Events

APRIL

25 West Navidad WMA Spring Meeting
Rockin' W Sale Barn
2510 US-77, Schulenburg, Tx
Begins at 5:00 p.m.
Contact Jessica Wick at jmwick8@gmail.com

25 Meyersville WMA Spring Meeting
Waskcow Camp-House Party Barn
13052 S. US Highway 183 Yorktown, TX, 78164
Begins at 5:30
Contact Margaret Harrison at 512-762-5735

MAY

2 Red Rock WMA Fundraising Auction and Dinner
Sacred Heart Catholic Church – Holtman Hall
4045 FM-535 Bastrop, TX 78602
Begins at 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Contact: Jim Russell at 512-575-5056 or
99sanddollar@gmail.com

JUNE

12 Wildlife Disease Workshop
Weimar Civic Center
I-10, 1754 Co Rd 10, Weimar, TX 78962
Begins at 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Contact Katie Edwards at 979-732-3458 or
catherine.edwards@tpwd.texas.gov

25 Wilson County WMA Annual Banquet
Wilson County Expo and Community Center
435 TX-97, Floresville, TX 78114
Begins 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

JULY

24 Deer Management Workshop
Immaculate Conception Hall
15994 TX-159, Industry, TX 78944
Begins 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Please RSVP
Contact Matthew Johnson at 832-595-8999 or
matthew.johnson2@tpwd.texas.gov

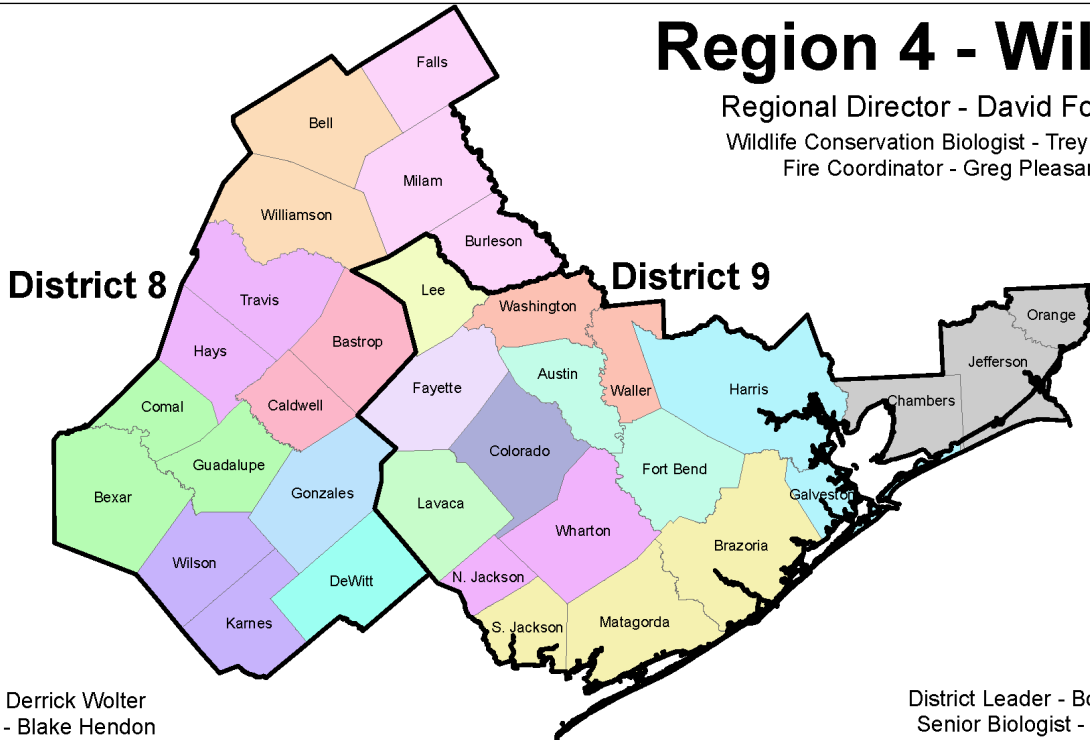
Our Wildlife Biologists

Click on the map for your biologists contact information



Region 4 - Wildlife

Regional Director - David Forrester
 Wildlife Conservation Biologist - Trey Barron
 Fire Coordinator - Greg Pleasant



District 8

District Leader - Derrick Wolter
 Senior Biologist - Blake Hendon

District 9

District Leader - Bobby Eichler
 Senior Biologist - Mark Lange

| | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| | Audrey Naughton (Karnes, Wilson) | | Katie Edwards (Colorado) | | Skyler Hickman (DeWitt) |
| | Brent Pierce (Lavaca) | | Laura Sherrod (Lee) | | Stephanie Damron (Waller, Washington) |
| | Brittany Perry (Burleson, Falls, Milam) | | Matthew Johnson (Austin, Fort Bend) | | Tania Pena (Hays, Travis) |
| | Clinton Faas (N. Jackson, Wharton) | | Olivia Kost (Bexar, Comal, Guadalupe) | | Todd Pilcik (Brazoria, S. Jackson, Matagorda) |
| | Cullom Simpson (Bell, Williamson) | | Rachel Patterson (Bastrop, Caldwell) | | District 9 Staff (Chambers, Jefferson, Orange) |
| | Drake Rangel (Fayette) | | Robert Conrad (Gonzales, MONWMA) | | Urban Kelly Norrid (Harris) |

Click on the map for your biologists contact information

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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."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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www.tpwd.texas.gov

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