



**Mission: To preserve and enhance the State Park System for the benefit of the people of Texas and their guests.**

**Board of Directors**

John Cobb, President  
512/332-0371  
[cobbfarm@airmail.net](mailto:cobbfarm@airmail.net)

Bob Armstrong, Vice President  
512/413-6891  
[landmanbob@aol.com](mailto:landmanbob@aol.com)

Ruth Jordan, Secretary  
325/651-7346  
[RuthJordan@suddenlink.net](mailto:RuthJordan@suddenlink.net)

Richard Solis, Treasurer  
830/935-4011  
[Rsolis@GVTC.com](mailto:Rsolis@GVTC.com)

Scott Chase, Director  
214/880-0404  
[schase@airmail.net](mailto:schase@airmail.net)

Jan DeVault, Director  
281/793-9569  
[jdv3dgel@ix.netcom.com](mailto:jdv3dgel@ix.netcom.com)

John M. Gosdin, Director  
512/219-6737  
[jmgosdin@aol.com](mailto:jmgosdin@aol.com)

Barbara McKnight  
254/968-4357  
[bmcknight3276@msn.com](mailto:bmcknight3276@msn.com)

Jamie McNally, Director  
512/495-8827  
[jfm@ctw.com](mailto:jfm@ctw.com)

Evelyn L. Merz, Director  
713/644-8228  
[elmerz@hal-pc.org](mailto:elmerz@hal-pc.org)

Ken Pollard  
512/971-5145  
[kpollard52@yahoo.com](mailto:kpollard52@yahoo.com)

Beth McDonald, President, Emeritus  
512/721-3321  
[BethMcDonald@austin.rr.com](mailto:BethMcDonald@austin.rr.com)

Linda Evans, Editor  
*The Voice*

**Send articles for The Voice to:**

Linda Evans  
[leevans@texas.net](mailto:leevans@texas.net)  
P. O. Box 41480, Austin, TX, 78704  
512/444-8079

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## *Texans for State Parks*

*Citizens working to preserve and enhance our great state park system*

### *The Voice*

May – June 2011

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- P&W Commission Budget Briefing Describes Likely Impacts of 2011 Legislation
  - Commission Approves Trail Grants for State Parks Projects
  - Preliminary Legislative Briefing from George Bristol, Texas Conservation Coalition
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#### **From the President:**

The Legislative regular session is over and Texas State Parks funding has been cut. According to House Bill 1 (the funding bill for the State of Texas) we will lose some parks and over 20% of our funding. There is a Special Session called at this time, but so far, there are no bills before the Legislature that would impact our Parks. We will be keeping an eye on this over the next few weeks and let everyone know as soon as we hear of any changes. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has helped us with this Legislative session, those that testified, those that worked the hallways, and those who supported us with letters and phone calls. I feel that it paid off for Parks. It could have been a lot worse.

One of the new changes has been the loss of two of our Regional Offices. We have six now instead of eight. They are all quite large now compared to what they were.

There will be changes in our Parks now and we will wait to see how the Staff will redesign the system. At this time, it will be "business as usual" until the new fiscal year (September).

As soon as we hear of any changes, we will notify everyone as fast as we can. I believe we can trust our Parks Director, Brent Leisure in being as fair and thoughtful as possible in these new changes. We are here to support him in any way we can.

I know in the meanwhile, with summer here, you will all get out and see our Parks. We need all the support we can muster for all of our Texas State Parks over the new few months.

Thank you,  
*John Cobb, President*

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#### **P&W Commission Budget Briefing Describes Likely Impacts of Legislation**

In a briefing to the Commission, TPWD Executive Director Carter

Smith described likely impacts to the department from the state budget bill which passed in both the House and Senate over the weekend. The legislature did not resolve school finance issues that are critical to funding the budget, so Gov. Rick Perry has called a special legislative session to deal with that and other matters. Agency observers think it's unlikely the budget bill will change much in the special session, though anything is possible.

In Smith's briefing to commissioners, he compared TPWD's original Legislative Appropriations Request with the state budget passed by the legislature after conference committee negotiations. Smith said the department's total budget is expected to shrink by \$145.46 million over two years for the 2012-2013 biennium, a 20.8 percent decrease. That cut breaks down to include \$44 million in salaries/operating, \$11.91 in capital equipment, \$41.59 million in capital construction, and \$17.65 million in new bond authority for construction and repairs, among other items. The state budget also effectively zeroes out 2012-2013 funding for Local Park Grants used to create or enhance city and county parks across the state, cutting that grant program by \$39.73 million, but leaving about \$1.5 million to continue to monitor recent grants already in progress.

The state budget bill also cuts TPWD's total number of FTEs by 259.7 employee positions, although rider provisions

could reduce that 169.2 FTEs. Smith noted that while the FTE cut will include some vacant positions, it will mean a Reduction In Force. He repeated TPWD's commitment to treat employees with compassion and respect, and outlined rough plans for impending RIFs, which will include 45 days paid notice, the opportunity to apply for vacant TPWD jobs, help seeking other employment and other assistance.

Smith also noted some better news for TPWD, where lawmakers in effect restored some cuts proposed in the original House of Representatives budget bill, and also gave the department flexibility to help manage fiscal impacts. This included legislative riders that do things like give TPWD flexibility to average TPWD's FTE cap over two years instead of one, which effectively means fewer employee RIFs required for 2012.

Another rider gives TPWD exemption from some Article IX transferability limitations, which effectively gives department leaders more leeway to decide how to spread the cuts out across the agency. Smith said TPWD's Land and Water Conservation and Recreation Plan will serve as the strategic guide for budget decisions. He noted lawmakers provided \$32.35 in new bond authority, though this is less than requested in TPWD's original LAR. This good news means the agency will be able to maintain a basic level of its Infrastructure

Division focus on repairs and improvements to state parks, fish hatcheries and other sites. Also, Rider 27 gives TPWD hope to be able use additional license sales and fee revenue it brings in above the Texas Comptroller's estimate, which would give some relief to offset cut impacts.

The department's executive team will work with all divisions to prepare staff budget recommendations for a TPW Commission budget workshop meeting June 30 in Austin. It is hoped that by then legislative financial matters will be resolved in the special session. The commission will make a final vote on the TPWD budget at its Aug. 25 meeting. Meanwhile, employees should stay tuned for an upcoming Town Hall Q&A session with Carter to be announced soon.

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### **Commission Approves Trail Grants for State Parks Projects**

The TPW Commission approved 21 National Recreation Trails Grants projects in various Texas communities totaling \$3.3 million and an additional \$485,000 in re-allocated funding to underwrite trail improvement projects in seven state parks and three local communities.

State parks to benefit from the grants include Seminole Canyon, Lake Brownwood, Huntsville, Tyler, Lake Corpus Christi, Cooper Lake, McKinney Falls, Eisenhower and Meridian. Funds for the

trail projects come from a portion of the federal gas tax paid by off-road recreational vehicles and administered by the Federal Highway Administration.

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**Preliminary Legislative Briefing from George Bristol, Texas Conservation Coalition**

George Bristol has worked tirelessly throughout this and past legislative sessions in support of Texas Parks and other Parks and Wildlife programs. He has provided his assessment of the recent session:

As soon as possible I will be getting out a definitive point by point analysis of what transpired in this session of the legislature. For now it is most gratifying to report that every exceptional item sought was accepted and passed in forms beneficial, although in the case of the all-important Rider 27 there are caps on both the parks account (Fund 64) and the hunting and fishing account (Fund 9). In the end we also got the \$32 million bond funding and the \$3.9 million for capital repairs and equipment.

With this in mind it is enough to say that because of a great deal of work our state parks, while taking cuts, came through in fairly good shape. So much so that barring any certification of funds denial by the Comptroller, Texas parks will remain open, although operation and maintenance adjustments will occur. This is a far cry from the draconian

prospect that loomed large at the beginning of the session.

Unfortunately, the local parks grant program did not fare well. I simply can't fathom why this much-needed and popular program could not have received equal treatment.

All the good that happened, did not happen in a vacuum. It came about because dedicated supporters rose to the occasion and made the case. They deserve our thanks. In the thanking I know there will be those who weighed in who will be missed. But please know that we know you were out there, making calls, sending emails and signing committee hearing cards.

However, there are a number of people who deserve special recognition and thanks.

The Speaker and the Lt. Governor's office were always open and they helped in a number of very specific and timely ways. The same was true of Representatives Drew Darby, Ryan Guillen and Myra Crownover, all who tried to help (and were able to do so) in countless positive ways.

Senators Tommy Williams, Kevin Eltife and their staffs stood just as tall in the Senate.

Always available were the quick response lobbying team headed up by Clyde Alexander and more than admirably backstopped by Robert Miller, David Teel of TTIA and Mike Coker of Tyler.

As I said at the outset, this session was going to be governed by laser strikes with bunts and singles. They laid down a great deal of both, allowing park issues to gain home plate on a number of occasions.

Backing all of us up was the expertise and dedicated passion of Carter Smith of TPWD and his staff. Again there were many, but Gene McCarty and Harold Stone deserve special praise. They were there morning, noon and, more often than not, late into the night.

Rounding out the effort was the constant presence of Chairman Peter Holt, Dan Friedkin and the other commissioners. I believe every commissioner was asked to contact some member or some staff at some point. They did so with measurable results.

In some respects this was as good a team effort as was the case in 2007, because we were faced with sensitive issues requiring pinpoint timing in a very bad situation. All those asked, delivered and equally important, stood aside if there was someone better to perform the task.

I am sure I will think of others and will try to add them in on the forthcoming final report.

Thank you for caring for Texas.

*George L. Bristol*, President  
Texas Conservation Coalition

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## Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Recovery Project Fundraiser

Our friends at the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Recovery Project have asked us to pass on word of a fundraising effort they have undertaken to support their efforts to preserve this endangered species. This Recovery Project has been very successful in bringing back the Kemp's Ridley turtle from the brink of extinction by protecting its primary nesting sites along the Gulf of Mexico. This fundraising effort is also being supported by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation and the Texas Game Warden Association, among others.

A fundraising raffle of **six guns** donated by McBride's Guns of Austin includes a Remington 700 30-06 that has been customized and is worth in excess of \$5000, as well as five other shotguns and rifles. For a complete description of the raffle prizes to [www.seaturtlefundraiser.wordpress.com/raffle](http://www.seaturtlefundraiser.wordpress.com/raffle) Tickets can be purchased **from this webpage by clicking on the link and emailing us the number of tickets desired**

**with an address and phone number.** You will be contacted with instructions for payment either by check or via paypal. Raffle tickets are \$10 each or three for \$25, and no more than 3000 tickets will be sold. All the money raised will go directly efforts "on the ground" supporting this project. There will be no administrative or overhead deductions.

The drawing will be held on July 1, with the first ticket drawn getting first choice and so on. Winners do not need to be present to win.

### Latest Edition of State Parks Getaways Available by E-Mail

Check out the latest edition of *State Parks Getaways*. You'll find what Texas park swimming hole our Facebook fans like best plus the top ten park swimming spots listed in *Texas Parks & Wildlife* magazine, fun videos on featured parks, a complete list of park lodging choices across the state, and information on where to pick up free *Great Texas Wildlife Trail Maps*.

Click to [sign up](#) to receive *State Parks Getaways*, which

arrives in your inbox every two months. You can also sign up to receive other free e-newsletters, email updates on outdoor topics as well as promotional offers. It just takes a minute. Let us help you stay in the know!

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**For a Calendar of Texas Parks \* & Wildlife Events,**  
visit <http://beta-www.tpwd.state.tx.us/calendar/>  
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Don't forget to send e-mail or other address changes to [leevans@texas.net](mailto:leevans@texas.net) so you will continue to receive news and information about the State Parks.

If you have news or an event you would like to include, send it to [leevans@texas.net](mailto:leevans@texas.net).

**TEXANS FOR STATE PARKS** invites you to join with us in protecting our Texas treasures. Whether you are an individual, organization, school group or represent a small business or a major corporation, membership categories provide a way for you to become involved. Ypi will find a link for a membership application on the home page of [www.texansstateparks.org](http://www.texansstateparks.org)



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